

## THE LORD'S SUPPER AND THE NEW COVENANT

The significance of the Church's relationship to the New Covenant vis-à-vis Pretribulationism was recently highlighted in a discussion of the futurist interpretation of Revelation. In their recent book on *Biblical Interpretation*, Köstenberger and Patterson defend a posttribulation rapture approach to the Book of Revelation in the following words:

... modified futurists affirm *only one* return of Christ to earth allowing the church to persevere through the tribulation. This is largely due to the inauguration of the new covenant making all believers in Jesus the spiritual descendants of Abraham and therefore covenant members of the people of God – true Israel.<sup>1</sup>

While this chapter does not address the Book of Revelation directly, the question of whether or not the New Covenant has been “inaugurated,” must address the references to the New Covenant in the Lord's Supper. All three synoptic Gospels and the apostle Paul agree that Jesus referred to the New Covenant in establishing the Lord's Supper. This observation, perhaps more than any other, has led many believers to assume that the Church has some connection to the New Covenant and is in some way either fulfilling or participating in the New Covenant. This chapter will examine the historical background, contextual setting and significant terminology used in these Scriptural references to develop an understanding of just how, if at all, the Church may be related to the New Covenant.

The Lord's Supper is one of the two fundamental institutions given by Christ to the Church. Assuming that the “New Covenant” to which Jesus referred in the Upper Room was the same as the “New Covenant” of Jeremiah 31, many interpreters have concluded that the Church must therefore be participating in some way in this New Covenant. This, however, poses

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 525.

significant questions both hermeneutically and theologically. Hermeneutically, it is clear from Jeremiah 31:31 that the human parties to this covenant are "the house of Israel" and "the house of Judah." In what sense can this language be understood to include others who are *not* of "the house of Israel" or "the house of Judah"? Theologically, if God fulfills His covenant promises to Israel by carrying out either all or some of those promises on behalf of the Church, is there then some degree of continuity between Israel and the Church whereby the Church is not a distinct people, separate from Israel? In other words, does not the assumed participation of the Church in Israel's covenant strike at the very foundation of dispensational distinctions? What are the implications for such an important dispensational doctrine as the Pretribulational Rapture? This chapter will put forth the position that the "New Covenant" of the Upper Room Discourse is indeed the same as the "New Covenant" of Jeremiah 31, but that the New Covenant has not yet been enacted, nor is the Church a participant in the New Covenant.

The relevant texts relating the New Covenant to the Lord's Supper are the following:

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| <p>Matthew 26:27–29<br/>And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for <i>this is My blood of the covenant</i>, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. 29 "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."</p> | <p>Mark 14:23–25<br/>And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 And He said to them, "<i>This is My blood of the covenant</i>, which is poured out for many. 25 "Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."</p> | <p>Luke 22:20<br/>And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "<i>This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.</i>"</p> | <p>1 Corinthians 11:25<br/>In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "<i>This cup is the new covenant in My blood</i>; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."</p> |
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### Which "New Covenant"?

Some early dispensational writers, in an effort to distance the church from Israel's covenant, espoused the theory that there were two "New Covenants" – one for Israel and another for the Church.<sup>2</sup> This view held that the "New Covenant" to which Jesus referred in the upper room was the Church's New Covenant, not Israel's. This view has since been abandoned by most dispensational writers.<sup>3</sup> Today, it is the near unanimous position among dispensationalists that the New Covenant to which Jesus referred was the same as that revealed in Jeremiah 31. This appears to be an inescapable conclusion.

### Covenant Terminology

Some confusion surrounding discussions of the New Covenant involves the problem of definition of terms. Legal terminology pertaining to covenants, contracts and testaments is highly developed in modern jurisprudence, and terms have specific meanings that have developed over the course of many centuries of legal history. Thus, when one says that the New Covenant has been "ratified," "inaugurated," or "enacted," one might come to certain conclusions about the status of the New Covenant based on how these terms are understood in contemporary parlance. But such terminology belongs to our modern world, not to the world of the Bible. There is one Biblical term that was used in reference to putting a covenant into force, namely the term "cut" (Heb. כָּרַת *karat*). Once a covenant was cut, it was in full legal force, and its parties were bound to its terms. There was no concept known in Biblical times of a covenant that was partially in force, or of one that was put in force with different parties than the signatories.

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<sup>2</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948) VII:98-99; Charles C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953) 117; John F. Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom* 218-219.

<sup>3</sup> Charles C. Ryrie *Dispensationalism*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995) 170-174; John F. Walvoord, "Does the Church Fulfill Israel's Program?" Part 3, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137/547 (July-Sept 1980) 220.

The term "inaugurate" has come into recent use by some to connote the idea that the New Covenant is somehow currently in partial force, but that its full force awaits a future day. Thus, Bruce Ware writes that the New Covenant "is inaugurated partially first and fulfilled in its entirety later."<sup>4</sup> Ladd introduced the term "inaugurate" into the jargon of New Testament theology in the sense of "Inaugurated Eschatology." He explained the present church age as being, "that of inaugurating a time of fulfillment in advance of an eschatological consummation, and ... in a real sense the Kingdom of God in his mission invaded history ...."<sup>5</sup> Whether or not one subscribes to Ladd's version of realized eschatology, one must wonder whether such a notion can legitimately be applied to the enactment of covenants. It is not clear why Ladd chose the term "inaugurate" to describe his view. Perhaps it was due to the practice in America of *inaugurating* a president before he actually begins *executing* his office,<sup>6</sup> but that is clearly a connotation that is entirely contemporary and is found neither in Biblical contexts involving the enactment of covenants, nor in any extant literature from the Ancient Near East. Were it not for Ladd's use of the term "inaugurate" to connote a realized eschatology, no one would have thought that the term could denote a partial enactment of a covenant.<sup>7</sup> Those who do so impose a false dichotomy on the terms of the new covenant by insisting that only the "spiritual" terms of

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce A. Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 96.

<sup>5</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 106. A more recent proponent of inaugurated eschatology is D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 256.

<sup>6</sup> Article II, section 1 of the U.S. Constitution actually only prescribes that "before he enter on the Execution of his Office, he [the President] shall take the following Oath or Affirmation." In actual practice inaugural celebrations usually last ten days, from five days before the inauguration to five days after.

<sup>7</sup> The term "inaugurate" simply means "to induct into an office with suitable ceremonies," "to bring about the beginning of." Etymologically, it comes from the Latin *inauguratus/inaugurare* "to practice augury" (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* [Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1983], 608).

the covenant are in force today.<sup>8</sup> But this is to impose a distinction that is not warranted in the text. The text of Jeremiah 31 does not suggest a distinction between "spiritual" terms versus "temporal" terms. The attempt to distinguish between spiritual and temporal terms in the New Covenant is analogous to attempts to distinguish between "civil," "ceremonial," and "moral" terms of the Mosaic Covenant. Such distinctions cannot be made exegetically. When the covenant is enacted (i.e. "cut"), it is enacted fully and is enacted with the contracted parties.

### **The Blood of the Covenant**

#### **A. The Relationship of the Blood to the Cutting of the Covenant**

What did Jesus mean when He referred to the "blood of the covenant"? What relationship does this blood have to the cutting of the New Covenant? Fairly typical among Christian commentators is the view of Charles Hodge:

"The blood of the covenant" means here [in 1 Cor. 11:25], as in Ex. 24, 8, the blood by which the covenant was ratified and its blessings secured. The passage referred to in Exodus shows the manner in which covenants were anciently ratified in the East. A victim was slain and the blood sprinkled upon the contracting parties, by which they were solemnly bound to their mutual engagements... This covenant is called *new* in reference to the Mosaic covenant. The latter was ratified by the blood of animals; the new, by the blood of the eternal Son of God.<sup>9</sup>

A major assumption in the argument for the church's participation in the New Covenant is that the shedding of the blood of the covenant on the cross was the vehicle for enacting the covenant. However, based on both a survey of Biblical covenants, and on what is known of Ancient Near Eastern covenants, such would not be the assumption of one who lived in the Ancient Near East. Rather, the vehicle of covenant enactment ("cutting") was the swearing of the oath; the blood

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<sup>8</sup> Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 134.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980 reprint), 227.

served a different purpose. The function of oath swearing as the means for covenant enactment is clearly seen in the Old Testament both in Ezekiel 17:13 and in Hosea 10:4.

Ezekiel 17:11-24 discusses the appointment of Zedekiah to the position of governorship in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. This appointment was made according to the established conventions of Ancient Near Eastern covenants. Verse 13 states that Nebuchadnezzar "made a covenant with him [Zedekiah], putting him under oath." The expression "putting him under oath" (בְּאֵלֶיָּהּ) renders the Hebrew preposition אֶל, used here to express the instrument<sup>10</sup> of the covenant enactment. There is no indication that any sacrifice accompanied this covenant enactment, and there is no reason to suspect that such was the case.

Hosea 10:4 describes the unfaithful northern kingdom of Israel who "with worthless oaths make covenants," a reference to agreements into which Israel entered with the surrounding nations. The expression "with worthless oaths" translates the infinitive absolute (אֶלֶּוֹת) used to express the manner in which these covenants were enacted.<sup>11</sup> Blood sacrifices may or may not have been ancillary parts of the covenant enactment ceremonies, but the instrument of enactment was considered to be the swearing of the oath.

The supposition that it was the shedding of blood that enacted the covenant is sometimes based on the proposed etymology of "cut" as coming from the act of dividing animal carcasses for the covenant ceremony, as in Genesis 15.<sup>12</sup> This etymology, however, is not certain, and clearly, there were covenants both in the Bible (e.g. the Davidic Covenant and the "Land" Covenant of Deut. 29-30, as well as covenants between people such as Jacob and Laban, Gen.

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<sup>10</sup> For the instrumental use of אֶל, see Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 98.

<sup>11</sup> For the infinitive absolute of manner, see Williams, 84.

<sup>12</sup> Andy Woods, "What is the Relationship of the Church to the New Covenant," <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/documents/articles/12/12.htm> (accessed 1/7/2012).

31:44) and elsewhere in the Ancient Near East<sup>13</sup> that were "cut" without the attendant shedding of blood. Weinfeld discusses this etymology, and, while admitting its possibility, states "it is equally possible that 'to cut' is figurative for 'decide, decree,' as in Akk[adian] *parāsu*, 'to decide,' Aram[aic] *gʒr*, Lat. *decider*, German *entscheiden*, etc."<sup>14</sup> This latter etymology is a better explanation in light of those attested covenants that were "cut" without the shedding of blood.

The closest OT parallel to the expression "blood of the covenant" occurs in Exodus 24:8, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made ("cut" פָּרַת) with you in accordance with all these words." This text needs to be examined carefully. After the recording of the Ten Commandments (20:1-17), instructions were given for an earthen or uncut stone altar (20:24-26), then various laws (21:1 – 23:13), and finally the three national feasts (23:14-19). The substance of the Sinai covenant was contained in Exodus chapters 20-23. Then, in chapter 24 the covenant was "cut" (i.e. enacted or put into force). The cutting of the covenant was accompanied by two actions: (1) the application of blood (verses 6, 8), and (2) the swearing of the oath (verse 7). But the application of the blood took place in two phases. In the first phase (verse 6) the altar was sprinkled with blood; in the second phase (verse 8) the people were sprinkled with blood. It was between these two applications of blood that the covenant was cut by the swearing of the oath.

Exodus 24:7 Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!"

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<sup>13</sup> M. Weinfeld, "בְּרִית *b'rith*" in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), II:259-63.

<sup>14</sup> Weinfeld, II:259. See also Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson and Johann Jakob Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999), 500. Another possible etymology is that the terms of the covenant were literally "cut" into the stone tablets in the engraving process.

When the blood was afterward applied to the people in verse 8, it is apparent that the covenant was already cut.

Exodus 24:8 So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made (כָּרַת) with you in accordance with all these words."

This observation makes it clear that, while the blood clearly had some relationship to the covenant, it was the swearing of the oath that actually resulted in the cutting of the covenant.

This corresponds exactly with what is known about Ancient Near Eastern covenants. According to Weinfeld it was the swearing of the oath that enacted the covenant.<sup>15</sup> Beacham is quite clear on this point:

That which immediately and legally placed a covenant in force was the oath. Although various symbolic conventions might attend ANE ratification ceremonies, the one component essential to all covenants was the swearing of the oath. Only by this means was the covenant formally actuated, enacted, or ratified ("cut" כָּרַת). A covenant ceremony might include a meal. It could incorporate some form of sacrifice. A token might be assigned, a libation or some other physical act performed. Nevertheless, there was no legal contract, no implementation of terms or benefits in part or in whole, and no obligatory force or factual realization until the moment when the party (unilateral) or parties (bilateral) officially swore to the terms of record.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, the terms "covenant" (כְּרִית) and "oath" (אָלָה) are so closely related conceptually that they were used both in the Old Testament and in other Ancient Near Eastern literature as synonyms.<sup>17</sup>

If the function of the blood was not to cut the covenant, then what was the purpose of the blood? Since the blood of the Sinaitic Covenant was applied both to the altar (Ex. 24:6) and to

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<sup>15</sup> Weinfeld, 257, 259-61.

<sup>16</sup> Roy E. Beacham, "The Church Has No Legal Relationship to or Participation in the New Covenant," unpublished chapter in a book on the New Covenant scheduled to be published, 13; quotation used by permission of the author. Dr. Beacham presented the substance of this chapter at the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, September 23, 2009, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA, under the title, "The New Covenant of Scripture in ANE Covenant Context: A Preliminary Paper" ([http://www.bbc.edu/council/documents/Roy\\_Beacham\\_ANE-Covenants-and-NC.pdf](http://www.bbc.edu/council/documents/Roy_Beacham_ANE-Covenants-and-NC.pdf)), 12.

<sup>17</sup> Other synonyms include *dabhar*, "word, promise," and *'amanah*, "firm covenant." In OT language one may "cut" a *dabhar* (Hag. 2:5), cut an *'alah* (Dt. 29:13[14]), or cut an *'amanah* (Neh. 10:1 [9:38]), Weinfeld, 260.



the people (Ex. 24:8) it would appear that the blood's purpose was to sanctify the people (and the altar). Clearly, blood is not necessary for the cutting of a covenant. A number of OT covenants were cut without the shedding of blood (the Davidic Covenant, the "Land" Covenant of Deut. 29-30, and likely the Noahic Covenant<sup>18</sup>). Beacham describes a number of features that could accompany Ancient Near Eastern covenants. These ancillary features, sacrifices among them, he terms "Covenant Complements":

In the ANE the term "cutting" a covenant referred to the formal act of ratification which occurred when the parties swore to the terms of the instrument. Numerous attendant ceremonial features or symbolic acts might accompany or complement the formal ratification of ANE covenants. Such complementary elements were optional for inclusion or non-inclusion in the ceremony. All of these features, despite their optional inclusion, were highly emblematic. None of them, however, were essential to covenant making or officially enacted the contract.<sup>19</sup>

Beacham continues, regarding the significance of sacrifices to Ancient Near Eastern covenants, as follows:

If a covenant ceremony did include a sacrifice, the sacrifice was ancillary to formal ratification. It made the parties fit for covenant relationship and symbolized their commit[ment] to covenant fulfillment, all in guarantee that the covenant could and would be actuated. The sacrifice and the sacrificial animals were, nonetheless, "subordinate to a fixed ritual procedure." Covenants could be made without a sacrifice. Even when included, the sacrifice itself, like other covenant complements, did not constitute enactment or ratification of the covenant.<sup>20</sup>

In defense of the notion that blood sacrifice might be the instrument by which a covenant was enacted, appeal might be made to Psalm 50:5 which refers to "those who have made [lit. "cut"] a covenant with Me by sacrifice." The verse appears to suggest that sacrifice was the

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<sup>18</sup> Gen. 8:20, Noah's offering is described as a "burnt offering" (עֹלָה) with a sweet smelling savor that arose to God. This appears to be different from the blood offerings that were associated with covenants. Even with the sacrifices of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15:9-10), it appears that the significance of these had to do more with the death of these animals than with the application of their blood.

<sup>19</sup> Beacham, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 14. See also Weinfeld, 262.

instrument by which the covenant was cut; however, this notion is based on the way the Hebrew has been translated (or mistranslated). The English "by" translates the Hebrew preposition  $\text{בְּ}$ . While in English, "by" may carry an instrumental sense; this is not a legitimate sense for  $\text{בְּ}$ . The preposition  $\text{בְּ}$  is probably used here in the sense of association.<sup>21</sup> Thus Psalm 50:5 may be understood as, "they made with me a covenant accompanied by sacrifice." The *Hebrew Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* also translates "by sacrifice," but it does not intend to convey the idea of instrument; the translation falls under the category of uses that mean "on the side of."<sup>22</sup> By this reckoning, Psalm 50:5 means "they made a covenant with me along side of the sacrifice." In other words, the sacrifice to which Psalm 50:5 refers was ancillary to, and accompanied, the cutting of the covenant.

Thus, though Jesus' blood shed at Calvary bears a definite relationship to the New Covenant, its shedding was not the event that "cut," or enacted, the New Covenant. The shedding of Jesus' blood was ancillary to the covenant and makes the cutting of the covenant possible, since by it, Israel must be sanctified and made suitable for entrance into the covenant. But the actual cutting of the covenant awaits the swearing of the oath by Israel, an event that will accompany the Second Coming of Christ.

### B. The Use of Blood Terminology

It is sometimes argued that Jesus' reference to the "blood of the covenant" at the institution of the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24) as a description of His death on the cross must mean that the covenant was, in fact, enacted at the cross. If the covenant was not cut

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<sup>21</sup> Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, §293.

<sup>22</sup> Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson and Johann Jakob Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999), 826.

by shedding His blood on the cross, then why would Jesus refer to it as the "blood of the covenant"? Why refer at all to the "covenant" if it was not to be cut at the cross? On the face of it, this appears to be a forceful argument, at least from the contemporary believer's perspective. But care must be taken not to read back into these words meaning that can only come from later revelation. Jesus' words must be viewed from the perspective of what the disciples knew on the eve of Jesus' crucifixion. The issue here is one of semantic reference. The believer of the twenty-first century is well aware of the fact that Israel has not come into the New Covenant. But the disciples on the eve of Jesus' crucifixion could not have known, or even suspected, that Israel might be two thousand years away from entering into the covenant.

What language might Jesus have used to convey to His disciples the significance of the blood He would shed the following day? On the basis of their knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, the choices were somewhat limited. If one were living in first century Judea before the cross, and one wished to speak of the forgiveness of sins, a regenerated life, and the power of the Holy Spirit, to what Old Testament passage would he refer? Since the Church was an unrevealed mystery in the Old Testament, one's choice of language to refer to redemption was necessarily limited. In fact, the only language in the Old Testament Scriptures that encompasses all the ideas of forgiveness of sins, a regenerated life, and the power of the Holy Spirit, is language that describes the New Covenant. For Jesus to say that the blood of His cross was the blood of the covenant was true, but it does not require that His reference be restricted to the New Covenant only. For the disciples it was a meaningful reference. For the twenty-first century believer one might use different terminology to refer to the same blood. The New Testament Epistles and Revelation speak of Christ's blood in relation to redemption, propitiation, justification, reconciliation, forgiveness and sanctification. One might legitimately refer to Jesus'

blood shed on the cross as the "blood of redemption" (Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:7; 1Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:9), the "blood of propitiation" (Rom. 3:15), the "blood of justification" (Rom. 3:25; 5:9), the "blood of reconciliation" (Col. 1:20), the "blood of forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22), or the "blood of sanctification" (Heb. 13:12; 1 John 1:7). Any of these terms could make legitimate semantic reference to the blood that Jesus shed on the cross. For that matter, even speaking proleptically any time after Genesis 3:15, one might have referred to the "blood of the woman's seed," or after Isaiah 52-53 to the "blood of Yahweh's Servant." For Jesus to refer in the upper room to His cross work as the "blood of the New Covenant" was a meaningful semantic reference for the disciples at that time and at that stage of their understanding of God's program. But it did not necessarily mean that the New Covenant was to be cut at the cross. Redemption was paid for by that blood, and thereby the cutting of the covenant made possible.

### **Paul's Reference to a Largely Gentile Church**

It is one thing for the Lord to use New Covenant language from the Old Testament with His pre-Pentecost Jewish disciples to describe His blood of redemption, but what about Paul's language addressed to a largely Gentile church many years after Pentecost? While the institution of the Lord's Supper preceded the beginning of the Church at Pentecost, it might be argued that Paul's use of the same New Covenant language in 1 Corinthians 11:25 leads inevitably to the conclusion that the Church participates in the New Covenant.<sup>23</sup>

The Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." (1 Cor. 11:25-26)

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<sup>23</sup> Decker, 449-50; Woods, 8-9.

Why should Jesus refer to the cup as "the New Covenant in My blood" if the church was not in some way participating in the New Covenant? In answering this question, it is important to recognize that the Lord's Supper has both past, present, and future orientations.

- Past – "My body," "My blood," "the Lord's death," "in remembrance of Me"
- Present – "do this," "as often as you drink it," "you proclaim"
- Future – "the New Covenant," "until He comes"

There is a significant distinction in the text in that, while the "body" of Christ (μοῦ ... σῶμα) is said to be for the believers (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν), the New Covenant is not said to be ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν. Apart from this omission, Paul's language is almost identical to Luke's (Luke 22:20).<sup>24</sup> But whereas Luke was describing Jesus' words to His pre-Pentecost Jewish disciples, Paul has omitted a reference to the direct application of the covenant to believers of the Church Age.

That the cup should be given a separate focus from the bread is in keeping with the way the Supper was originally instituted. Lane notes, "Jesus' word and action with the bread was independent from the word spoken over the cup. The two sayings were originally separated from each other by the sharing of the main body of the meal, and they must be expounded separately."<sup>25</sup> He further explains:

Following the main meal (cf. I Cor. 11:25)... the third cup of red wine mixed with water, and with his eyes on the cup pronounced the prayer of thanksgiving on behalf of all, with the concluding words: "May the All-merciful One make us worthy of the days of the Messiah and of the life of the world to come. He brings the salvation of his king. He shows covenant-faithfulness to his Anointed, to David and to his seed forever. He makes

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<sup>24</sup> Marshall argues for Luke's text being more primitive than Paul's, and thus Paul is likely dependent on Luke; see I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 800, 803. This would make Paul's omission even more significant.

<sup>25</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (NICNT) Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 506. See also Marshall, 805.

peace in his heavenly places. May he secure peace for us and for all Israel. And say you, Amen."<sup>26</sup>

Thus, there appears to be a two-fold significance in the elements, one looking back (the body representing His death, looking back to the cross work), the other looking to the future (the blood representing His return to fulfill the New Covenant).<sup>27</sup> The bread has a definite historical reference, the cross; the cup apparently has a futuristic reference, the fulfillment of the New Covenant in the kingdom. This two-fold temporal reference in the elements is consistent with what Jesus had said to His disciples in the upper room. Jesus had spoken of His next partaking of the cup "in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25) and had concluded the supper with the singing of the eschatological Psalm 118 (Mark 14:26). Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 11 there is both the historical reference ("you proclaim the death of the Lord") and the future reference ("until He come," verse 26). Believers of the Church Age, while remembering the cross, must not forget that Jesus is coming again.

Foreswearing feasting and wine, Jesus dedicated himself with a resolute will to accept the bitter cup of wrath offered to him by the Father. Yet there is here a clear anticipation of the messianic banquet when the Passover fellowship with his followers will be renewed in the Kingdom of God.... The reference to "that day" envisions the parousia and the triumph of the Son of Man.... The cup from which Jesus abstained was the fourth, which ordinarily concluded the Passover fellowship.... The cup which he refused was the cup of consummation, associated with the promise that God will take his people to be with him. This is the cup which Jesus will drink with his own in the messianic banquet which inaugurates the saving age to come.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, Paul's future pointing reference to the New Covenant meant neither that the covenant had been cut, nor that the church was participating in that covenant. The blood of that

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> John Master, "The New Covenant" in Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master, *Issues in Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 99-100.

<sup>28</sup> Lane, 508-509.

covenant had been shed, making possible its future enactment. In the meantime, that same blood, the blood of the new covenant, was also the blood of redemption for the church.

### **The Early Church's View of Their Relationship to Israel's Covenants**

Early church history suggests that there may have been a conscious effort to disassociate the church from Israel's covenants in the observance of the Lord's Supper. One of the contentious issues that separated the eastern Byzantine church from the western Roman church concerned whether leavened or unleavened bread should be used in the Lord's Supper. Clearly, when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, it was at a Passover meal using unleavened bread. It appears, however, that prior to the seventh century, with the exception of the Ebionites, the common elements in the Lord's Supper were *leavened* bread and wine mingled with water.<sup>29</sup> Some time subsequent to the seventh century, it became customary in the western church to use unleavened bread.<sup>30</sup> By the eleventh century the controversy between east and west over leavened versus unleavened bread became quite heated, and in 1053 Cerularius, along with Leo of Achrida, wrote to John, bishop of Trani, that the churches of the west were "following the practice of the Jews ... contrary to the usage of Christ [in that] they employ in the eucharist unleavened bread; that they fast on Saturday in Lent; that they eat blood and things strangled in violation of the decree of the Council of Jerusalem; and that during the fast they do not sing the hallelujah."<sup>31</sup> This letter is quite interesting because it does not appear to be motivated by any

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<sup>29</sup> Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Vol 2, §68.

<sup>30</sup> F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 235. Among the earliest undisputed witnesses for unleavened bread are Alcuin (*ep.* 90, ad fratres Lugdunenses, AD 798; *PL* 100. 289) and his pupil, Rabanus Maurus (*Instit. Cler.* 1. 31).

<sup>31</sup> Schaff, §68.

kind of anti-Semitic attitude. The positive references both to the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 and to the singing of the hallelujah – the *Hallel* (Psalms 113-118) sung at the Passover meal – show that there is no bias against the Jews *per se*. Nevertheless, the criticism for using unleavened bread as something that was “contrary to the usage of Christ” is suggestive. It appears to have been quite important to Cerularius that the Lord’s Supper be disassociated from its connection to the Passover. Indeed, his criticism of the western church in this matter led him to coin a new term, *Azymites*, to describe those involved in the heresy of using unleavened bread (*azyma* from ἄζυμος, “unleavened”) instead of common bread.<sup>32</sup> Schaff explains, “The Greeks insist that our Lord in instituting the eucharist after the passover-meal used true, nourishing bread (ἄρτος from ἄρω), as the sign of the new dispensation of joy and gladness; while the lifeless, unleavened bread (ἄζυμον) belongs to the Jewish dispensation.”<sup>33</sup>

What does all this mean relative to the Church’s participation or non-participation in the New Covenant? It may mean nothing at all. Like many issues in history it can be difficult to assign motives to the actions of men. But this controversy does suggest that the early church, by its use of leavened bread, sought to disassociate the Lord’s Supper from the covenants of Israel. And, if that is the case, then it is likely that the early church did not view the cup of the Lord’s Supper as signifying the Church’s participation in Israel’s New Covenant.

### **Conclusion**

Both in the institution of the Lord’s Supper and in Paul’s reference to Christ’s words in his instructions to the Corinthian church about the Lord’s Supper, reference is made to the New Covenant. This has led many believers to conclude that the church is in some way participating

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. In response, the Latins called the Greeks *Fermentare!*

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



in the New Covenant. This appears to be a problem in that God clearly stated through the prophet Jeremiah that the New Covenant was to be made with "the house of Israel and the house of Judah." This chapter has sought to show how the language used by Christ and Paul in reference to the New Covenant in the Lord's Supper does not require participation of the Church in Israel's New Covenant.

First, it was established that the reference to the "New Covenant" in the Lord's Supper was to the same covenant as that to which Jeremiah 31 refers.

Second, attention was given to the matter of definition of terms. In particular, focus was placed on the Biblical term "to cut" (כָּרַח) which means to enact and to place fully in force the terms of a covenant. Problems introduced by added semantic baggage attached to the term "inaugurate" were evaluated as to their impact on this discussion.

Third, the role of Christ's blood in relation to the "cutting" of the New Covenant was explored. It was established that the shedding of Christ's blood was not the instrument by which the covenant was cut; rather, the cutting of the covenant will be effected by the swearing of the oath of the covenant by Israel at Christ's Second Coming. The blood, on the other hand, makes the future cutting of the covenant a possibility, and the expression "blood of the covenant" is a reasonable and adequate reference to Christ's blood of redemption, when used in a pre-Pentecost setting among Jewish disciples.

Fourth, Paul's use of New Covenant language when addressing the Corinthian church was examined. It was seen that Paul's omission of the phrase "for you" in connection to the cup made a separation between the church and the New Covenant; furthermore, the two-fold temporal reference in the two elements of the Lord's Supper (the bread looking back in time to

Christ's death, the cup looking forward in time to Christ's Second Coming) argues for a non-involvement by the Church in the New Covenant.

Finally, the controversy in the early church over whether leavened or unleavened bread should be used in the Lord's Supper was examined, and the hypothesis was hazarded that the early church's use of leavened bread may be due to their unwillingness to be associated with Israel's covenants.