

# **A New Heart and Soul**

## *Preliminary Thoughts Concerning 'New Covenant Israel' in the Old Testament, the Gospels, the Book of Acts, the 70<sup>th</sup> Week of Daniel and the Millennium*

**By DR. JOHN C. WHITCOMB**

President, Whitcomb Ministries, Inc.

Biblical dispensationalism is not the easiest way to understand the Scriptures – but it is God’s way.

For example, the easiest way to “understand” the Book of Revelation is to spiritualize it, as literally thousands of Bible students have done for centuries. The more difficult way, and the way that guarantees God’s promised blessing to those “who (read) and those who hear the words of this prophecy” (Rev. 1:3) is to recognize that Revelation is the capstone at the very top of the pyramid of written revelation, and that it builds upon and presupposes the truths revealed by God in the previous 65 books.

Revelation 2 and 3 can only be understood in the light of the book of Acts and the epistles, which offer God’s plan and purpose for the church. Revelation 4 to 19 deals with the application of the New Covenant to national Israel and her relationship to Gentile nations during the seven years that precede the second coming of Christ. Revelation 20 gives us the timing and duration of events during the kingdom that was offered to Israel by John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus in the light of numerous Old Testament promises.

Revelation 21 and 22 give us absolutely spectacular glimpses into the eternal state, which follows the 1,000-year kingdom of Christ upon the earth. Significantly, dispensational distinctions between the church (cf. Rev. 21:14), Israel (cf. Rev. 21:12, 13) and the Gentiles (cf. Rev. 21:24-26) are identified and confirmed.

So here is the divine challenge for understanding such complexities as the New (Abrahamic) Covenant: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). In this regard, it is no wonder that many Bereans “believed” and proved to be “more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica.” The reason? “They received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things [that Paul taught them] were so” (Acts 17:11, 12).

By way of contrast, how devastating it must have been for the two disciples on the road to Emmaus to hear the Lord say to them: “‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

How precious would be a recording of that lecture! And even more, how we could learn from a recording of the teachings our Lord gave to the disciples during His last 40 days on earth, when He was “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). He must have told them that the kingdom for which they had been praying (cf. Matt. 6:10) was primarily a future earthly kingdom, for they urgently asked Him, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). It is perfectly obvious that He did not rebuke them for believing in the future establishment of a literal kingdom for Israel. He simply informed them that the timing was yet to be revealed: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (v. 7).

But what did our Lord tell them about the kingdom during those 40 days? He must have told them that one must be “born again” to enter the kingdom just as He had told Nicodemus (John 3:3). When Nicodemus expressed amazement at this announcement, Jesus rebuked him: “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?” (v. 10).

This is the vital question: What was Nicodemus to have understood about “new birth” from the Old Testament? The answer is quite clear: He should have understood the dynamics of New Covenant faith – by which Abraham had been saved (cf. Gen. 15:6) and by which every pre-

Pentecost saint back to Adam and Eve (cf. Gen. 3:20, 21) had been saved, as it were, “on credit.” Paul speaks of “a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed” (Rom. 3:25; cf. Heb. 9:15).

In this sense, Paul insists, Abraham was “the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also” (Rom. 4:11). This includes both Jews and Gentiles who believe God’s Word (cf. Rom. 4:11-24). This is the profound, yes, infinite significance of the New Covenant in its spiritual aspect. No one can be forgiven, saved, born again or qualified for entrance into the earthly kingdom, eternal life or heaven without it. Did not Nicodemus, “the teacher of Israel,” understand this (John 3:10)? Did not the disciples fully understand this by the end of their final 40 days of special instruction by the King?

It may be surprising to some to learn that Moses understood this, too. He told Israel that some day “you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find *Him* if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut. 4:29). But he sadly announced: “Yet the LORD has not given you [the nation, with some exceptions – like Joshua and Caleb] a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this *very* day” (Deut. 29:4). Yet some glorious day the entire nation will “return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut. 30:2), and will “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut. 30:6). That is the essence of the New Covenant – a new heart and soul by the grace of God through faith in God’s Word.

But what about circumcision? Abraham knew that he was saved by faith long before he was circumcised (cf. Rom. 4:9-12). And Moses understood that the essential requirement for salvation was not physical circumcision but heart circumcision. Thus, he could challenge the nation: “Circumcise the foreskin of your heart” (Deut. 10:16; cf. Jer. 4:4). And he could promise (by the Holy Spirit) that some great day “the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut. 30:6).

The apostle Paul totally endorsed this point: “For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God” (Rom. 2:28, 29; cf. Phil. 3:3, Col. 2:11).

Nicodemus (and the Twelve, after the 40 days) should also have known the parallel truth: Israel’s greatest problem was “their uncircumcised hearts,” which needed to be “humbled” (Lev. 26:41). Jeremiah predicted: “‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘that I will punish all *who are* circumcised with the uncircumcised—Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all *who are* in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all *these nations are* uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel *are* uncircumcised in the heart’” (Jer. 9:25, 26). When the kingdom comes, “No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart or uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter My sanctuary, including any foreigner who *is* among the children of Israel” (Ezek. 44: 9).

One of the main reasons Stephen was stoned to death was this particular denunciation of the nation of Israel: “*You* stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you” (Acts 7:51). If Stephen, a Hebrew deacon in the early church (cf. Acts 6:5) understood this, surely the Hebrew church apostles did.

In the light of all of this, one might be tempted to classify physical circumcision as an evil ceremony. But this is not the case. It was given by God to Abraham (cf. Gen. 17:10-27) as “a sign of the covenant between Me and you” (Gen. 17:11; cf. Acts 7:8) and was confirmed to Moses hundreds of years later (cf. Lev. 12:3). The Lord Jesus said: “Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath” (John 7:22). God saw to it that His Son’s forerunner, John, was circumcised (Luke 1:59). He also planned that His incarnate Son would be circumcised (Luke 2:21). Paul circumcised his half-Jewish disciple Timothy (Acts 16:3) – but not his Gentile convert Titus (Gal. 2:3).

The only problem with physical circumcision, of course, was the possibility of a misinterpretation and misapplication of the sign as a means of salvation. In the early church, this

issue had to be confronted during the great Council of Jerusalem, for some heretical Jewish believers had told some Gentile believers that, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1).

In the church, the body and bride of Christ, there is a somewhat similar, although not identical, danger. Water baptism is a symbol of Spirit baptism – not for everyone (as circumcision was for every Israelite male), but only for true, born-again, believers. But the moment it is viewed as a necessary act for the purpose of attaining salvation (or sanctification) it becomes a deadly danger. Hundreds of millions of people think they have been accepted by God because of water baptism as an infant or as an adult. How disastrous!

Likewise, partaking of the bread and the cup (the Eucharist) is a blessing if it is understood as a memorial of Christ’s death for us (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-26). But the minute it is seen as having saving or sanctifying significance (as in the Roman Catholic and other systems), it becomes a theological monstrosity.

May God give each of us further Biblical insight as we study these topics while awaiting His coming kingdom.

**Copyright © 2011 by Whitcomb Ministries, Inc.**

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®.  
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.