

ASPECTS
of the
EVERLASTING
COVENANT

B M Hull

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Contents

General Introduction	4
1 THE PROPHET AND THE SON	8
2. DECREASING AND INCREASING	9
3. IMPERFECT FAITH AND THE PERFECT	11
4. A LAMP AND THE LIGHT	12
5. A VOICE AND THE WORD	15
6. SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE	17
7. A COMPARISON BETWEEN JOHN'S BAPTISM AND THAT OF JESUS	18
8. REPENTANCE UNTO REMISSION OF SINS AND REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE	20
9. BEHEADED OR CRUCIFIED	22
10. THE PRIESTHOOD	24
11. THE INWARD AND THE OUTWARD	26
12. THE SHEPHERD AND THE PORTER	28
13. THE GARMENTS	30
14. THE FRIEND OF THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDEGROOM	33

General Introduction

Perhaps there is no subject more important and yet so little understood in the churches as that mentioned in the title of this booklet. It is a matter that vitally affects the life of each child of God, and also the corporate and individual testimony of the churches. The two covenants implied by the title are normally referred to as the Old and the New Covenants. Many problems flow from the failure to understand and experience the life promised under the terms of the New Covenant; confusions of terminology and concepts abound, resulting in malpractices which can lead to carnality. There would be an absence of a good number of difficulties that afflict the churches if the people of God had a true grasp of the contrast between the Old and New Covenants and lived in the good of the covenant of God now in force.

The Old Covenant is the arrangement which God made with the people of Israel through His mediator, Moses. God made many promises to His chosen people, who, in their turn, covenanted to obey His law, and the agreement was dedicated by blood of calves and goats (Heb.9.18). It became binding thereafter upon all Israel and God, but the children of Israel failed to fulfil their part until one man came, the true Israel, Jesus Christ. Thus in Himself Jesus ended the reign of the Old Covenant terms and brought in a new covenant, dedicating it in His own blood; this covenant became fully in force only after His death, resurrection, ascension and acceptance in heaven, whereupon the Holy Spirit sent down at Pentecost made this new covenant fully operational in the hearts of men. This being so, it is clear that, since Pentecost, the arrangement which God has with all mankind, including the Israelites, is the New Covenant, the old arrangement made with Israel only has passed away, being replaced with something far better (Heb.8.13).

The chosen intention of God in all His dealings is to make Himself known to the hearts of men. The Lord Jesus, in His prayer in John 17, defines eternal life as knowing the Father and Himself. Is there knowledge more wonderful? To know God is to live! The revelation of Himself that God made to men under the Old Covenant was incomplete and limited. He dwelt behind the veils of tabernacle and temple, He spoke in similitudes and through prophets, seers and by many other means. The reason for Him being shrouded thus was simply that sin was in the way; it remained unremoved in men's hearts, an obstacle dark and terrible that kept God from men and men from coming right to God. Yet God did shine forth in glory to His people of old; lights and shades of Himself were made known but all was marked with imperfection and impermanence, it could not satisfy either His own heart or the needs of men. The effect of all that the Lord made known concerning Himself in giving the law and ordinances of the Old Covenant was to show how very far from Him mankind had become because of sin. Men discovered through the Old Covenant that, no matter how they tried, they could not fulfil all God's requirements, or purge themselves from an inward consciousness of their continuing sinfulness, which marred all their perceptions and understandings. In the age of the Old Covenant the Israelites were near and the gentiles were far off, but none were reconciled unto God, nor did any have access to the Father (Eph.2.13:18) .

Thank God this covenant was destined to pass away, to be replaced by a better covenant established upon better promises and containing a wondrously complete self-revelation of God as Father and Saviour of mankind. The knowledge of God that comes in the New Covenant exceeds all that was known in the Old. Central to all this was the fact that there was to be a removal of the distortion, blindness and dullness caused by consciousness of sin. Through the blood shedding of the Lord Jesus sin was taken away in His blood; men come into new states of consciousness, 'no more conscience of sins' (Heb.10.2). 'and all shall know me'. O the delight of God in thus being able to make Himself known and the privilege of man in being a recipient of such revelation and knowledge!

It can be clearly seen that the knowledge of God and experience of Him possessed by the person living in the good of the New Covenant, is far more excellent than that enjoyed by the men of the Old Covenant. Why then should people born in this day of grace live subject to the old, bringing over Old Testament ways and concepts into the new? Yet this is the state of affairs common in many places. Is there not a deep need that men and women should sit at the feet of the Lord Jesus and let Him, by the Spirit, take the veil from their hearts, that they may behold the wonder of God's New Covenant with men and, having seen, to straightway enter right in to the privileges of it all?

In the thirteenth chapter of Hebrews a vital truth is set forth, namely that of 'the everlasting covenant'. Just a phrase here, but what depths it brings to light. It is like a window opening and revealing the true world of everything. The writer tells us that this covenant is 'to make you perfect', (13 v. 21). It is therefore the covenant of total perfection. When was it made, and between which persons? What are its terms and who witnessed it? The scriptures furnish us with many little pointers by which we can answer these questions. This covenant was made between the Father and the Son and was witnessed by the Spirit, it was sealed in the blood of Jesus. The 'old' covenant and the 'new' covenant are adaptations in time of this 'everlasting' covenant .

The Everlasting Covenant is that arrangement which underlies all God has been doing in what is called 'history'. He has been working according to the terms and purposes of that covenant, adapting it first to His people of old (Israel) and then to His Church - the true Israel of God. The second adaptation, the New Covenant, contains in it the very Spirit and Life of the Everlasting Covenant, whilst the earlier adaptation, namely the Old Covenant made with the nation of Israel, was weak and contains only the type and figure of the true.

How wonderful it is to consider the Father and the Son entering into covenant with One Another; before angels were created there was an arrangement made solely between the Divine Persons in which God purposed 'according to His eternal purpose' (Eph.3.11 and 1.11), and it was agreed between them that all God's purpose should be wrought in and through the Son. Surely this links with Paul's statement in Ephesians 1.4, that (God) 'hath chosen us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world'. So Paul takes us back to the fact that all begins in God, the covenant arrangement was made in God, (Father, Son and Spirit), that 'we should be holy and without blame before Him in love'. John, the blessed apostle, saw the same thing also and wrote of it: He saw One upon the throne and around 'the throne a rainbow in colour like unto an emerald' (Rev.4.3). So, as God looked from the throne, He beheld all through that rainbow, and when John saw God it was through that same wondrous green. Green is ever the colour of Life; plants, trees and corn, growing up are green. It is significant of grace also. Jesus made the people to sit on 'the green grass'; He, in tender grace, fed them as they rested (sat) in His gracious provision.

Remember Noah, as he stepped from the ark and, unasked by God, offered a sacrifice of burnt offering to God, who, smelling the 'savour of rest', makes an unconditional covenant in His heart concerning the processes of life on the earth and any further judgement upon it (Gen.8.21). God proceeds to bring Noah into the covenant made in His heart, 'I, behold I establish my covenant made with you and with your seed and with every living creature...' Then God puts 'His bow in the cloud as a token of a covenant made between me and the earth'. A bow, the token of a covenant of God: The full bow in the heaven of heavens around the throne, the token of the covenant purposes of God. See here the great consistency of God's ways, desiring to allay all unnecessary fears and to give life. Would not the heart of Noah and his descendants, seeing clouds rising in the heavens, be struck with terror when they recalled the awful destroying deluge which the first appearance of such clouds occasioned? For until the flood there had been no rain upon the earth (c. f. Gen.2.5,6 with 7.v.4). Perhaps the understanding of this fact clarifies the apparent preposterous nature of Noah's preaching; the people disregarded his warnings: 'Rain? A flood? What is rain?' So they ignored the word of the Lord's prophet. In their eyes such judgement was to be rejected. Jesus said it would be the same in 'the days of the coming of the Son of Man' as it was in Noah's day. We know that the destruction of the earth will be by fire, not flood, but warning entreaties by God's people of this fact shall be treated with only a similar response to that given to Noah's preaching.

Examining carefully this covenant made by God with Noah and every living creature, we cannot fail to notice the intrinsic element of grace. God tenderly sets in the earth His token rainbow in the clouds to assure mankind of His desire to bring forth and preserve life. Surely we could also use this as a spiritual lesson, for often people speak of 'clouds', by which they mean problems, set-backs, things that exercise their hearts and cause a temporary obliteration of the 'sun' from their view; but behold the rainbow, God's covenant of Life! There is 'life' even in the very clouds: 'behold He (who is the Life) cometh with clouds!' (Rev.1.7). How many precious saints have found it so, to His great glory! Thinking further on a spiritual line, what are clouds? 'A great cloud of witnesses' says the Hebrews writer, waiting to drop the refreshing distillations of their testimony to God's faithfulness upon the waiting and responsive heart? And again, what are clouds? Promise of rain? Without them there is no outpouring from above and no blossoming of 'the wilderness as the rose'.

Much more could be said, but we desist, returning instead to the wonderful covenant made between God (Father) and God (the Son) and witnessed by God (the Spirit). It was made without angelic labours and it is not communicated by them as the Old Covenant adaptation of it was (Gal. 3:19). All was conceived by God, wrought in God and purposed for God. In this everlasting covenant all is God! It involves God's faithfulness to God; Father to Son and Son to Father, all through the medium and channel of that Glorious Servant Holy Spirit. God the Father promised the Son a bride; the Son promised the Father many sons which He would bring to glory; the blessed Spirit was promised a temple in which He could pour out love of God and through which He could cause fragrance from many sacrifices to rise. We could go on, to the Father - a family, to the Son - a bride, to the Holy Spirit - a Temple, as though God was busy conceiving a plan and purpose where each of the divine persons could receive presents which fulfilled their hearts' desires! As we contemplate such things there can be no other response to them than to join with Paul and say 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out! For of Him and through Him and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.' (Rom.11.33 - 36).

The great Everlasting Covenant then is all God! It is settled in God's integrity. The Son must fulfil His part, because all things God does are of necessity through the Son; such is the role of the Son, the Word (John 1.1), nothing is made but through Him and by Him. Perfection must be wrought in the Son, the Father would be ever faithful to the Son, the Son to the Father, the Spirit witnessing at every stage the unfolding of all. Angels and men would later be brought in to see aspects of God's purposes being worked out, but they are not involved in the establishment of it. This is God alone promising Himself, working for Himself and in Himself. Here is mystery; here are things now made known unto the saints which angels looked into afore-time and wondered about! We humans, being part of God's creation, are now being incorporated into God. This covenant made between the Divine Persons involves the formation of a perfect man as God originally intended man's life to be. The outpouring of His very life in death was vital to make it available to mankind. The resurrection, ascension and acceptance before God of that victorious Life and the subsequent outpouring of His very Spirit through the Holy Spirit was necessary so that human beings by these means could be regenerated, incorporated and integrated into God. The everlasting covenant could only be sealed in Jesus' blood, the blood of God, sealing the covenant made between them, signifying death - in fact, the outpouring of the Life, the expression of the divine nature that pours itself out in self-sacrificing love that it may beget unto itself! Here then we stand, baptised by Jesus Christ in the Spirit, that is into the heart of this wondrous covenant. In our spirits we know it to be so, our spirits witness, made alive by the Holy Spirit who is the Great Witness. Yet, at the same time our minds seem to stand at the fringe of things, we see but dimly, 'through a glass darkly', but a day comes and soon shall be when 'we shall know even as we are known'.

It is clear from an examination of the epistles that each of the writers had a deep understanding of the excelling glory of the New Covenant and the glory that faded in the old. Though language varies from writer to writer, the underlying concepts remain the same. Paul, in his second epistle to the Corinthians, unfolds much of his heart in matters relating to the Christian ministry. In a letter rich with insights concerning himself, his joys, his sorrows, his comfort and his grief, he states in the third chapter many facts concerning the ministry of the New Covenant, contrasting it with the old; he lives so clearly in the consciousness of the exalted privilege and wonder of being a minister of the New Covenant .

In language poignant and penetrating, he shows the excellency of the New Covenant not with ink but with the Spirit, not on tables of stone but in the fleshy tables of the heart, not in glory which has faded but glory that is permanent, not the veiled face of Moses, mediator of the old, but the unveiled face of Jesus, shining in our hearts (2 Cor.3:18 & 4:6) mediating the Spirit of the Lord, who brings the liberty in which we are changed into the same image from glory unto glory. Paul defines this as 'treasure' (4.7), and so it is in the hearts of those to whom it has been made known.

The whole of the epistle to the Hebrews is devoted to the contrasting of the covenants, by which means the writer seeks to dissuade his readers from returning to ritualism and dead formalism and to press on into God, despite their difficulties. As we know, the name of the writer is hidden; many arguments have been put forward for this one and that, but, be that as it may, the wonder of the contrasting positions between new and old show that the covenant that the Lord Jesus is ministering today is as the sun to the moon in comparison with that which Moses

ministered to the nation of Israelites. Indeed the old covenant is but reflected light thrown back in time from the greater and living Light that had not yet historically come forth in Moses' day.

Careful reading of this epistle will convince the heart that it is not only a detailed unfolding of the contrast between the old and new covenants, but much more; it shows forth the excelling glories of Jesus Christ - who is seen to be the whole covenant. All turns on His perfections; these He bequeaths so freely at His death, pouring them out yet mediating them into our hearts by the Spirit; 'better things', 'a better hope' by which we draw nigh to God. The inference we can draw from the epistle is that to underestimate the New Covenant is an insult (albeit an unwitting one) to the Mediator of that covenant, even Jesus. This will give our hearts help in understanding the necessity of the severe warnings contained in the epistle. Perhaps it also quickens our desires that we may dwell in, and increasingly comprehend the covenant in force in this day entering thereby into God's rest, that we may experience His so great salvation and not 'crucify the Son of God afresh' but 'have our hearts anchored within the veil' by certain hope. Many hearts would be horrified if they thought they were demeaning Jesus, but if the New Covenant be not understood and experienced daily in our lives, then we assuredly are thus belittling the work He has done.

Turning from the writer to the Hebrews into the writings of Peter we discover that he too knew and lived in something quite 'new'. He had suffered considerable difficulty in making the transition from old to new testament thought and understanding. This is revealed in his steps in the Acts and in Galatians chapter 2. Notwithstanding these traumatic experiences through which he passed, we find in chapter 2 of his first letter such a clear statement of that covenant and life into which the new-born babes of God enter. All is in the Spirit and spiritual to him now, not national as before; the born-again ones are 'the chosen generation', they are the spiritual priesthood offering up the spiritual sacrifices and are all precious through the indwelling 'preciousness' of Jesus.

A brief perusal of John's writings is sufficient to reveal to us the wonderful testimony he bears to the new thing that God had wrought in Christ, a rending of the veil that we should be born again of the Spirit of God into the communion of God the Father and the Son (1 John 1.3). For him types and figures are past, his spirit abides in God, the Reality. He walks 'in the light', not in shadows of the old order. The anointing teaches him all things, it abides within (chapter 2), he needs not to be taught about God by seer or prophet, neither has he need of earthly priest to lead him to God. Blessed Apostle! Glorious man thrice blessed with the fellowship of God!

As we have now briefly seen, the writers of the New Testament epistles exude an understanding of something far better than their forefathers knew. Their experience of God was even more wonderful than that of the patriarchs, men who, though just, were not made perfect without us (Heb.11.40). Yet, were the patriarchs and forefathers not advised of God of something to come, excelling all that they had ever known themselves? A new thing (Is.43.15-19), something far more wonderful than the extinction of the enemies of the Israelites. The Spirit of Christ in the prophets of old spoke of wonderful things to come, to be wrought in the heart and the mind of man. It was Ezekiel and Jeremiah who spoke most clearly of these things. They were both priests, for was not the covenant in the hands of the priests? (Mal.2.5-7). These two prophets spoke at that point in the history of Israel when the ark was lost, the glory departed, the temple in Jerusalem torn down and the Levitical priesthood well nigh disintegrated. The people of Israel were in disarray, some already scattered to Babylon; to those Ezekiel spoke the wondrous words of promise, 'I will give you a new heart', 'I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh', 'I will put my Spirit within you', 'I will save you from all your uncleanness'. Is not this the covenant language of God? He who spoke thus to Abraham of old - 'I will, I will, I will...' (Gen.12.1-3) !

Just at the time Ezekiel spoke these things and was mocked by his hearers among the dispersed Israelites, Jeremiah was prophesying to the remnant in Jerusalem. As they gazed upon the destruction of the temple, the loss of the ark and the tables of stone with the law written thereon, perhaps in those very days he spoke forth chapter 31:31-34- 'A new covenant'- not like unto that which is falling away even now; it shall be in the heart and in the mind, 'and they shall all know me from the least to the greatest'. O the wonder of this message! To have heard it in those days would have been glorious, but to experience it in these days is our privilege, our treasure, though our vessels be earthen. Yet the Jewish people understood not, even as Paul said later, 'a veil is upon their hearts' (2Cor.3.15) and it is not yet 'taken away'. These things always remain hidden unless the heart of man turns utterly to Christ, who, by the Lordship of the Spirit, will cause the miracle to be wrought, the covenant to be

written on the 'fleshy tables of the heart', and God to dwell there where His law is written within the personality of men.

In these foregoing paragraphs we have sought to demonstrate the fact that the full weight of scripture evidence points undeniably to the fact of this 'better covenant' being promised by God in the days of Israel and the patriarchs. The statements of New Testament writers testify that the promises are fulfilled in Christ and are available to all who will believe and receive from the day of Pentecost to the end of the age. A simple method of contrasting the two covenants, old and new, will now be attempted. Rather than a detailed exposition of scripture, our aim is to take up two men, their conception, birth, life and death, and to contrast them. They are representatives of the two covenants; the one, John the Baptist, being the one of whom Jesus spoke saying, 'Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater' (Matt.11.11), the fore-runner who so embodies the Old Testament ways of God with men. The second man is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, 'the firstborn among many brethren', He who rose from the dead to become the mediator of the New Covenant. Thus it is an examination of the last of the Old Testament prophets and the first of the new.

John, the messenger sent to announce the coming of Him who was greater; a great man indeed, but in a multitude of ways the person who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Apparently the Lord Jesus was bringing something into being that John but dimly saw and so partially felt; he came and fulfilled his course, the greatest of the Old Testament order of men of God. The demise of his type of experience and knowledge of God was certain, for, as Jesus must increase, he inevitably decreases (John 3:30). Please note the absence in the original of the second 'must' in this verse, for the decrease of all he represented was a necessity, it being replaced by the perfect experience and wondrous knowledge of God which existed in the life of the Lord Jesus.

It may be considered imprudent by some to undertake such a contrast between John Baptist and Jesus, but their lives reveal principles that underlie the covenants, and thus, in a simple way, the truth can be discerned in a form almost pictorial, as the major points of difference in their lives are examined. This is not meant to be exhaustive in its approach, but to show the fundamental differences. Some may accuse us of 'over-spiritualizing', or of an over mystical approach in the following chapters, but let hearts consider carefully that our God is one in all His ways. He is a God of law, all He does is settled according to the laws of His own being. There is, therefore, consistency in His ways as He moves within the bounds of that laid down as covenant law in His being and arrangements. There are spiritual laws set forth in the natural world, all conforms to that which it is, in its being. So let us proceed with open heart and seek to understand the covenant of our God, who through the psalmist said that He would reveal His 'secret counsel' and show His covenant to those who 'fear Him' (Ps.25.14).

1 THE PROPHET AND THE SON

Jesus came forth as the Son of Man, that is as the representative of the whole human race. He came direct from God without the agency of a man: He had no earthly father, He came from above (John 3.31). Right at the outset it is noticeable that John the Baptist did not have the same origins as Jesus. The Holy Spirit moved in different ways at the direction of God; John was conceived naturally, though filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1.15). He was born of woman, his nature came from Adam, it had sin in it and his filling with the Holy Spirit was in order that he might fulfil his office of fore-running prophet, the prophet of the Highest (Luke 1.76). How different Jesus is, this One who for us is the representative of the New Covenant man. He was spiritual in His origins, conceived of the Holy Spirit, His very nature came from God; of Him it is written 'the Son of the Highest' (Luke 1.32)

In the conception and birth of John the Baptist there were no extraordinary occurrences, saving that Elizabeth, who formerly had been barren, was granted grace from God unto the opening of her womb, so that the processes which usually occur after sexual union could take place. Zachariah fathered John through the womb of Elizabeth his wife, it was quite normal, although precious promises concerning the child to be were given. There was however no earthly father involved in the conception of Jesus; it was miraculous, the Father overshadowing in the Holy Spirit from heaven. By this means the usual heredity of sinfulness in blood, flesh and nature was not imparted. The heredity of sin in human nature is carried through from the father's side of the union, thus it was

imparted to John, in the nature of him, hereditarily a sinner: not so with Jesus! His conception is unique among all born of woman. His heredity did come from His Father, the Most High God, thus was the nature of the Highest in Him. Reversing this last phrase we see that the Highest was in His nature; Sonship was foundational in Him, whereas the Holy Spirit infilling John but made him a prophet. Here lies a matter deep and seldom understood.

In the old covenant days the Holy Spirit was present in power to infill men for special purposes to enable them to be judges, seers, prophets and kings. Men such as Bezaleel and Aholiab, who fashioned the articles for the tabernacle, were granted an infilling of the Holy Spirit to equip them for that task, but the Spirit of Sonship was never imparted to the spirits of men to regenerate them from their sinfulness, because there was but One Son of God who had as yet not become incarnate. He was not yet Son of Man, thus the miracle of fusing the divine nature and human nature had not taken place. Under the old covenant, although the Holy Spirit was available to enable men to fulfil an office or a function, He was not available to give them the new nature which alone could make them sons of God. When the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary, the mystery of godliness began (1 Tim.3-16) God manifest in the flesh. The Nature of God in flesh: a human nature was formed which had the possibility of the Highest implicit in it; a personality without sin, innocent and with the ability to turn that innocence into incorruptible holiness of life by obedience to the Father and unbroken communion with Him.

The mark of the New Covenant therefore is Sonship, not prophet-hood, although the Son is also the Prophet (Acts 3-22). The Son of the Highest truly demonstrated the greatness of His nature; from it He formed character through obedience to His Father against temptations and opposition of every sort. He overcame all, triumphed wonderfully - a true Son indeed; there was never a realm in which He did not live victoriously - the mundane, the extraordinary, the joyful and the tragic, in apparent defeat and in success; He walked always in unblemished obedience to the Father. What a tremendous Life He formed in Himself and poured out at Calvary! In death that life was dissolved, in resurrection on the third day it was caught up in entirety into the Holy Spirit, after ascension it was accepted and enthroned in glory, and it is the Spirit of this Life that is sent into the spirits of men to make them sons of God through faith. A man is invaded, infused, infilled and quickened when this Spirit of Sonship enters into him; this is regeneration, the new birth from above; his sin is purged away, his nature is changed, his heart is purified, his human nature is identified and unified with the victorious humanity of the Son of God.

The mystery of the Incarnation is beyond perfect definition. Mary said to the angel, 'How shall these things be seeing I know not a man?' The angel answered concerning the 'overshadowing of the Holy Spirit' and 'the power of the Highest'; she would therefore make available herself in glad agreement with the Holy Spirit and thus bring forth 'that Holy Thing'. In Jesus there was a human nature formed by the Holy Spirit and, though distinct from, yet abiding in this same Holy Spirit. That human nature and personality was kept pure by a constant communion in and with the Father by the Holy Spirit. He did nothing of Himself (John 5:19), He lived a dependent life, wholly leaning upon the Father for everything (John 6.57)- Thus, in Jesus was formed and grew a personality which completely remained in the Communion of the Father and the Spirit. We know that Adam did not abide in the context of the commandment of God, he leant unto his own understanding and did not remain a dependent man, thus human nature, moving outside of the safety of God and into agreement with satan, became sinful. How wonderful that Jesus has redeemed human nature back into God, forming that perfect communion of divine and human in Himself. This then is Sonship, it is wrought in the spirits of men, a deep, permanent alteration of the nature of a man; the Highest is in his nature, by daily obedience he can put on the new man and shine forth in the image and likeness of God.

2. DECREASING AND INCREASING

Now we move on to consider the distinct difference between John Baptist and Jesus in the realm of personal awareness. In Hebrews chapter ten an insight is granted into the self-awareness of Jesus as He 'came into the world', it is a consciousness of the will of God to take away the first covenant and establish the second (verse 9)- He (Jesus) came to do that will of God, to establish that covenant in His body (verse 5). Bear in mind that the Church is now His body. His self-awareness is also clearly revealed later with a new aspect noted in Luke 2.49. In reply to the enquiry of his concerned earthly parents, He says in accents full of amazement, 'did ye not know that I must be about my Father's business?' And so the revelation unfolds, He knew that He was the Son, He knew that

for which He had come; at the age of thirty He took upon Himself, in public, His vocation to bear away the sin of the world.

Consider how He knew so clearly what He was doing, yet John Baptist said he 'knew not' (John 1.33); John's self-consciousness was clear concerning his calling - 'I am a voice' - fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy. John was conscious of the limitations and the transience of all that he was doing, he was to pass away to be replaced by that which 'exceeded in glory' namely a covenant which brought perfection and permanency.

Galatians 3:17 shows plainly that God made covenant with Abraham on the basis of promise and faith, the Seed to whom the promises were made was Christ, He followed directly in the line of that promised to Abraham, the law and ordinances came in from God 'along the way' and, being perfectly fulfilled in Christ, pass away. John Baptist's awareness concerning his life and ministry, his purpose for being on the earth at that time amply represents the impermanent and fading aspects of the old covenant itself. It was transitory, like John who came forth as a light to shine a short while and then be snuffed out, so the Old Covenant arrangements were brought in by God to shine a while in a certain area (Israel) and among a certain people (the twelve tribes of Israel), and so pass away, being replaced by the Great Light of the New Covenant in Christ, which should shine unto the uttermost parts of the earth unto all peoples.

In Romans 5:20 we are told in the marginal renderings that the law of the Old Covenant 'came in sideways' or 'by the way'. It was as though it was an afterthought on God's part, having already stated His main purposes for men in Genesis 1.26 and the following verses that man was to be in the image of God and in His likeness. Not only so, it is as though God gave the old covenant 'by the way' in the sense that Israel received it 'on the way' from Egypt to the land of promise, or perhaps we could say 'on the way' from Abraham to Christ. The law of commandments had its work to do. Romans 5:20 shows it was given 'that the offence might abound', i.e. 'that sin should become exceedingly sinful by the commandment' (Rom.7.13). Thus the heart of man would become awakened to the nature of sin in himself. Furthermore this old covenant was brought in only until He should come whose life and victory would bring it to an end. Galatians 3:19 reveals that all along God had in mind that better arrangement; He had made promises to this effect, particularly to Abraham (3.16). These promises were also to the seed of Abraham, and in the same chapter Paul states that the people who are of faith are Abraham's seed (3-7). It is therefore clear that all that God brought in through Moses, namely the law, the ordinances, the system of priesthood and worship, the sacrificial methods; these were in the same position to the New Covenant as John Baptist was to Jesus, they were to decrease and the new must increase, they came but to fulfil a purpose, as John did, and then, that course being fulfilled, to vanish away.

In the New Covenant there is a passing into the Spirit. Not law and works or outward conformity to a system of sacrifices, washings and wearing of special garments. These all belong to that which has passed away. The swinging of incense, the candles, 'sanctified' portions of buildings set behind veils trod by a special group of men, are all reminiscent of that which has now passed away; as surely as John fulfilled his course and passed away. Now Jesus has come, He has brought in the New Covenant. The time of reformation is come (Heb.9.10) the externals are passed away, Christ has come 'an high priest of good things to come' (Heb.9.H). He moves to bring men into God and God into men, He treads in the Spirit the inward parts of God, satisfying His heart with His sacrifice and blood and (granted an opening through the will of men) enters in and treads the inner holiest of all in the spirit of men, making it pure from the essence of sin, replacing self on the throne and bringing God there to reign in Himself.

How tragic a thing it is to find so many continuing to practise religious ritual in the external ways of the Old Testament which are of no value now. Often these things are dressed up in Christian, instead of Judaistic terms, nevertheless they shall for ever remain 'ready to vanish away' (Heb.8.13), when the hearts of those practising them see that the power and realm of the New Covenant is 'in the heart, in the spirit' (Rom.2.29). Here lies a dreadful danger, namely that of resting in external orthodoxy, an absence of heart reality. Paul and those enlightened souls with him, Priscilla and Aquila, pressed on in this great 'reformation'. Yes, what John Baptist brought was good, what the old covenant had was good, but it did not go far enough, either for God or men. See them with Apollos in Acts 18.24— 28; this bold man 'knew only the things of the Lord concerning John's baptism'; but the glorious reformation took place, he was shown the 'way of God more perfectly' and entered right into it.

Continue on and see Paul in Acts 19.1-6. Again the 'reformation', 'The men had passed only into John's baptism'; this baptism, said Paul, did not go far enough; another who is greater was to come, even Jesus; then through obedience and faith, they passed into the Spirit of the New Covenant.

Further consideration of the relationship of the law and Old Covenant to the New Covenant reveals the position and connection of Jew and gentile. The link between Jew and Old Covenant is incontrovertible. They became a nation as God brought them out of Egypt to His feet at Mount Sinai. There they entered into solemn covenant with Him, which they broke soon afterwards. Having noted that the old covenant itself was brought in for a purpose, which, being fulfilled, then passed away, being replaced by that which was better; even so the Jewish person that enters into the experience and heart-knowledge of God in the New Covenant relinquishes all benefits accrued under the former covenant (Phil.3:3-11)

There are no Jewish Christians. Paul, having come into New Covenant life, understood that truth. He 'counted all but dung that he might win Christ and be found in Him'. Let careful note be taken of the contents of the 'all' that Paul counted as dung. When Christ appeared to him, all his experience of prayer and formalism under Jewish Old Testament ritual was like offal, that which dogs eat! Christ the true meat had come! Let us also note that under the law and old covenant the Jewish nation served a wondrous purpose in God's unfolding plan. It was such an advantage to be born and brought up a Jew. A wonderful revelation of God had been made known to them. Worship of Him in glory in the tabernacle and many other privileges Paul enumerates in Romans 9:3-5. They provided a national identity with a fully documented history through which God could reveal His will and purpose in His Son. When He entered into a covenant relationship with them He was able to show Himself forth, so that none could say that He had foisted His redeeming Son upon the human race without prior warning. Neither could any who might try, argue that they had not known of His coming, for God had advertised what He was going to do in Christ, from His word of promise in Eden concerning the seed of the woman, until John Baptist, never leaving Himself without witness. All was ratified by His dealings with the Jew, no-one should have been taken by surprise by the coming of the Messiah. He even warned of a covenant to come which would embrace Jew and gentile into one - a new creation, neither Jew nor gentile but a new man.

As Paul unfolds the purpose of God with Jew and gentile in Romans eleven he cites a picture from nature, an olive tree with holy root and branches which naturally belong to the tree. Some of these are broken off, the reason for this is that they were unbelieving. In place of them, many branches of a wild olive are grafted in. Paul says that these wild branches are the gentiles and also states that the natural branches (Jews) could be grafted in again if they forsook their unbelief concerning Christ. Here then is the emphasis of this picture: all is by faith, not by nature, or birth, or privilege, but only by faith. The branches abide by faith; it is the root that gives the life; is not that root and stock Christ? As the branches abide in Him by faith alone they bear the 'Christ fruit', not the 'Jew fruit' or the 'Gentile fruit'. These distinctions pass away, Christ is all and in all. The root beareth all, giveth its life to all, the branches live not because of privilege of birth as Jew, but all are there by faith, all grafted in; where then is boasting? Grafting is symbolic of the cross, the cutting open and the placing and setting in, the cross where Jesus our peace 'made both one' (Eph.2.14) and abolished 'the law of commandments contained in ordinances' (the basis of Jewish boasting) 'for to make in Himself of the twain (Jew and gentile) one new man' (2.15). This matter causes much offence. People, seemingly qualified by birth, boast and speak of being 'a completed Jew', or 'a Christian Jew'. The point is obvious in Paul's parable: every branch had to be grafted in, none grew naturally there. Every branch is joined to root and stock only by the gracious action of God, the Husbandman. It is all of Him. How wonderful these things are; the cross brings all on to one level, all must come in by faith via Calvary, that the holy life of the root, the Christ-life, might flow into every branch, Christ being the fruit it bears. So here, natural Jewish privilege decreases: 'He must increase, I decrease'. Just as John Baptist fulfilled his course and gave way to Him who is to inherit all things, so the Jewish nation, in their spiritual capacities, fulfilled their great function, and now, like the gentiles, can only enter by faith into the covenant in force since Pentecost.

3. IMPERFECT FAITH AND THE PERFECT

Examining other aspects of the conception and birth of John Baptist and Jesus, clear distinctions that demonstrate further contrasts between the covenants are immediately noticeable. Elizabeth, mother of John, was a woman

who had known a normal relationship with her husband, Zacharias; true there had been no offspring, she was barren till, by a miracle, God enabled the child to be conceived. In Old Testament history it is to be noted how often God delighted in granting such a miraculous opening of the womb to women; this was in order that the children thus conceived should have in their origins the mark of God's chosen call and destiny. Nevertheless, the child John was natural, born of a natural union, God granting a miracle to open the womb that has hitherto been barren. This is a fitting type of the Old Covenant. It was barren, spiritually unproductive of that which God sought for. Sons of God were not produced by this covenant, though prophets were; it was a covenant where, on odd occasions, the natural, combining with the Spirit of God, brought forth men and women of use to God, but never true sons of God.

Look also at the unbelief of Zacharias; he was unable to rise up in faith to the wondrous announcement. He became dumb. This imperfection of human unbelief is manifest throughout the days of old covenant law. The moral incompetence to rise up into the grand design of God is so evident; the weight of speechlessness caused by failure and sadness runs like a thread through the history of Israel as she laboured to bring forth, as a nation, what God wanted. In both Zacharias and Elizabeth there is the sign of that dreadful duality that characterised life under old covenant law; this is summarised in Romans chapter seven, 'O wretched man that I am', a part rises up desiring to fulfil God's will, but a problem, sin, endemic within, prevents perfect moral obedience. 'With my mind I serve ...says Paul. How true of life under the law; Zacharias and Elizabeth must have known that inward willingness, but 'another law worked', producing doubt and unbelief. Thus they symbolize the barrenness, the duality, the dumbness, the incompetence and the sad incompleteness of life under the Old Covenant. Yet God granted them the child He promised, and then there was the release of utterance in Zacharias' mouth, and through his prophecy the promise of One to come. So the people under old covenant law did bring forth the prophets of God, but all predominately pointed to Him who was to come and to the covenant that He was to minister.

Now consider Mary the Virgin, what a blessed type she is of life under the New Covenant. There is no unbelief as the angelic announcement is made, only complete co-operation of faith in her heart: 'Be it unto me according to thy word'. A marriage of divine and human is thus brought about; there is no duality here, no inward struggles, just the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in the Virgin womb of the woman. How delightful are God's redeeming acts! Recall to mind the inward, spiritual union that the first woman entered into with the serpent and his message of apparent fulfilment in the garden; such an unholy thing was formed in her heart and in the heart of her Adam; the mutation produced of that illicit union is called 'the Old Man' in Bible language (Rom.6), a mixture of human and devilish; see then the wondrous One conceived in the womb of this wholly yielded believing woman Mary. He is the one who was, and is, the New Man. Thus is every act of God in the unfolding drama a redeeming work. Here then is blessed union of faith, word and Spirit; a holy thing is what is brought forth, not John, which means 'God is gracious', but Jesus - GOD IS SAVIOUR.

The New Covenant produces virginity of spiritual life in the souls of men; there, within the life of man, the life of God is formed, Jesus as a gift imparted by the Holy Spirit, living in the New Covenant life, brings forth 'holy things', even Jesus, a clear conformity to Him. The New Covenant is a fruitful union of the word and faith and the Holy Spirit in the life of a man. Mary is the type; she hears the word of angelic promise, yields in abandoned faith, and the Holy Spirit, the power of the Highest, forms in her the Christ. There is no duality here; true, Mary says 'how shall this be?' but it is not the enquiry of an unbeliever, but that of a heart knowing the impossibility of bringing forth without divine empowering; she is told the means, understands and abandons without further question. O that hearts would be as this virgin's was toward God, and Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant. For there is an end to all duality in the heart, that is the 'wretched man' syndrome; the provision of the New Covenant makes available the immediate possibility of deep union with God by the Holy Spirit (while coupled with daily obedience - 'be it unto me according to thy word'). It means the bringing forth in the personality of a man or a woman the characteristics of Jesus' life, these being known by the person in himself or herself and recognised by others who look on.

4. A LAMP AND THE LIGHT

In John's Gospel chapter five verse thirty five Jesus gives testimony concerning John Baptist, He calls him 'a lamp' (Greek). The testimony in John's Gospel chapter one verse four concerning Jesus is altogether different, He is described as 'the light'. Again the difference between the covenants are emphasized in these two words. How descriptive they are. John Baptist a lamp that shone for a season, and men rejoiced in the light that shone from him; but Jesus, not merely a receptacle for giving forth light, but rather the Light itself.

'The types and figures are fulfilled' says the hymn-writer, they pass away as the substance comes forth; so the old covenant passes from sight, swallowed up in the greater New Covenant. Even the light that shone in old covenant days was from Him who was to come, shining through the type; the prophets of old found they were being borne along by the Holy Spirit and they sought diligently as to what the Spirit of Christ was meaning as it spoke in and through them (I Pet.I). It seems so clear now, the old covenant was but a lamp pointing the way, something shining in almost overpowering darkness, by which diligent pilgrims could pick their way in godly fear to a place of a measure of peace with God. They heard a sound 'and a voice of words; which they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: for they could not endure that which was commanded' (Heb.12.19,20). The terror of the old covenant, the just demands of a Holy God struck such fear in them, 'they could not endure' the sound. Somehow the shape of things is made more fearful by the play of light and dark, shadow and blackness which is created by a lamp; there appears to be a distortion of things, shadows play with the senses, too much is left to the imagination; only part is made known, it is too incomplete, true perspective is absent. This is the old covenant. When Jesus said 'I am the Light', He brought not some partial revelation of the heart of His Father as the Old Covenant had; it is not that there was distortion in the lamp of the old, the light was true but only in part, like unto the dimness of those minutes that herald dawn, a glow in the sky, but so much lies hidden, waiting to be made plain by the sunrise. Light is revelation, the old covenant, therefore, is revelation, but only partial and mainly in type and shadow, but it did bring to light aspects of the heart of God. Jesus brings to light the whole glorious heart of God, 'in Him we see the God-head shine'; holiness and love, the essential light of revelation the human heart needs is light upon the person and nature of God; the mystery is beyond words, no man knows God the Father save the Son (Matt 11.27). No wonder Jesus says, 'Come unto me, learn of me, take my yoke upon you, I will give you rest', (Matt. 11.28,29). How does He do it? By giving to the human heart that comes humbly to His feet the increasing revelation of what His Father is like. Hallelujah!

Here then is the glorious rest of soul that Jesus promises, God in all His attributes and in proper perspective is revealed in Jesus; it is not one side of His nature that is made known, but - 'for in that deep Life of God, in harmony complete, like crowned kings, all opposite perfections take their seat' (F.W.Faber). No voice of words from the mountain-top, no tabernacle of skins and cloth, no legal code could ever set forth the blessedness of God, all was veiled and incomplete. Call to mind that Old Testament tabernacle, and within the veil the light which no man could approach unto; the priests saw that light diffusing through the veil of scarlet, purple and blue, just a glow that came forth, putting into sharp relief the cherubims of gold embroidered in the cloth, symbolic of His mercy; yet through the veil of Jesus' flesh the light of the glory of God shone. At Calvary that veil was rent, that is to say the heart of God is seen in all its naked holy love. Calvary is the moment of supreme light, when the heart of God shines forth unveiled; who can speak of these things without pausing to worship and adore?

Calvary, the place of total darkness - the natural luminaries were eclipsed, yet in the spirit, against this background of natural and supernatural darkness, there took place the supreme act of Jesus in which the light of the knowledge of God was released through the veil of His flesh. Calvary was exposure of the lengths and depths to which God would go in order to redeem mankind, overcoming the malignings of the devil by the revelation of His own heart. The web of lies the enemy of souls has successfully spun around the hearts and minds of men - these malignings, imputing to God what God was not, suspicions concerning God's integrity which the unsuspecting woman in the garden first imbibed, these things have darkened the hearts of men, at once both lifting up men as gods and relegating God to a subordinate place as an untrustworthy being. No mind of men or women has been free from these endemic suspicions concerning God, they develop in a multitude of ways, into a multitude of substitutes, philosophies and myths. Truly the root of darkness is ignorance of God, the ultimate blindness is not being able to see Him; so He who is the Light came that He might 'lighten every man that cometh into the world', and to throw into perspective all things, both good and evil, natural and supernatural, through revealing in His flesh the very heart of God.

'God does not care, He has forgotten'; how many such slurs have been cast upon the Glorious God! Calvary is light, the unveiling of how much God does care for those who are His enemies. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4.3-7, speaks of this light shining forth; it must be noted that these verses are described in verse one as 'this ministry', that is the ministry of the New Covenant as spoken of in chapter three. Recall to mind the numerous references to a 'lamp' in the Old Testament: a famous scripture in the Psalms (119 verse 105) refers to God's word being 'a lamp to my feet and a light to my path'; the writer is obviously referring to the benefits he experienced as he read and obeyed the commands and injunctions of the scripture. It illuminated his path, casting sufficient light for him to make out the next step along the path. Recent archaeological discoveries include an article that corroborates this truth - a small lamp that attached to the foot of the traveller. Truly the scriptures of the Old Testament do this. We are able to pick our way through life's circumstances. In the New Covenant however things far better are provided for us. The Light in the heart - Jesus the Lord within the inner man. By Him we know all things and need not stumble or struggle along life's way. His shining within far exceeds a lamp attached to the foot. Bless God for the Old Covenant, but how far excelling in glory is the new!

As the epistles came to be written it is noticeable that John in particular speaks of 'abiding in light', 'walking in the light'. Paul speaks of being delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:12,13) and partaking of the inheritance of the saints in light - here the saints are abiding in the place of knowing God, being made free from all the remnant of those suspicions earlier mentioned; all doubts and fears, all darkness chased away as the saint inherits the nature and puts on the character of His heavenly Father. Referring to John's first epistle, chapter 2 verse 8, the new commandment, the thing true in us, the light about and of God is now shining, the darkness is passing away (A.V. margin), the true light now shineth; this is taking place in reality in the hearts of the saints of God and through them the True Light shines unto men.

The emphasis is light in us, darkness passing away, fears disappearing, doubts removed, uncertainties banished because the true nature (light) is now shining in our hearts. In the old order the light shone in the tabernacle of badgers' skins and specially prepared cloth, in the New Covenant God dwells and shines in the hearts and personalities of 'the saints'. That light of the old order was but as 'a lamp', imperfect in that it caused shadows and was incomplete; in the New Covenant 'the true light now shineth', wondrous self-revelation of God in Christ which puts into perspective all things.

To the heart enlightened by the Spirit of God, the Old Testament holds such treasures, types wonderfully vivid when looked upon from New Testament perspective. Think again of Him in whom is no shadow of turning as He sat upon His mercy seat in Light; no shadow there, seated omnipresent in the whole of that inner room, the holy of holies, immanent in the atmosphere of the room, day and night were all alike, for there was no night there, He never grew dim nor became shaded, no gradations of light in that room - God upon His seat of mercy upon the ark in the heart of the tabernacle. The ark is Jesus Christ, He is the propitiatory (mercy seat), in Him God and men meet in light. We are now His tabernacles, our spiritual personalities are the place of His throne, He dwells in us, He the Light through Christ Jesus shines in our hearts and in His light we must walk, not walking out into the darkness of our own understanding by yielding to temptations from outside. The heart of the saint must learn to maintain its inward vigil, abiding in the Fellowship of Light with Father and Son by the Spirit; the priests of old attended morning and evening to the oil and the lamps; in type they maintained 'an inward life' whilst things continued in the camp outside as usual.

Doubtless from time to time there was uproar in the camp, the sounds of joy or maybe of sorrow fell upon their ears as they attended upon the Lord within, but they were not harassed by such sounds, nor left off their blessed service; they walked in the Light and from that place they ministered the Lord's judgements to the people, ministered His forgiveness by atonements, taught His word, offering manifold offerings unto Him. Let every one of us walk in the Light, maintaining that inward communion with Him, so through the veil of our flesh shall the glorious light in the face of Jesus Christ diffuse to others in actions, words, tones of voice, brightness of eye, shining features; yes, in everything some of His light shall be ministered through those who live this way. Recall to mind the witness of Stephen as the stones smote him and the veil of his flesh was torn - light flooded out of his mouth, testimony rich and wonderful in his speech, 'I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'. Is this not but another testimony to the fact that it is only when the human soul is in extremity that its depths are revealed? In Stephen those depths were heavenly, full of God and His Son, not seated but standing,

perhaps with arms outstretched to receive Stephen's spirit as it was leaving his body. Surely only those who have the Light of God in their hearts shall pass into Him who is Light on the day of their departing from this present dark and evil world.

5. A VOICE AND THE WORD

(Closely connected with the Prophet and the Son)

John Baptist, in the course of his ministry, provoked questions in many hearts; perhaps the most important one was 'Who art thou?' accompanied by various suggestions put forward by the enquirers for him to either deny or affirm. Finally he answers 'I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness'; so it is in the original Greek, though the Authorised Version uses the definite article. He says what he is, for it is what you are that really makes you who you are. We know that John Baptist is therefore claiming to be the particular personalization of the prophecy of Isaiah, the one sent to comfort, 'to speak to the heart' (Hebrew) of Jerusalem, the messenger commissioned to 'prepare the way of the Lord' and 'to make straight in the desert a highway for our God' (Is.40). By the unerring principles of being he is expressing what is his existence: 'I am a voice', 'a mouthpiece', an instrument through which another speaks His words. John Baptist completes a line of many men, for God never at any time left Himself without some prophetic witness on the earth; this, Jesus Himself says plainly in Luke chapter eleven verse fifty, also disclosing the terrible price many of those who were His mouthpieces had to pay; it is clear that this world will never receive Him or His messengers. Jesus had His time of popularity but it passed; their adulation turned to hatred as He came to the heart of His message. Jesus said to the Jews concerning John Baptist 'you rejoiced in his light for a season' ; we know that there came a time when Herod could bear that light no longer and he silenced the voice of God's entreaty and mercy to himself for ever. Even the church had its period of popularity, but it passed; for a season the people magnified them (Acts 5:13), but quite soon those same early lovers of the Lord Jesus were being hounded, some of them to their death, by those who earlier had lauded them.

Perhaps at this point it is good to note that in the Old Testament days the word came through the messengers irregularly, like the waves of the sea it came, not as a constant flow or a rhythmic life, but in spurts as the speakers were moved of the Holy Spirit. God took up His mouthpieces and spoke through them as it pleased Him and then laid them down again. Thus the ministry of 'voices' in the old times ebbed and flowed. It lacked consistency. The experience of those living under the old covenant was likewise. The nation of Israel knew times of depression and then a period of spiritual uplift, a constant state of spiritual well-being was almost unknown in those days. However, in Jesus the Word, we see the consistent message constantly coming through. The sound does not become distorted, the message of His life does not digress or degenerate; in all circumstances and at all times the message comes through _ full of grace and truth' (John 1.17)

Returning to the main theme of this section, consider the fact that none of these prophets of old, culminating in John Baptist, were themselves the true embodiment of their message. It is true that at times prophets such as Ezekiel enacted their message in a dramatic way to bring force and emphasis to their word, but this they did only at the command of God. Hosea became married to a harlot at God's command in order, in some small way, to exemplify God's unchanging love for His harlot wife, Israel. In all these there is the hint of the truth, but not the very truth itself, as though God is saying, there is to come a time when the thought behind the word and the word behind the voice will be fused indivisibly into a life, thought, word and deed, all utterly one and expressing God's heart and will perfectly .

Those voices of old seemed to echo in the wilderness places, the words of God uttered through them rang plaintively; there is the cry of unrequited love, of promise too, things that shall be, but there is little sense of completeness, of arrival, only of getting nearer to that perfection. John says, 'I am a voice', Jesus is 'The Word'. Here lies wondrous truth. John, the instrument, Jesus the musician; John an instrument 'without life' giving sound (1 Cor.14.7), Jesus the breath, the life that gives the sound; John a mere, yet wonderful, mouthpiece, and the Lord Jesus the very utterance. Surely this is the reason that we get that sense of completion, a sense of 'arrival' when we read the utterances of Jesus. Now the very message of God Himself was on the earth. The Word was now made flesh; Jesus was not merely dramatizing God's message, He was the message of God's Being embodied; perhaps this should be considered by those who advocate drama in Christian work. It is plain that such 'acting' passed away when Jesus came; the substance is now here. Drama is useful to express truth at the child level, but

should we not follow the example of Paul, who said 'when I became a man I gave up childish things'? God in Old Testament dealt with His people as with young children, but His New Covenant is to do with the 'young manhood' of His purposes; in the age to come we shall enter in to the full maturity of His plan.

To support the above statement, just think of the Lord Himself; it is written of Him that in the days of His flesh He was 'the Holy Child Jesus' (Acts 4.27,30). The word used means a youth in his minority; Jesus came to His majority, maturity and full manhood, upon His resurrection and ascension and enthronement; by raising His Son thus, God was saying, 'here is My True Son, He has done all my will, expressed all my heart, I am perfectly pleased with Him' . If God is pleased with Him should we not be also? Blessed Lord Jesus, we love you too! Jesus learned whilst He was on earth, He laboured and did the works of His Father and having learned and suffered, because He obeyed, the Father has publicly owned and adopted Him, recognized Him and enthroned Him at His own right hand in glory.

The discerning eye can see plainly the superiority of embodying the message whilst speaking it, over against being a mouthpiece or instrument through which God utters. Perhaps we have seen the megaphone, a cone-shaped instrument which enables a person to address a large crowd by amplifying his voice; this amplifier relays the words to the crowd, but does not partake of the essential nature of the words; it is merely a tool, a channel. Perhaps if the message incensed one of the crowd listening, he might wrench the device from the speaker's grasp and smash it, but really it was the message that was being hated; so the prophets of old were slain, but really He who was speaking never died. When Jesus came, all was different, He was who He was because of what He was the embodiment of God, the thought of God expressed in life and lip, in action and reaction, in word and tongue; the Life of God in human form; so when they killed Him they crossed out the Word, the Life, thus sentencing God to death in this present world and, with Him, all who have His life. This is why there is no future for this present age; the present world must be destroyed, the Church of Jesus Christ has no place here, this world is left to its own sinful life and shall be dissolved in God's good time.

As has been intimated above, a word is the distilled expression of the thought of a mind. The Gospel of John informs us that 'The Word was God and was in the beginning with God' ; when that Word became flesh those near to Him beheld the mind of God, His plan and purpose for men: 'the glory of an only begotten (son) with a father'. The whole of John's Gospel is an exposition of the soul of the Son moving in harmony with the Father. The gospel is embroidered with the wonderful design of God in the soul of the Man. Thus we pass from messages, exhortations, rebukes, revelations and comfortings to the message itself. God's message to us is Himself embodied in His Son Jesus. His final word is Jesus. Man must accept or reject that word of God, by their response to Him they are all judged. To remain willingly ignorant is as culpable in God's sight as outright rejection, but those who receive Him receive the power to see, feel and know 'the Word becoming flesh' in themselves. They do not share the wonderings of the prophets of old in whom the Spirit of Christ that prophesied in them was distinct from their own states; they spoke not of themselves nor to themselves, but to the generation to come (1 Pet.1.11,12). Instead the children of the New Covenant have the Spirit of Christ mingled with their own regenerated spirit; this inward harmony of life, if continually walked in, produces 'the word made flesh' in them. The New Covenant is therefore summed up in one of the favourite words of the apostle John i.e. 'to know'. Rather than questionings, inquirings wonderings and ignorance, characteristic of the Old Testament because of the veil upon the mind, there is a deep, implicit knowledge. The 'Word' is written in the fleshy tables of the heart and a man looking within himself reads Him (that is, God in Christ) there within, and knows.

Here is the substance of the New Covenant, the word of God's heart, the word describing God's Being become flesh - Jesus. When questioned in Mark twelve concerning the greatest of the commandments (words), Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy six verses four and five; He added to this a quotation from Leviticus nineteen verse 18, this He said was the second great commandment (word). Love to God first and love to neighbour second, all is love. Jesus was this word (Commandment) in flesh. Jesus is the normal man. Jesus is the New Covenant Man. Moses spoke forth the law of God to the people; he was a mouthpiece. He read to them that which was written upon the tablets of stone, words written there by God, in which, in some detail, He disclosed the outworking in the relationships of life of the law that governs God's own Being, which is love. Love was law in the Being of Jesus, He was indeed the Word become flesh. This law, in turn, is written into man's spirit and mind by God's Spirit, under the terms of the promise of the New Covenant, so that love towards God and unto man becomes law in

that man's soul who walks according to that covenant. 'All shall know Him' (that is God), 'from the least to the greatest' (Heb.8.11). A man shall 'have the witness in himself (1 John 5:10). Inward knowledge; intuition, implicit witness and total correspondence with God in man's soul. Man governed by the same laws of being as God Himself, namely holiness and love. All this is wrought by the great grace of God in the willing heart that will receive.

Mention has been made concerning the laws of God's Being. They are basically twofold, Holiness and Love. Each unfolds from the other and enfolds with the other, so that in God's Being they are inseparable. Therefore we could say that the laws of His Being simplified are Love and Holiness, or Holiness and Love! Recall the first of the 'words' (commandments) as expressed in Exodus twenty verse three: 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me'. This is the law in God. In the relationship of Father, Son and Spirit this is intrinsic in their Being, law in Their Nature. They remain faithful in holy love the One unto the Other; so perfect is this affection, so undefiled, that they are one. When the word was made flesh He was tempted to depart from that law of holy love that exists in the eternal life of the Holy Three. The devil said, 'fall down and worship me' (Matt.4.9), but Jesus kept Himself holy unto God His Father in love and so resisted the tempter; thus He did in every temptation that assailed Him. In doing this He established in the human spirit, soul and body that eternal life which is in God, the life that is governed by the perfect law of the Being of the King of kings. Here is the wonder. In the New Covenant, this great eternal life governed by this law is working in us who receive the Son of God in us in reality; thus 'the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death' (Rom.8.2).

6. SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE

All begins with spirit, everything is spirit- based. By bringing together the two scriptural phrases, 'In the beginning God' and 'God is a Spirit' we can instantly perceive that everything of substance is in spirit. From spirit came matter in all its forms. In Romans chapter one we are shown the dreadful downward spiral of mankind after sin had entered into the world: consistently men chose to worship and cleave to those things of matter, bowing down to images of created things, rather than to God, who is a spirit. This tendency to a materialistic life has come to its full head in western lifestyle and to its full philosophical development in the doctrines of communism, which, simply stated, say there is no spirit-realm, all is matter. So it seems man lives by his own choice in the world of matter, having shunned the spiritual, the real dimension of substance, he now dwells in the realm of outward symbol and of shadows. Can such a dreadful blindness afflict the human race? It seems so. Adam chose what he could see, handle and partake of with the physical part of his being, not only the fruit of the forbidden tree, but his wife. He chose her whom he could hold then and there rather than God who is a spirit who could not be physically perceived or held.

God, ever-merciful, desiring to bring mankind back to Himself, comes to us where we are. In order to show the realm of spirit and substance He employs symbol and shadow first. Yet mankind, so geared to the earthly, the material, seems to balk as God would wean him away from the religious practices, the rituals, the types and figures, the shadows and symbolism, into the spiritual realities these things represent. A consideration of the difficulties Jesus experienced with the religious people of His day corroborates this statement. Ever He sought to turn them from symbol to reality, from shadow to substance, yet He found such obstinacy - and it is the same today. The heart of man, if choosing its own way, and neglecting personal communion with God, seems to degenerate into the uncultivated and neglected thorn and thistle life, poor plantings indeed in comparison with the true seed planted in the garden of the Lord.

In this respect, what controversy has raged between symbol and substance in the churches over the ordinance of baptism. The symbol is clearly water, the substance is clearly Spirit. Yet how many are in confusion about these things. God is a spirit, man is a spirit and has a body in which that spirit is living its life, thereby producing 'soul' or consciousness. Man's sin problem lies in his spirit, rooted there, it is not primarily a physical state, but a spiritual one. Sin is a spiritual nature, a living power not an accretion of dirt clinging to a man's outward body which can be washed off by an immersion in water. Sin dwells in the inward, spiritual man of a person. Surely in the light of these statements it is clear that no physical act can deal with a spiritual problem. Only a spiritual baptism taking place in the inward parts of the fountain-head of man's inner being can deal with the spirit and power of sin and bring man into God, who is spirit, and God who is a spirit, into man!

The Church of Jesus Christ is His body. It is a spiritual body, not a physical one. Access is only granted to this body therefore by a spiritual birth, in which a person receives the Life that exists, empowers and motivates that body. Yet many teach that access to the Church is by a water sprinkling as an infant, or an immersion in water as an adult believer. They therefore are setting forth baptismal regeneration; but how can a physical act, taking place in a natural element bring us into a spiritual body to dwell in the supernatural element of God's Spirit? In this again we see the recurring habit of man, who turns to the outward ordinances rather than the inward reality. All things begin in spirit for all begins in God. From Him all things proceed, partaking thereby of the basic nature of spirit. Sin originated in an angel-spirit (Lucifer), turning wholeheartedly aside from its place and position given to it of God. Sin is obviously therefore spiritual, being now in mankind, that is, in the spirits of men, first and foremost rendering them dead to God and alive to the world and all the temptations therein. Salvation must be an operation of God in the spirit, that radically deals with man's spirit. The washings, purifications and elaborate ceremonies in Old Testament ordinances and the sprinkling of the blood of sacrifices did not purify men's inner states. Again, the 'body' of the people of Israel was not a spiritual body. They were not joined to God in their spirits, all their joining to Him was in matters of outward conformity to His instructions as best they could. No doubt many among them longed for a passing in to something better; we know they did, for there are many expressions of such longing in the Old Testament. To pass from shadow to substance was the purpose of God, and He tarried until, among other things, such a desire was voiced by many a prophet, until it was shown that shadow must pass away having proved ineffectual. In his ministry John Baptist provides a bridge of connection between shadow and substance.

7. A COMPARISON BETWEEN JOHN'S BAPTISM AND THAT OF JESUS

John Baptist was a revolutionary! He was not however revolting against the status quo of his day on the basis of some notion held in an idealistic mind; rather he was moving according to his allotted function in the purposes of God. The message God gave him to preach was revolutionary, and the symbol he was given to administer caused a great deal of a stir, conflicting as it seemed with those given by God at Sinai in the Mosaic code and therefore binding on the Jewish nation. Up until that time God's method of dealing with sins in Israel involved a complex series of animal sacrifices, every Jew knowing what was required of him if he sinned knowingly, or discovered that he had done so ignorantly by some error of omission or commission. He must bring the appropriate sacrifice, pass through ritual cleansing if necessary and thereby atonement was made for his sin. John however brings a new message, and an apparently new method of dealing with sin, namely an immersion administered by himself into the Jordan river. It is noticeable that the scripture only ever records John doing the baptism, and carefully records that Jesus Himself never did baptise in water (John.4.2). Later, possibly at John's passing from the scene, his disciples did baptise, or else how did that group become baptised in his baptism as is mentioned in Acts chapter nineteen? Right from the outset though only Jesus' disciples baptised in water, whilst Jesus Himself withheld from performing the ordinance in order that there be no confusion about the element in which He was to baptise - that is in the Spirit of God. However, as is usual on the earth, we must have the symbol before the substance appears, therefore John comes baptising in water, which itself was a prelude to Jesus' own disciples baptising in His Name, a symbol of that true and wondrous baptism which Jesus was to administer.

Another point worthy of note is the fact that John did no miracle (John 10.41). We know that Jesus did many great miracles, His ministry was diverse, which fact seems to cast into sharp relief the single act of baptism, around which all John's ministry focussed. It was as though God wanted every eye to be fixed on this symbol. It seemed to Jewish minds almost heretical to go out to John to have their sins dealt with. Instead of making their way up to the temple in order to offer the appropriate sacrifice via the priest, this new message, purportedly to come from God - through this charismatic figure, a man in the very mould of Elijah of old, instructed them to go out to him in the wilderness away from Jerusalem, away from the temple to a place called Bethabara beyond Jordan. There John was baptising them for the remission of their sins - one act that seemed to deal with all their misdemeanours. John insisted that they brought forth fruits as befitting their repentant state, and clearly did not baptise anyone without a sense coming to him from God that the person was genuine, and even as he did so, he pointed them to Another who was to come after him who would bring a greater baptism.

Bethabara has a meaning, namely 'the place of passage'. Unerringly John had been led to baptise at the exact geographical place where the children of Israel had made their 'passage' through into the promised land hundreds of years earlier. It was as though John was saying 'be baptised of me and you will find it to be the beginning of the passage from the wilderness life into the life of promise as mentioned in the prophets of old, away from all sin and into that life which pleases God'. The name Jordan has a double meaning: firstly 'come down', that is that which is flowing down from the upper regions of Hermon through the Lake of Galilee. Secondly it means 'the stream of judgement'. What wonderful teaching lies hidden in the meaning of these names and the symbol that was enacted there. If the spirit of a man would 'pass over' from sinfulness into those promised states of inward life characteristic of God, then he must repent, believe and be baptised in the Spirit of God, not just in the symbolical baptism in water, but in that baptism in the Spirit which Jesus gives. The Holy Spirit is the true river that 'comes down' from above; the Source is God's own life that flows down from above through the lake of Jesus' own life, in which the waters were gathered and then poured out in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, through which sin in our flesh is judged and dealt with, all the way back to Adam (Joshua 3:16). Truly in that baptism of Jesus, namely that spiritual agony, through which He passed at Calvary, was the 'river of judgement' the true stream of judgement in which sin, self, satan and the world were dealt with; the effects of that great work of Christ pass to us in the baptism in the Spirit that He gives. See how wonderfully the types of the Old Testament blend with the presence and ministry of John Baptist to point the way to that baptism into life that Jesus imparts to repentant, believing hearts.

We are privileged in our day to look from a far better perspective than they could of old, yet they could have seen another link God was making between an event in their own national history and that baptism in the Spirit. When the children of Israel passed through those Waters of Jordan they did not in fact get wet. Only the feet of the priests touched the water, the rest of the nation passed through on dry ground. Jesus our great High Priest was truly 'made wet' for us; He stood in the place of death that we might pass over. In the baptism of John the people got wet, but he said that he was only pointing the way, 'there comes One mightier than I'....'He shall baptise in the Holy Spirit and fire'. It seems that ever the finger of the Lord is pointing through the shadow to the true, even in these types and symbols. That baptism in the Spirit was not in water, they were not going to get wet. It was not their outward body that was to be immersed but their inward man. They were not to be baptised merely in the waters flowing down from the melted snows of Hermon, feeding and being stored in that Sea called Galilee and so passing on to where they stood awaiting their immersion in the Jordan River. Greater by far was the true baptism to be. They were to be baptised in the spiritual states of God which were to flow to them through Christ, not melted snows but utmost purity, not held and concentrated in a lake, but the life of God gathered and concentrated in the inward soul-states of the Lord Jesus and so flowing down to us in the Baptism which He gives, because the great reservoir of the accumulated life in Him was broken open at Calvary, thus being able to flow down to us in the river of the Spirit at Pentecost.

Taking another aspect of the truth set forth for us here, we can see that Christ Himself is the true 'Promised Land'; we can only pass into His soul-states by passing through the spiritual waters of His baptism. Once having passed through that baptism He gives, we are able to begin to possess Him in our own personal experience so that His life be thus reproduced in us. In connection with this, it is wonderful to see just how God brings together elements of the truth which formerly had been quite separate and distinct. In the Old Testament they had been set, separated, in the history or the ritual of religious worship of the nation and now they were being conjoined in the wise dealings of God. John Baptist is moved by God to associate together in one, baptism, birth and the removal of sin. In the Old Testament these were separated. Sin was dealt with in the sacrificial system. The nation was 'born' at the time of its passage out of Egypt through the Red Sea. This act was subsequently seen to be a 'baptism' by the apostle Paul (1 Cor.10.1), baptism and total cleansing from sin accomplished in one act by God and symbolised by the baptism in water. We must understand at this point that John's baptism pointed the way to Jesus and people who left John and followed Jesus had to be baptised in water in the name of Jesus; this is because it is in Jesus' name, and only in His name, that the Father is able to work these things in a person's life. It was to Jesus, not John Baptist, that the Father gave the Holy Spirit after that He ascended up, into which Spirit only the Son has the right or the power to baptise. John's baptism is indeed only a pointer to that which was to come. He pointed to Jesus, and said to those who would listen, 'behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world'; then he continues 'He shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire'. Here is the true Lamb set forth; His blood did not

merely atone and cover the sins of the Israelites, but rather would take away the sin of the world; not covering of sins, that is the actions, the outworkings, but the removal of sin, that is the disposition, that from which those actions spring.

The occasion when God first introduced the lamb to Israel involved their birth as a nation out of Egypt. It was a truth taught them, put before their eyes constantly, that there was to be a lamb for a house, so the true Lamb for the whole house of mankind was being set forth. In and through Him man was born again, in the sense that human life was given new life, that is the life that is in Him. Those people of Israel knew that on the night of their great deliverance from Egypt, and their beginning as a nation, they were redeemed by the blood of a lamb from certain death. Not only did they have to shed the blood, but also put it upon the door-posts and lintels of their houses and remain in the house eating the lamb which they had roasted with fire; now here was their true Lamb come to His house, whose blood the Father must shed with the assistance of the members of His family, then they must all eat thereof and so live. So the lamb was ever before their eyes, implicit in their existence, it was there in their cleansing from sins, birth and daily life as a nation.

Fire had been there at the birth of the nation too, the pillar of fire, at times being before them and sometimes behind them. That night they were born, even old men who should have died in the judgement of the firstborn were saved and given life in a figure. Does this give fresh insight to the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, spoken that night so many years later? He was the teacher of Israel and should have known these things. The fire was a separation between them and their enemies, they never passed into it of course, but it was there nevertheless. Later, at Sinai, the fire was identified as The Presence of God, and He came into their midst by fire when the sacrifices were offered, and all was ready for Him to dwell in His tabernacle. In the words of John Baptist, all was coming together; they were themselves to be immersed in the fire of God's very Being; He, the One True God they had worshipped at a distance, was going to indwell them, to burn in them from the moment that they were baptised in the Holy Spirit by the Lord Jesus.

8. REPENTANCE UNTO REMISSION OF SINS AND REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE

The heart of John Baptist's message was Repentance. Matthew chapter three reveals him at the zenith of his ministry, preparing the way of the Lord, straightening out the crooked paths made in human hearts by the effects of sin, bringing all to one place - complete repentance and immersion in the waters of Jordan. He was a fiery man, with a fiery message, walking in the spirit of Elijah, who had gathered all Israel, not to a river but to a mountain and said 'how long halt ye between two opinions?' So John, moving in that tradition, brought hearts to the bar of God's commandment. Many came, many yielded; they repented, were baptised of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. This was a great revival. He yielded not one moral inch in his message, either to the religious clerics of his day or to the Roman occupational forces; nothing swayed him, he knew that the way of the Lord was repentance and baptism. Everyone had to come, none were to trust in their Jewish heritage from Abraham; the axe was being laid to the root of the fruitless tree, there was a great judgement of wrath to come, it seemed imminent. One greater was coming to His floor. He was coming to seek a crop from His Jewish field, a reaping, a threshing, a winnowing, a garnering of the wheat and a burning of the chaff. This image of the threshing-floor came from the Old Testament, somehow they knew they were God's field. Jesus was to bring all the nation in spirit to His threshing floor, it was a bare hillside called Golgotha, there Israel was fully and finally threshed, and there was no fruit among them but Himself. He, the true Israel, He alone was fruitful, He passed through the threshing and winnowing Himself at Calvary, and God gathered His life into His heavenly garner at the ascension.

Golgotha: there the fruitless Jewish tree was cut down at its root, the old covenant, with its limitations, was passing away; it had brought forth no fruit unto holiness, it had proved barren, it did not contain life, it was in word only. Like John himself, the law and Old Covenant ordinance had been brought in to awaken the hearts of men to their sinful and unfaithful states before God; when it came, it caused a great revival of sin-consciousness, and so it does when the Spirit applies it to our hearts. So Paul says, 'when the commandment came, sin revived and I died'. Awful revival, the sin nature dormant, yet alive in the spirit of men, suddenly risen up in awful power as the Law of God is presented to the heart. 'The commandment ordained to life proved to be unto death'; so says Paul. John Baptist was like an embodiment of the legal code and brought men to the acknowledgement of their

deathly state by his baptism: who cannot fail to discern the power of John's ministry? Its effects were great, a tremendous revival, many hearts touched of God, conscious of their sin, aware of their hopeless state, hearing that their sins, which were many, could be repented of could testify to that fact by being baptised; immersed in water, and yet in their hearts immersed in a change of mind concerning their sins, for repentance means 'a change of mind'. Great as this ministry of John was, its limitations are obvious. It did not go far enough. It did not get to the heart of the problem of sin by slaying the powerful nature of sin and loosing from the power of death; it could only bring the heart to a repentant state in which that heart looked to God alone and acknowledged its need of Him to forgive and be merciful. They walked away from their baptism in Jordan by John, knowing that through that repentance and immersion in water their sins were forgiven and remitted. Contrast the way that Jesus came and ministered forgiveness of sin in His own person, not by an act but by His own Being.

Call to mind how Jesus, on a number of occasions ministered to souls stricken with a sense of their sin or crippled by its effects. John's Gospel chapter eight records how Jesus ministered to the woman taken in the very act of adultery. By His word to her, on the grounds of His own being, He pronounced her uncondemned and commanded her to live free from sin. In Luke five there is record of Jesus ministering to a man whose body had become paralysed. This paralysis of bodily function was linked with sins the man had committed. Jesus forgave him his sin, loosed him from its dominion by His word, saying, when questioned by scribes and pharisees viewing the proceedings, 'The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins'. Again there is reference to the ground of His own being.

Jesus introduces us in Himself to a new being, one that is capable of being free from sin: 'Go and sin no more'. The old covenant embodied by John Baptist caused the fact of sin to 'revive' and ministered comforting remission, yet not power of new being (creation) which would enable the recipient to live free from sin. Jesus comes as the embodiment of the New Covenant, a covenant of liberty from the necessity of sinning because it promises to slay the nature from which sin issues and to implant a new nature to which sin is not native, neither can it be. It should be noted how much further this grace of God in the New Covenant goes. Far beyond repentance it goes unto the regeneration of the individual. Ezekiel refers to this in chapter thirty six mentioning the washing and the sprinkling from all filthiness and then the granting of a new heart and a new spirit. This will be accomplished by God Himself, by the Spirit, coming within a man and thus from his inmost nature a man shall be 'caused to walk in God's statutes and to do them'. Freedom from sin in the heart is here the benefit specifically in mind to those who enter in to true relationship with God under the terms of the New Covenant.

Repentance alone can never satisfy God or His apostles and prophets. It was the testimony of the leaders of the early church when they saw and heard what had happened in Cornelius' house that 'God hath also to the gentiles granted repentance unto life' (Acts 11.18). Not just repentance, but repentance unto life! Surely not repentance unto the same life subject to the inevitability of a continuance in sin, but rather 'repentance unto life' as it is in Christ, the life that does not sin and by which a man need not henceforth sin if he allows that life of Jesus to fill his own. Note in the text quoted the word 'also'; obviously the members of the early church were in no doubt as to what had taken place in their own lives, repentance unto the receiving of a new life in actuality. It was fundamental in their ministry - 'repent and receive'. Life was imperative, in spiritual things as in natural there are no vacuums. Perhaps it is at this point that so much modern evangelism fails, bringing people to a repentance and the ministering of forgiveness of sins, but not bringing them unto the receiving of life from above. Only by such a receiving of newness of life can the soul hope to live a life pleasing to God. This was the true state of salvation as known and experienced in the early church: O that it were so today!

Under the terms of this New Covenant, continuance in sin in the life is forbidden (Rom. 6.12). The old sinning life died with Christ and in Christ. He took it upon Himself and we with it, thus it is finished! Those who receive this Spirit of the life that is in Christ Jesus shall be quickened by that life and shall show forth its dominant characteristics, and those who also receive this doctrine shall be moulded thereby into the shape of a life free from sin. Many who have received the life do not move into the benefits of it because they are also moulded by a doctrine that is deficient and unscriptural. Romans chapter six verses seventeen and eighteen speaks of 'being delivered to a mould of doctrine'. How true! How blessed too if we are delivered into the mould of true doctrine and obey it from the heart, for the outline upon our lives shall be freedom from sin and clear marks of a happy servitude to doing right.

Developing this a little further and enlisting the help of the Hebrews writer we find him speaking of the conscience of the worshipper under the old covenant and under the new. In the tenth chapter mention is made of conscience of sins. Linked with this is the fact of a constant remembering of sins from year to year. Worshippers who truly loved God, still were not made perfect inwardly. Their conscience registered what still existed within them. The energy of 'the motions of sin' which were in them still impinged itself upon their intuition and self-knowledge, they were not free from the sense of their sinfulness inwardly, although outwardly they obeyed the legal terms of the Old Covenant. Paul was in such a position in Romans seven, the sheer torment, the dichotomy of his life caused him to cry out in great agony 'who shall deliver me ...?' Such a consciousness of the need for liberty drove him, in his honesty to God and to himself, to seek a way out.

The Hebrews writer (10.22) speaks of the state of conscience in the person who draws near to God through Christ with a new, true, clean heart attested to by the witness of the Spirit. Here is the man of the New Covenant with a heart sprinkled from an evil conscience; intuitively he does not sense evil within but rather that he has a 'true heart' within. Again in chapter nine verse fourteen he refers to the contrasting intuitive registrations of the conscience concerning the inward state. No longer an awareness of 'dead works', self-initiated efforts to be accepted by God, a service energised by self rather than the glorious inward conscience which confirms to the heart of the one regenerated that he is serving the Living God 'through the Eternal Spirit'. How implicit these things are, how explicit they become in the lives of those living under the one covenant or the other. In the old, the ceaseless activity of sacrifice upon sacrifice, priests never resting or sitting down in God's presence; no lapse allowed in the ritual without dread and fear affecting the heart; constant reminders of sin and imperfection all around. However, the worshippers in the New Covenant dwell in rest inwardly, and the external labours come forth out of that rest. The inward whisper of the Spirit of God crying 'Abba, Father', and the conscience registering the fact of being accepted in the Beloved, and because of that, at rest in Him. The Lord grant an understanding of these things to grow among His people that they may boldly move in their God.

9. BEHEADED OR CRUCIFIED

It seems that in a multitude of ways we have been instructed of God through the birth and life of John Baptist and Jesus. Now we turn to the manner of their respective deaths and find new light from God there. It truly leads us to wonder at God, who makes all things to conform to their nature and pattern, so that the Spirit of God is able to open to the humble and teachable heart avenues of truth from unexpected sources. John Baptist was beheaded: decapitation, the body buried by his devoted disciples; of his head there is no record, it is last seen on a charger carried by a servant of Herod's household (Matt.14.11). Doubtless it was cast away somewhere at the whim of the woman and her daughter who had gained it. On the other hand it is written of Jesus in His death that, although the bones of those on either side of Him were broken, His body remained intact; no dismembering, no breaking of the body, that scripture be fulfilled, 'a bone of Him shall not be broken' (John 19.36).

The Old Covenant as represented by John Baptist was ever a covenant arrangement where Head and body were separated. God the Head could never be joined to Israel as His body. Remember the tabernacle in the wilderness and later the temple in Jerusalem. They were constructed somewhat in the pattern of a body and head, the holiest of all being the head, the body and legs and arms being the holy place and the outer court. If, in the mind's eye, the tabernacle be stood on end, with the altar of burnt offering as the feet, and so progressing upwards to the holy of holies as the head, the likeness will readily be perceived. Doubtless also the thoughtful reader will recall where the veil of separation between God and His people was hanging - just at the place equivalent to the place of the neck in the body.

Is it not apt, therefore, that John Baptist should die thus? He symbolises this terrible separation between God and man as revealed by the Old Covenant with its laws and ordinances. How God has longed for a body through which to express the thoughts of His mind, yet, because of sin, the communication has been cut, there is no flow of the life of the Head to the body. Instead, in the Old Covenant, there was the cold form of ritual and sacrifices. All was in ordinances, formal and bereft of the Life of God. John Baptist's disciples were left with his body; they buried it.

The Jewish nation had the form of godliness, the legal code, with its shape so life-like, but having no breath or power. The Pharisees no doubt revered that body of truth, as has many a Jewish person since also; but what a wonderful day when they, like those disciples of John, 'took up the corpse and laid it in a tomb and gathered together unto Jesus' (Mark 6.29,30 c.f.Matt.14.12). Such a day must come in the lives of all those who have followed the dictates of the Old Covenant: they must come to Jesus that they might have life.

The earthly agents of John Baptist's decease were none other than Herod and his unlawful wife, Herodias, whose daughter was involved too. Some months after Herod had ordered the death of John, Jesus stood before him. We are told that Herod had often wanted to see Jesus doing some miracle. Herod asked Jesus questions, but 'He answered Him nothing' (Luke 23.9). God was dumb in front of an enquirer because that enquirer had murdered His voice months before at the beheading of John. This process goes on in many a life.

In another context Jesus said, 'they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them' (Luke 16.29); again He says, 'had ye believed Moses ye would have believed me for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?' (John 5:46,47). If a man disregards repeatedly the voice of the law of God speaking in his heart when it prompts him, and pricks him in his conscience, such a man is inevitably going to come to a crisis where he will murder the voice of God in his own heart. From that moment he shall not hear the voice of God again.

This awful murder of truth by error, of life by death, of Spirit by flesh, is a terrible thing. In the heart of men one or the other must be victor, and the other vanquished. If the truth of God according to the law is triumphant it shall bring the heart to the place of a great cry, such as that of Saul - 'who shall deliver me?' (Rom.7: 24), or that of those who on the day of Pentecost cried, 'men and brethren, what shall we do?' (Acts 2.37)- Therefore the just demands of God's voice in His law are applied to men in order that hearing they may come to God with a great longing cry, which He shall answer in Christ.

However, if that voice be murdered, then it is the end. Herod was an Edomite, a distant but direct descendant of the arch-enemy of Israel (Jacob), even Esau. The man of the flesh, who loved the things of this world; sensual, sophisticated, natural, animal, rejoicing in things that are touched, tasted and enjoyed in the flesh, and repudiating the world that is not seen by selling rights to it for bodily satisfaction. The crisis for Herod was wrapped up with sensuality - a dancing girl, perhaps aesthetically tasteful in the estimation of some, but this was the crisis: in a moment of emotional and sensual ecstasy he makes a rash promise, he bows down at the goddess of this world's beauty, sacrificing himself irremediably to himself.

We remember the reason for Herodias' vicious hatred of John Baptist. He, the embodying of the Law of God, had told Herod that he must not have her because she was married to another. John was totally uncompromising in his denunciation of their union; the Law of God does not bend, it does not adapt itself to different ages; it is as God Himself, for it is an emergence in words of the principles basic in God's own being and thus is unchangeable. A man must hearken to God's word, or, if he evades it over several years, he will inevitably come to the great crisis. In such a crisis the man only does what he has been tending towards in the process leading up to it. Thus did Herod. Suddenly the crisis was upon him, unexpectedly he must choose; He was sorry about it, but for his own self he would choose, for the sake of his own word because of those sitting by. Thus he looks upon the head of God's prophet and from him comes no word.

Consider in contrast again the manner of Jesus' death. Here there is a wonderful emphasis on the unbroken, the lack of severance. Head and body together to Calvary. Head and body passing through death together, Head and body rising again; Head and body adopted up into heaven by the Father to be seated with Him for ever. Blessed absence of separation betwixt head and body. Christ the Head, the Church His body. There is no severing between Christ and His Church, and no fracture in that body. He the Head took His body with Him to crucifixion unto death, yet through death to life in resurrection power and finally up to heaven in glory.

There was a severing that awful day, a separation in a mystery betwixt God the Head and Christ the body (1 Cor. 11). Who can plumb the depths of this mystery? God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and yet Jesus, the man, cried out, 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' The agony of awful ignorance. Christ, who knew all things, experiencing the unknown - God — forsakenness. Experiencing the fruit of sin, suffering in

Himself the terribleness that sinful mankind should face because of their sin. The perplexity of a pathetic loneliness is in that cry; 'cut off for sins and not His own', says the hymn-writer, Charles Wesley. The wondrous communion between God the Father, Jesus' Head, and the Son, His Body, which they had enjoyed for ever and ever in heaven, and more lately as Jesus was on earth, ceased. The Son of Man stood alone in greatest weakness (yet He was strong) and overcame all things of sin and those the fiends of darkness threw against Him. He preserved His inward states of holiness unto God intact, His integrity to His God unblemished in all the powers of His inner man, though tried beyond all understanding, and He held us to Him, we His body: since He did it for us, even as it was done in Him so it was done in us; He took His body (the Church) into death to sin, into death to the world, and through into newness of life for evermore.

Is it any wonder then that the veil in the temple was rent from top to bottom? Head and body are now made one. This is the message of the New Covenant, we have access through His blood into the holiest (states). The blood (life) that flows in the Head flows through and in every member of the body. The covenant is not the inert corpse of a dead formalism, but flows through the spiritual veins of the Head and body alike in living fire. The mind of the Head is transmitted to the body; every member knows to which body it belongs and has the mind of Christ. Every member of that body is intuitively aware that it has passed through death; the law of the Life that is in Christ the Head is in the spiritual fibre of every member of His body. Glory be unto God who hath given us the New Covenant in the blood of His Son, that it be in the very blood of our spiritual man also.

Linked with this thought of blood must, of necessity, be that of the heart. The privilege of the body is that it possesses and houses the heart! Therefore let men and women know that, if they profess to be the body of Christ, then let them look to their heart in which is written the Law of God's own life. This law is imparted to every member and is in them via the blood-flow. Jesus said that the New Covenant was in His blood. Every member of Christ's spiritual body has the New Covenant at their heart and in their blood, the covenant of conformity to God's own life and being. Let every member 'hold to the Head' from whence all flows, and not give heed to the shadowy things, a mixture of old covenant truth linked with myth which panders to pride (see Col 2.17-19). How amazing it is to see the terrible ease with which the heart can slip back into old covenant ideas, whilst still maintaining the Christian veneer; or is it that hearts have never seen the nature of the New Covenant, and from the beginning of their profession of faith have embraced a Christianised old covenant concept? God make His truth known that His people may dwell in the good of it, all their days on this earth.

10. THE PRIESTHOOD

No study of the covenants would be complete without some mention of the priesthood. Surely it is not without significance that John Baptist was the son of a priest after the Aaronic order. His father, Zacharias, was of the course of Abia, that is the eighth course according to the arrangements for priestly function in the first book of Chronicles chapter twenty four. David had organised the descendants of Aaron into various 'lots' in order that all might minister in their place.

Had John Baptist been a normal son of his priestly father, he would probably have become a priest after the order of Aaron, offering up the various offerings and sacrifices for sins, also performing the numerous duties according to the ordinances laid down in the old covenant system of worship. However, the role of the priesthood in Old Testament days had another element to it. This is strongly brought out in the book of Malachi. In the first chapter the Lord remonstrates with the people of Israel because they profaned His altar with carelessly offered sacrifices which were unclean, having spot and blemish. Then in chapter two He speaks to the priest, reinforcing His original intention for the Aaronic priesthood that - 'the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts' (Mal.2.7). In the fourth verse of the same chapter God says, 'My covenant was with Levi'. He had vested in the Aaronic family, the Old Testament priesthood, the ministry of the old covenant in all its aspects. The priest was God's messenger; thus are priesthood and prophethood linked together in God's original. Moses was told by God 'Aaron will be to thee for a mouth'; God's mouthpiece were to be His priests, the law of the old covenant was to be found in his mouth, the people were to be instructed by the priests. It seems that a separate ministry of prophet was not originally envisaged by God, and that the prophetic line came into view distinct from priesthood when the priesthood failed in the days of Eli and his sons in

Shiloh. Even then it is noticeable that Eli the priest was used to nurture Samuel, who was the first of that distinctive prophetic number, and not only so, but Samuel ministered also often in a priestly capacity by erecting altars and offering sacrifices. Memorable in this connection are the times when Samuel affirmed that he, as prophet and judge among the people, could pray for them and minister the words of the covenant to them. He called them back from waywardness into covenant with God; he was a true prophetic priest.

Another factor in this connection is that the kingdom did not come into being except by the sanction of God through His priestly prophet. Samuel anointed Saul first and subsequently David, thus was the kingdom inaugurated. How very much all things appear to spring forth from the priestly ministry; it is the heart of all ministry, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Let all would-be prophets and those who would rule among the churches take note - first priesthood and faithfulness therein! Faithfulness in priestly function to God and among men.

Bearing these things in mind, it should not surprise us that John Baptist, greatest of the prophets, the messenger of the Lord (Mal.3-1), should be of the household and lineage of Aaron. He was calling the people back to God and His ways, calling them to a doing of the law, preparing the way for the Lord, who would 'suddenly come to His temple'. The name John, given by the angel, means 'God is gracious' and it had been a gracious thing God had done in giving to His people His law, and entering into covenant with them if they would enter into covenant with Him. Many are under the misapprehension that law is against grace; this is not so, grace was in the law; how privileged the Jewish nation was to be specially singled out to be recipients of a revelation of the One True God, Jehovah, and to know His nature and will. It was grace, yet now in Christ grace has come upon grace, for the New Covenant is grace poured out exceedingly. The grace of God unto all men (not just one nation) has now come forth in Christ. The grace of God in Christ has now appeared, far more wonderful than the grace of God that appeared in the giving of the old covenant. Let hearts rejoice in that which is greater and dwell therein, not drifting back to a lesser grace which now, as yesterday's manna, breeds worms and stinks! When hearts go back to living under Old Testament terms they do become conscious of their 'worm' state; there is a consciousness of sinfulness, a breeding of self-awareness - 'O wretched man that I am' . The heart that lives in the New Covenant experiences a greater grace - 'Jesus' - 'Saviour', the One whose Life has saved me and is in me, saving me every day from my 'worm' life. Thus Paul tells us in the Roman epistle that Jesus, whose name means 'Jehovah Saviour', 'saves us by His Life' (Rom.5. 10). He became 'a worm and no man' that we should know the indwelling power of His Life, by which we are constantly kept in holiness as we walk in the Spirit.

As John Baptist prophesied and performed his function he had no sacrifices to offer for the sins of the people, the one ordinance he had was baptism by immersion. This, he said, was for remission of sins, and he pointed the way by his life, his ministry, his ordinance, to Jesus who brings in a True Life, a better priesthood entered into by a better baptism. No-one could receive the benefits of John Baptist's ministry unless they were baptised of him; then many of them became his disciples to be schooled at the words of his mouth. No-one can receive the benefits of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ unless they are baptised of Him, not in water but in the Spirit, not unto remission of sins but repentance unto Life from above; not unto a life of being disciples only, but into a life of spiritual priesthood. Every person baptised by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit enters the sacred ministry of spiritual priesthood. Jesus is Head over the household of priests unto God His Father. He is Melchizedek the older who instructs His younger brethren in aspects of their ministry.

In days of old Aaron and his sons each had to be baptised (washed) in the waters of the laver set in the tabernacle. The Head (Aaron) and the children all passed through the same waters. Jesus, our Head, and we His children pass through the same spiritual waters, and thus come up into the ministry of spiritual priesthood, being made fit for it by all receiving the one resurrection life of our Head, and in Spirit, at that moment, enter into the priestly city, New Jerusalem (Heb.12).

The great calling in this New Covenant is unto the spiritual priesthood. It is central. All other calling(s) hinge upon this main calling, a life lived within the temple of our bodies in which, by the Holy Spirit, we offer up sacrifices unto God our Saviour. Our spirit rises to Him, whilst our body lies upon the altar, being daily consumed, our souls becoming ashes under the altar cry unto men and God (Rev.6.9). By the Spirit of God our Elder Brother, Jesus, shall school us in the elements of priestly ministry that we may offer spiritual sacrifices unto God and His Father and

also have our hearts as sanctuaries of prayer, that intercession, the highest of the priestly functions, may take place. The priests are to come up into a life of intercession that the sweet odour of our prayers may be accepted of God. As the spiritual priests of God minister unto Him, so shall they be 'ministers of the New Covenant; not of the letter, but of the Spirit', (2 Cor.3.6), and men and women shall 'seek the covenant at their mouths'. They shall speak prophetically as those who live before God in their spirits, serving Him night and day, feeling the effects of Jesus' blood within and know Him as the Lamb newly-slain, their inward lives sustained by a deep consciousness of His presence, power and purity. Only in the good of this inward life lived as a priest can a man or a woman be a minister of the New Covenant. It is primarily the imparting of 'the Spirit', not only instruction in words. Such 'word only' instruction is the result of the absence in the life of the speaker of the inward realities of those things spoken. O that all the corners of this world were being reached by such a priestly company who were ministering the very life of heaven to the hearts of men!

Here lies vital truth. Priestly ministry in the days of tabernacle and temple mainly took place in the hidden area of the holy place and the holiest; if not there, then certainly in the court where altar and laver were situated. This ministry was not therefore open to full view, but those interested to see could go to the gate-area and look in. We could say then that this was primarily a ministry in the secret place. Now, gaining instruction from this for this day of the New Covenant priesthood, we see that those who are priests after the order of Melchizedek must be constantly ministering to God inwardly, that is in the heart and spirit of them; pre-eminently they must be those with this testimony, 'An hidden life in Christ I live, and exercised in things divine'. The light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ shines in their hearts' (2 Cor.4.6), they minister to Him within, 'there is no night there' (Rev.22.5). When those who live like this in their hearts to God speak forth and live out their lives there shall be a definite flowing of this substance of the hidden life in the Spirit unto others; the words spoken shall be spirit, the deeds done shall be imbued with that grace of God, thus shall there be impartation of the Spirit taking place through them.

11. THE INWARD AND THE OUTWARD

Perhaps to some readers some of the things already written may appear to be unusual in presenting spiritual truth in such a way. To contrast John Baptist and Jesus thus is rarely done. We now desire to take another step in these comparisons, one which perhaps may be thought even more unusual. Everything about John Baptist bespoke a holiness that needed a great protection from external defilements. He would be classed as an ascetic, that is a person who keeps himself very carefully lest he be made unclean by becoming involved with anything in his outward behaviour and living which would defile. In our dictionaries in this context we find mentioned monks and hermits, those who are abstemious, keeping themselves clean to the standards of their particular religion by austerities. It implies a rigorous self-denial, keeping in bounds the things within that would otherwise naturally come to the surface and lead to sin and uncleanness.

There can be no doubt that John Baptist was such a man; in his garments he followed the tradition of the ascetic prophet named Elijah. His eating habits were simple in the extreme. He ate locusts and wild honey. There was no self-indulgence in his habits at all it seemed. We are told in Matthew eleven that he abstained from drinking; he kept himself on an extremely tight rein that he might be true to the commission given him in embodying the Law of God. In being such a man he showed forth a type of holiness. He was a holy man. Holy unto God's purposes, holy unto his calling. Doubtless such a holiness based essentially upon outward observances and carefully trained habits required a great amount of will-power to sustain. John would certainly have been graced by God also to live up to the demands made upon him. Could it not be said that his spotless walk was preserved precariously and was essentially an outward one?

Certainly John Baptist, in this ascetic life of his, epitomises the holiness achieved and maintained by obedience to the old covenant. It lay in outward conformities. The inward man remained still defiled by sin, there was no deep transformation within, but rather the longings of a great desire and the setting of the will to please God. At the same time there was awareness of a contrary fountain in the heart that gave forth its water within. Bitter waters, unclean waters, that which defiled. Yet the dedicated heart that loved God could preserve itself by careful obedience to the law and in many, many ways keep itself from being defiled by the practice of sin. The word

precarious was used above: indeed the holiness attained under old covenant conditions was precarious, and was only preserved by much watchfulness .

When we consider the holiness of the Lord Jesus we see something altogether different. His holiness was intrinsic. Again the dictionary helps us, this word means 'belonging to a thing by its very nature'.

Here then we move into another dimension entirely, namely a holiness that belongs to a person in his very nature, a person in whose very nature holiness finds a natural home. The first man ever to be of this order of being was our Lord Jesus. Jesus was the first of a new type of man, He shows us what life is like under the New Covenant! Peter, in his first epistle speaks in chapter one, saying from God the Father, 'Be ye holy as I am holy'. God is telling us that we must have an holiness of the same order as His, that is intrinsic, in our nature, we are to be holy by nature! Some will immediately respond with the word 'impossible!' However, God is faithful to do it in those who will come to Him for it, for it is possible in the terms of the New Covenant now in force.

Jesus, in His earthly walk, shows forth the marvellous possibility of this true holiness being given and maintained in the midst of an alien and unclean world. The critics accused Jesus of being 'a gluttonous man and a winebibber' (Matt.11.19), they added that He was 'a friend of sinners', inferring that in His habits of life He had altogether too much free intercourse among men and women of questionable character. Jesus had holiness in His heart, that holiness and the sinful world in which He lived were mutually exclusive. There was in Jesus a purity that repulsed temptation as it came to Him from powers at work in the world in which He lived. He was holy in being and He maintained that state and brought it into every function and faculty of the human soul and personality. He did this against the background of every kind of temptation that the human can possibly undergo.

There can be no doubt that the outward holiness of the ascetic achieved under the old covenant left the heart unsatisfied and without that abiding sense of righteousness fulfilled and holiness achieved. There was a restlessness intrinsic in the life of the old covenant saint. They ever looked for that fundamental thing to be established within them, they never received it as long as they were on the earth. That fundamental for which they longed was 'perfection'. In the Hebrew epistle we are told that they were not made perfect (11.40). John Baptist was without doubt a man of the deserts, a wanderer, moving around under the starry heavens. He was at home with the beasts and without permanent, abiding rest of soul. This impression can be gained from a general examination of the characteristic way he spoke and moved through life, right to the end. In Jesus however there is that sense of movement, yet without restlessness. In Jesus there was an absence of the sense of striving to achieve, rather there was the rest of faith which knew that, as He walked forward, then all things would be wrought by His Father in Him and through Him. He knew He was given to have the life in Himself and that, as He lived in dependence upon His Father, then all that lay intrinsic in that life would develop forth to its perfect states, and accomplish that which was consistent with its nature.

Let the twentieth century church take note of these things set forth in Christ. This life is ours. 'I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly', said Jesus in John chapter ten. What a famous verse! Some interpret it along the line of God's will for us to possess the good things of this world, that we be prosperous, that we abound in the riches of this world; what a shabby interpretation of scripture! Jesus was without doubt speaking of that life of holiness being given unto His sheep so that they were by nature holy unto Him and did not need to preserve those holy states by striving, straining and rigorous self-denial. Rather the perfect life-states were given to the sheep as a sheer gift of God and, provided they walked with their Shepherd and followed Him whither He goes, then those holy states given would distil through all the faculties and powers of their humanity. This whole truth of the gift of holiness as against that earned by hard labour in obedience over many years, is vital for the heart to understand. There was hard labour in the old covenant: with the sense of attainment there was always the gnawing sense of failure to fully achieve, as the heart that loved God would so desire to do. There is no doubt that there is a realm of desiring to achieve, of going after that which, as yet, is not perfectly attained; however, there is a distinct difference, and it is simply this: in the new man there is the sense of a reaching out for more, based upon an inward sense of a foundational gift of holiness imparted in the inner man. Every person who would be a saint of God in this New Testament age must receive from God this basic inward gift of holiness in Christ. They must not only believe, they must also receive. Here lies, perhaps, the most fundamental problem in Christian ministry in this century: many come to the position of believing in Christ, but there are far fewer who come to

receiving, in themselves, those things in Christ that God has made available in the Holy Spirit for us now. Thus people experience deep uncertainty and lack of assurance; so-called backsliding is commonplace, with repeated rededications of the life; disappointment can so easily become the portion of such a one, and the great need is simply that the heart comes to understand what the New Covenant is all about, and to receive the gracious gift of a new spirit to which holiness of life is intrinsic, and the Holy Spirit to abide to keep that spirit within ever unto Christ.

This leads us to mention of spirit within. 'You know not what spirit you are of', said Jesus to His disciples (Luke 9:55). The situation that sparked off this rebuke from the lips of Jesus was one in which His disciples, being angered by the unwillingness of people in a village in Samaria to receive Jesus, desired to call down fire to destroy the inhospitable people. They had a precedent for such behaviour: Elijah had done something of this order back in the days long ago. The connection between John Baptist and Elijah has already been mentioned. John followed in the line and spirit of this man. The connection between John Baptist and the Old Covenant has been shown, the spirit of the Old Covenant was the severe judgements and curses that came to those disobedient to it. In the bare demands of the Old Covenant there was no mercy to those who failed to live up to its standards. Often fire and terrible burnings came to those who were disobedient. 'The law came through Moses', this is the bare statement of fact in the first chapter of John's Gospel. No mention of mercy or of grace, just the law with all its terrible demands and judgements. Here is not the end though, 'grace and truth came by Jesus Christ'. Grace linked with the truth, the gracious supply to enable the willing heart to live up unto the demands of the truth. Grace is that of God which desires to save and not send down fire to consume the disobedient.

The Old Covenant destroyed, but the New is that through which God is able to save. Thus the children of the New Covenant have grace and truth in their hearts and by them comes grace and truth to others who are fallen and away from God, there is no vindictive desire in their spirit to call down fire on the miscreants, the manner of their spirit is altogether different from that. Again the truth of a gracious saving disposition in the inner man is apparent, their spirit is not only holy intrinsically, it is also gracious longing for salvation and not damnation. Truly this age in which we live is a most blessed one, the benefits that God imparts through His New Covenant to those who will receive, far out-distance that which was available in the old day; thank God it has passed away as far as He is concerned, there can be no doubt that He is utterly glad about that too. To share His inner states with humankind has been His great purpose since before the foundation of the world. It has been the settled desire of His heart, and from that He has never altered or diminished, although sin entered in, and all the tragic muddle of the affairs of history as a result. God is unchangeable in His being, and in what He does also; His word stands, He accomplishes that which He has set out to do. Let the heart of the reader then come up into all that He has for them, that they be sons indeed.

12. THE SHEPHERD AND THE PORTER

The title of this section is derived from the wonderful passage in John's Gospel chapter ten. There Jesus, in the course of teaching, takes up the image of sheep and shepherd. This was a deeply familiar concept to Jesus' hearers because the image had been employed by prophets of old concerning God shepherding His people Israel through the wilderness and putting them in the care of under-shepherds when He had taken them into the land of promise. Not only so, for all over the land there was the familiar sight of folds, some temporary, some permanent: flocks enfolded ready for sale and under the care of a 'porter', or roaming the hills with their shepherd who was leading them from pasture to pasture.

There is much delightful instruction in this image, conveying to the mind as it does such winsome truth in simplest language. Yet, keeping to our subject, we see again the inferiority of the old covenant compared with the new. As Jesus comes forth, stating Himself to be the Shepherd of the sheep, He must of necessity, though parabolically, put those men who had gone before in perspective. Most of these He refers to as thieves and robbers, perhaps He had in mind the many would-be deliverers who had called to His flock, climbing up over the wall - false messiahs. In our day we have them - communism, socialism - in fact it seems endless, promising their utopian dream, their voices come to the sheep (and the goats) in the fold of this world, and men respond according to the dominant disposition in their hearts.

Yet returning to the times when Jesus spoke, we see that He refers to one fold in particular; later, in verse sixteen, He refers to the other folds where some of His sheep were awaiting His call. In verses two and three He speaks of the Jewish fold. In those days it was a common practice for a shepherd to come to market with his flock. He would put his sheep in care of a porter or door-keeper. This man kept the door of those folds (sometimes there were several such). As more shepherds brought in their sheep and goats for market the door-keeper would perhaps let in a number of flocks from different shepherds until the fold was full; there the sheep and goats from different flocks mingled, awaiting the voice of their shepherd, who would lead them out and on, either to market or to fresh pasture.

We are considering but one flock - that of God, His Old Testament people which He led out of Egypt from their awful bondage. With them went a mixed multitude; there was something of mixture between sheep and goat in the flock. God brought them to the fold, a temporary resting-place, it was the foot of Mount Sinai, where He enclosed them in the protective wall of His old covenant law. They were to remain safe there, a people not wandering about at the mercy of wild theories and dangerous doctrines, until such times as He should come and call them forth to fresh pasture. The door-keeper would prevent them from wandering away, he would feed them too, according to the shepherd's instruction and permission. Protection too from lion and bear was in the hand of the door-keeper.

Who can fail to see the parable? John Baptist the Porter, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets who were keepers of the Lord's sheep, who fed them the laws of God and kept them enwrapped in the safety of His old covenant ways, promising them also that their Shepherd would return, and they would hear His voice and to new pastures would they be led. How fearlessly the prophets of old kept the door of the fold. They fought against the intruder, the false voices, the false shepherds that came and wooed the sheep. These door-keeper(s) served their generation and fell asleep, until the one most privileged of their line was born and was fulfilling his office: John Baptist, unto whom it was revealed that he was to 'behold the Lamb of God', the True Shepherd; to Him he was to open the door that He may go in and call His sheep unto Him and put them forth, going before them.

Note this great credential of the True Shepherd for which John was to look: 'the Lamb of God' upon whom the heavenly Dove was to descend. Before John's Gospel chapter ten and the truth of the Good Shepherd, comes chapter one and the manifestation of the Lamb, testified to of God and man. Let under-shepherds take note, let churches take note! Lamb first, then shepherd. If a man is not known among you as having a lamb's heart, then fear to recognise him as a shepherd - he may still have the goat nature in him, or worse still - the wolf.

Thus Jesus came to John Baptist and to Him John opened the door and Jesus began to call men out unto Himself. It was the habit in those days for the shepherd to go into the fold himself and call his sheep by name; they knew his voice and began to gather around him within the fold. Jesus came as a Jew after the flesh; He came to fulfil the law of the old covenant, both its principles and its rituals; He came within its walls and gathered around Him as many as He would. He was the Lamb, whose voice found an answering echo in the hearts of His sheep. There was that in them that had affinities with Him: Jesus ever speaks to that in us which has affinity with Him. Then, when all was fulfilled and Jesus could cry 'It is finished', then in resurrection and ascension and the advent of the Spirit, He could lead His flock out of the encompassing fold to the pastures of the New Covenant. Green grass; green, the colour of grace in scripture. Free to move around and not be enfolded by walls to keep them from wandering or to protect them from enemies, but rather held together by the magnetising presence of Himself, their wonderful Shepherd, who also was their shield, their defender against their enemies. Their eye was upon Him: He, the centre of all their way, to go where He led; blessed states of the Shepherd and His sheep.

Jesus also tells us of other sheep which are not of the Jewish fold (John 10.16). Are they not the gentiles? He has gone forth in the Spirit of God to call us into that flock, neither a Jewish flock now, nor a gentile one, not Chinese or British, but His. Here is one instance where our King James Authorised Version fails, it mis-translates His word and puts, 'and there shall be one fold'; the Greek says something far better, namely 'there shall be one flock'. Jesus' flock, centred upon Him. No goats there, with their heads up, and their tails too; but lambs and older lambs (sheep), with the humility of head lowered somewhat, so that their eye can see the Shepherd, and their tails lowered too. These have no distinguishing marks of their former enfolding, no Jewish or gentile branding, but rather His sheep and His alone.

The Old Covenant is aptly typified as a fold. In Galatians three Paul refers to being 'shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed'. Paul also speaks of its effects personally in his life, telling us his testimony of being enclosed in the law of sin working in his members, unto which fact he had become aware only by the illumination of heart the old covenant had given him. Thus he found himself surrounded by insurmountable walls of moral standards too high for him to climb, and he cries such a woeful cry of a lost lamb full of pathos and ignorance, 'who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' Sheep cannot leap over walls, they can only find new life through the door of the Shepherd.

This truth of the old covenant, revealing the sinfulness of the heart of man to that man, is set forth in this fact also: walls of permanent folds were made either of rock or mud, sometimes a mixture of both. Thus the Old Covenant brought those within it to a consciousness of their hard, rocky inward nature and of being earthy in the extreme. Of the dust, and in all things surrounded by dust, who could set them free? Temporary folds, up on hillsides, were often made of thorns and thistles entwined with such stunted prickly bushes as grew there. Thus, even in this, the old covenant surrounding the soul only awakens it to a realization of the curse that is upon it because of sin! Surely then there is blessedness in being made aware by the Old Covenant, but it is the conviction of a terrible awareness of being in bondage to earthiness, hardness, and of being under the curse. With what delight then do the awakened but enslaved sheep hear the voice of the Shepherd calling them by name and leading them forth!

First He calls unto Himself and then puts them forth, leading them to that place where all His sheep must begin and continue. Lambs are bred for sacrifice, and unto the altar they must go. It is the way to abundant life, as He gives it (John 10.10). There is no way to life abundant except following where the Shepherd leads, and first He leads us to death. Consider verse seventeen, 'I lay down my life that I may take it again'. Every sheep must do likewise, being led of Him to a sharing of His death that they may take up their life again, all new as He did. They must die to sin, Jesus did; He not only died for it but died to it! The goat qualities must forever disappear in the great destructive fires of Calvary and be no more.

In Old Testament times, outside of Jerusalem, was a valley called the valley of Hinnom; it was the city incinerator. All refuse was burned up there, including the unclean parts of the sacrifices. All these were cast there, burned up, unwanted, irremediably vile, good only to be burned; so must the old man be taken out of us and be destroyed as we identify with the Lamb (Shepherd) who takes away the sin of the world.

Yet lo! There rises newness of life, a newborn lamb in the flock of God, and it follows after the Lord from pasture to pasture into the abundant life, inextricably linked with the Life of the Shepherd. This is the New Covenant: 'Behold I make all things new'; not all life's situations are at first sight fine pastures, there are deep valleys through which to pass, barren hillsides too, but in the New Covenant all things serve the life within and feed the life of the lambs, strengthening them to walk with steadier pace, and thus they 'grow up into Him in all things'.

Now it will surely be noted how holiness of life under the New Covenant and 'abundant life' as Jesus promised it in John chapter ten, are entwined completely. Holiness of life is the Lamb's life. It is imparted at new birth and maintained and developed in the soul of individuals as they move on close with their Shepherd. He leads them to green pastures. This colour (as has already been mentioned) has the significance of grace in the scriptures. Thus the life of the sheep that walks with the Shepherd is constantly fed the gracious word of God in its manifold forms, as need is, and the Shepherd supplies. Holiness is maintained therefore in grace, it is not achieved so much as graciously given and constantly developed in the sheep as it follows the Shepherd.

Although not a major point, it is worth mentioning that a sheep grows its clothing from within. To 'be clothed with humility' Peter says (1 Pet.5:5)- Not the donning of something for an occasion or an impression, but the emergence outwardly of a protective coat from the inward nature. So it seems in a multitude of ways we are brought repeatedly to see some of the excelling glories of the New Covenant.

13. THE GARMENTS

In the last paragraph of the last section clothing was mentioned, and although not a major point, a brief consideration of the garments worn by John Baptist and Jesus is instructive. Surely nothing is without significance. In modern days the colouring, type and nature of garments worn by individuals is some indication of their inner states, and those whose hearts are in tune with God may gain illumination from those worn by John Baptist and Jesus.

John Baptist followed very much in the line of the prophets of old. A garment woven of camel's hair and a leather girdle. These are reminiscent of Elijah, who wore such clothing (2 Kings 1.8), and it seems that many of the subsequent prophets chose to wear similar apparel to help substantiate their office as prophet (Zech.13.4). There was a great sense of austerity about this clothing when worn by the genuine prophets of God. Surely it is not without significance that man was given 'coats of skins' after their fall in the garden, as though saying that the fall had brought men much more into the realm of the animal, and out of the dimension of the divine. Thus Adam and Eve went forth bearing their shame, not only in their hearts but upon their bodies also.

It is worth noting that the firstborn of Isaac was a 'hairy man': Esau, the man of the flesh, the man who lived for things natural and things animal - his food, his pleasure in the field of sports; a thoroughly worldly man seeking his comforts and joys in things that are of this world. Jacob, in his subterfuge to obtain the blessing from Isaac, was forced to clothe himself in Esau's garments which smelled of nature, the odour of the earth! Not only so, Jacob must also put upon his hands, forearms and upon his neck goat's skin, as though to signify how his very neck and hands and arms are still under the dominion of the animal nature. Surely these things are of salutary meaning to those who have eyes to see. The fall of man was terrible, from being in God's presence, though naked (and yet clothed with purity), to being apparelled with animal skins and cast out of the garden into an earth cursed and now with wildness endemic in it.

The prophets, as God's spokesmen, were to acknowledge man's fallen state even in their garments. John Baptist's message of 'the axe laid to the root' is to the point; all must be cut down as being unprofitable to God, this seems to be typified in his clothing. The camel, an unclean beast to the Jew, provided the hair used for his garment, yet the animal, the unclean thing, was cut down. John was encircled with a girdle of leather, of what animal we do not know, but yet he seems to embody the deep acceptance needed by repentant men and women that they have become unclean and animal-like in their states and engirdled by sin, and they must die as the beast did which supplied the leather for the girdle. Moving about in his isolation among the wild beasts, a figure of loneliness, close to nature, clothed with things made of animals, John Baptist appears as a symbol of all the Old Covenant showed concerning man: that he is fallen, separated from his fellows and from God, alone, solitary, an individual who has strange kinship with the beasts.

Contrast with this the sight of Jesus and aspects of His clothing, His intercourse among men, so free and wonderful. He seems to have worn garments somewhat similar to that which a Jewish rabbi of His day would have worn: they were simple and unaffected though. An inner garment and an outer one which was seamless and possibly made for Him, or given to Him by one of the ministering women who 'ministered to Him of their substance' (Luke.8.3). Its seamlessness indicates value, and if one of the women did impart it to Him it indicates the devotion and love of a pure heart for her Rabbi. Jesus then would have had a girdle about His waist; the wearing of such things aided in walking as it lifted the tunic somewhat. Over these garments came the mantle, which was probably not white but of some other colour, but almost certainly was fringed with blue or had blue tassels.

In all this we see an absence of the animal connections. Here are the simple garments of a teacher who does not wish to draw attention to Himself as the pharisees did in their adaptation of the dress (Matt.23.5). Jesus wanted people to be drawn by His word and life, not by His dress. He was following no religious trend, but was bringing in a spiritual kingdom that is to exist in hearts of men and women as it does in God who is spirit. We read of those glorious inner states of His spiritual heart shining forth on the mount of transfiguration. His skin shone, His raiment was incandescent also, bright with that which was unearthly, from above, divine not animal. Here was embodied the true state of men in the New Covenant: transfiguration of the simple, the mundane things of the garments necessary for this life by perfect inward states in harmony with the divine. Humanity and Divinity together in oneness, not humanity and the animal blending as fallen men had become. John Baptist, the setting

forth of man fallen, yet seeking for release and some better thing, and Jesus showing the glorious states of inner transfiguration which the grace of the New Covenant brings us into.

Linked with these matters are further facts concerning the dress of John Baptist and that of Jesus. The former was an ascetic, 'in the deserts until the time of his showing unto Israel'. His holiness could only be maintained by strict separation from impurity. It was a holiness precariously preserved, mainly one that rested in outward ritual observance and stringent self-denial. This was all the Old Covenant could offer to its devotee. Insights to the Holy God, but nothing to satisfy the inward longing of awakened men and women who desired to be like Him. John Baptist embodies this, moving alone in the vast wastes of the wilderness, clad in garments not without significance as we have seen. He is one looking for Another, one moving restlessly through. There is a sparseness about him, nothing of the spiritual fatness which the New Covenant man possesses. He is famed for not 'eating or drinking' (Matt.11.18), and he ministered the habit of strict and repetitive fasting to his disciples (Luke 5-33,34). Much of their devotion lay in outward observances.

Such a holiness can never satisfy the inward man. It is neither intrinsic nor secure. Rather it is something that can be lost by some inadvertent misdemeanour, and only be hardly regained by long abstinence and a patient seeking again. In this connection one thinks of John's temporary loss of faith as he languishes in prison (Matt.11. 3): 'Art thou he that should come or look we for another?' Doubt under pressure of adverse circumstances. Thus many faltered and well-nigh fell in Old Testament days. Having within but a flickering candle which lit the way and almost spluttered out in storms and tempests. God Himself longed for this state of affairs to pass away, and Jesus in His name bid John Baptist, and all those who prophesied in Old Testament days, not to be offended at the apparent delay; the time of their release drew nigh, when that which they had spoken and searched into by the Spirit of Christ would become plainly revealed.

There is nothing isolated and ascetic in the holiness granted and gained in the New Covenant. Of Jesus it is written 'a gluttonous man and a winebibber' (Matt.11.19)• He moved among men, touching them and their affairs, so sordid and sinful, 'yet without sin': He was not defiled thereby. His holiness was intrinsic, inward, implanted, inspirited into that body which God gave Him at birth; He preserved that holiness intact all through His life, and even when He was made sin on Calvary, His spotless integrity and holy separation of Being to God was not sullied or marred at all. He is the manifestation of what God will do to the one who will receive grace under the terms of the New Covenant. The inspiriting of a new, holy nature takes place at true new birth. A man thus becomes 'a partaker of His (God's) holiness' (Heb.12.10), because he has become 'a partaker of the divine nature' (2 Pet.1.4). Peter, in his first epistle chapter one, takes up this matter most powerfully, quoting God the Father as saying, 'be ye holy as I am holy'. A holiness not consisting of outward acts, correct behaviour and external garments, but a holiness like unto God's own because it is of Him, a holiness of Being, a holiness that subsists in the nature of the person. Jesus could say 'the prince of this world cometh and has nothing in me' (John 14.30). Intrinsically holy, inwardly spotless and pure unto God, there was no ground for the wicked one to lay hold in the Lamb of God.

Yet our thoughts are inevitably drawn to the events of Calvary, the stripping of the Saviour, the giving of the garments to the soldiers, casting lots for that which was seamless. Thus was He stripped for us, in death He loosed us from things outward as well as things inward; at Calvary He took away the 'animal', the necessity to wander in deserts, clothed in garments befitting the fallen state, hoping for something better. In death He was bound with grave-clothes, and yet rose again, and from whence was He clothed? In His resurrection-body what did He wear? Where did His garments come from? Assuredly they were from heaven; He was clothed from above in every way. No mention is made of what He wore in resurrection - all attention is upon Him. All things are made new; the old nakedness has passed away with the old life, and the new has come!

Connected with this is the sight of 'one like unto the Son of Man' in Revelation chapter one. See His clothing, is it not representative of that which all shall wear in that city of God, New Jerusalem? See the girdle of gold, gold of obedience and kingly righteousness - encircled by it around the breast and waist. The perfect obedience of this wonderful One, is it Him and/or those who are truly redeemed? Who is worthy to reign but He who has obeyed? Are we worthy to be clothed with garments of blue as the high priest of old was, and are we, as this one is, worthy to wear a girdle of gold? Our obedience having been acceptable to Him, in our heart and breast have we been

steadily moving in loving abandonment to Him, as we have walked our pilgrim-way through the purgings of our earthly walk? Oh, may we thus walk and be worthy to be clothed as 'one who is like unto the Son of Man'.

14. THE FRIEND OF THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDEGROOM

As we come to the end of this brief study, it is perhaps appropriate to conclude with a consideration of the words found in John's Gospel chapter three. There John Baptist is answering the question of some of his disciples in connection with the matter of purification rites. In the course of his answer John Baptist turns the attention of his questioners away from himself on to the Lord Jesus by taking up thoughts connected with marriage-ceremonial as practised in those days.

It was usual that a father should engage in seeking out a bride for his son. Having found an eligible girl, the father and mother of the prospective groom would enter into covenant-arrangement with the parents of the girl, thereafter the young man and the young woman were promised the one to the other in solemn covenant. As soon as these formalities were completed, a man called 'the friend of the bridegroom' was appointed. He was charged with full responsibility in all subsequent arrangements between the two families in respect of the timing of the wedding and the many details involved. The two families usually contacted one another as necessary through the friend of the bridegroom, and his charge was concluded when the bridegroom appeared, according to his promise, to claim his waiting bride at the house of her family. There were marital celebrations for some days, after which the bridegroom would conduct his bride to his house, which was normally a 'mansion' or series of rooms joined to his father's house.

In a most instructive way the relationships of the two covenants are revealed the one to the other. It was part of the duties of the friend of the bridegroom to keep the bride-elect true to her promises while she awaited her bridegroom's coming. He would constantly visit the family-house of the bride to check that arrangements were proceeding, that she was keeping herself ready, and to confirm to her that her husband-to-be was indeed coming and the time of his appearing was drawing near.

John Baptist likens himself, and therefore his ministry, and that of all those in whose line he followed, unto this friend of the bridegroom. Theirs was not the joy of having the bride, but to bring forth the bride, chaste and ready for her groom when the sound of his voice was heard. John rejoiced in hearing the voice of Jesus, he knew Him to be the groom, the One to whom the bride belonged. He and all his prophetic line of holy men had sought to make ready a bride prepared for their Lord. They had fulfilled the function well, keeping some in Israel true to their covenant promise to be a pure people unto God. Frequently God had spoken of His Old Testament people as His bride, yet true marriage had not yet come, the union had not yet taken place. Men and women, like Simeon and Anna, who were looking for His coming, rejoiced to see Him come; they are representative of a great host through the generations of Israelites who behaved as those espoused to their God, and were awaiting His coming to take them into blessed union with Himself. Now at last the Bridegroom had come to claim His own, and how few recognized Him. John Baptist himself said that he did not know Him at first, it was only when he saw the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus that it was confirmed to him that this indeed was He that should come. John heard the sound of the Bridegroom's voice, the Lamb's voice, He who had come to gather to Himself the people which had come out of bondage and gone after Him in the wilderness in the first love of their espousals (Jer.2.2,3)- Their very beginnings as bride elect were through the shedding of the blood of lambs in Egypt. Day by day the ordinances of the old covenant stipulated that lambs were to be offered, morning and evening, without ceasing. Truly they were people of the lamb, but when the Lamb came for His bride few were ready, and through their fall salvation is come unto us gentiles, who before had no hope and no knowledge of a divine Lover who desires to enter into spiritual marriage with us in our hearts.

How excellent is this New Covenant, in force these past twenty centuries! It is a covenant of marriage, it is the voice of the Bridegroom, it is the Bridegroom Himself, come by the Holy Spirit. He comes and ravishes our hearts by the flame of love in His eyes, and carries our inner, spiritual man off to His Father's house in the New Jerusalem, where we find He has made ready a place for us, a mansion for His lover bride-elect. Thus there is spiritual union implicit in this New Covenant. It is a knitting of devoted hearts, the blending of His Spirit with ours

in holiness. He comes in the Person of His blessed Spirit and carries us away to dwell with Him in the Holy City, upon Mount Zion in heaven. Our bodily tabernacles must remain upon this earth, but our hearts should be walking the golden streets, for to those who are lovers of the Lamb, virgin unto Him, 'the hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets, before we reach the heavenly fields or walk the golden streets', that is before we receive our resurrection body. Thank God we have the foretaste now. We await His coming from above, at which time 'this corruptible shall put on incorruption and this mortal shall put on immortality'. So shall we forever be with the Lord, His bride in complete union with Him, not spirit only, but body also, and therefore soul.

These are days in which those chaste unto Christ are not without their pressures and temptations, yet such things only serve to enhance and deepen the devotion of the espoused bride to her Lord. The New Covenant therefore is a covenant that imparts the Spirit of God into hearts, making them one with their Beloved. It is the covenant of spiritual union founded in love. It is the divine and the human in oneness blending within the tabernacle of a man's body. It is the end of self and the beginning of the Christ-life in the human soul. It is not revelation of the divine standards, with no power to fulfil them being given to those who would do so; this was the Old Covenant state. It is God come down in great reconciling love to become one with every human heart that will enter into covenant with Him. It is union in the nature, leading to deepening integration with God in the life of those who live under the terms of the New Covenant.

Let hearts arise then in these days, let them live in the New Covenant Life from above. Let them throw off the Christianised elements of Old Testament ritual which clog the truth. Let people come to the Father in Spirit and in truth and worship Him from hearts made pure by the action of Jesus' life in them by the Spirit. Let the bride appear, chaste and holy to her espoused husband and Lord - Jesus Christ. Let the people of God not wallow in false humility based in the imperfections revealed in them by old covenant law, but let their hearts be full of Christ and set Him forth, for He is the Life, He is the Message, He is the Covenant, He is God's promise to us, and we can have Him in our flesh so that the Word is made flesh again in human beings who before times were sinners; thus shall people in the world hear the sound of His voice and see the Life expressed, and many shall believe.