

WHAT THE NEW COVENANT MEANS ⇒THE LAST ACT OF THE OLD COVENANT⇐

The Old Covenant was a covenant between God and the nation of Israel. The New Covenant is a covenant between God and any who wish to be part of it.

The question arises: “Did the New Covenant make the Old Covenant null and void?” If we think in terms of human contracts, there is no reason at all why one contract should make others null and void, even if they are between the same parties, and here we are dealing with contracts which on the human side have different parties. Only Christian Jews may be considered to fall into both covenants, and they only fall into the Old Covenant camp in so far as they live in a society bound by it, as we have previously seen.

There are in the New Testament a number of indications of the end of the Old Covenant. When Christ died on the cross the curtain in the temple separating the inner sanctuary was torn from top to bottom. This was indicative of the end of the Old Covenant sacrificial system. Jesus himself often talked of something new as we have seen before. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70 is a powerful symbol of the end of the nation of Israel and its covenant for those who see it that way. After all, Israel had been rejected by God once before, in 587 BC, when it was defeated by the Babylonians.

Yet a “remnant” of Israel, as the prophets called it, did return from that exile. And now once again we see a nation of Israel established in its traditional territory after nineteen centuries of exile and persecution. Can this be ignored as a sign that the Old Covenant has not been totally nullified?

Just as there are indications within the New Testament that aspects of the Old Covenant have come to an end, so there are indications that there was still a future for the nation of Israel. After the resurrection, the disciples asked Jesus: “Lord, is this the time when you are to establish once again the sovereignty of Israel?” Jesus did not say: “You have got it all wrong.” He said on this matter: “It is not for you to know about dates or times, which the Father has set within his own control.” (Acts 1:6) Paul, who was insistent that the Old Covenant did not apply to Gentiles, saw a future place for the nation of Israel. In writing to the church in Rome, he said: “This partial blindness has come upon Israel only until the Gentiles have been admitted in full strength; when that has happened, the whole of Israel will be saved.... God’s choice stands, and they are his friends for the sake of the patriarchs. For the gracious gifts of God and his calling are irrevocable.” (Romans 11:25-32). Paul appears to be saying that the future of Israel in God’s scheme of things is based on the covenant promises to Abraham, and is therefore independent of the failure of Israel to keep the covenant mediated by Moses.

The Book of Revelation is notoriously difficult to understand, but there are perhaps some indications here too of a future role for Israel. There is a temple in Jerusalem to be measured, followed by a time of Gentile domination of the city of Jerusalem, and there are prophetic events to take place in Jerusalem. (Revelation 11:1-13). Later on a siege of Jerusalem is mentioned. (Revelation 20:9).

The acceptance that the re-creation of the nation of Israel in the land of its ancestors is an act of God in fulfilment of his promises to Abraham should not be seen as a political statement about the justice of what has happened, or a comment on the rights and wrongs of Israel’s treatment of others living in the land. Israel has not been restored because Jews were “good” in God’s sight, but as Paul said: “for the sake of the patriarchs”. In Christian eyes, it is by the covenant promise of God to Abraham, not by deeds.

Now that we have seen how Jews view their covenant and their faith, we can easily expect them to want to rebuild their temple and restore their old ways of worship, with the priests, Levites, and sacrificial system. When we bear in mind that the second most holy place of

Islam, the AlAqsa mosque, is built on the site of the Jewish temple, we can see the potential for massive political conflict.