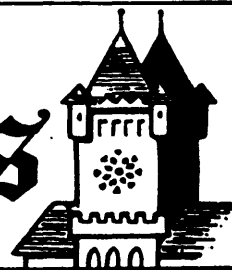


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STUDIES IN BAPTISM

by Ray R. Sutton

No. 17: Circumcision and Baptism II

And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions (Colossians 2:11-13).

The present study is a continuation of the previous essay. We will continue to examine the relationship between baptism and circumcision. Last time we noted that these two rites are rituals of death and purification. We begin this essay with a third aspect.

Baptism and circumcision are *multi-national signs*. Baptists such as Jewett and Kingdon disagree, holding that baptism is multi-national whereas circumcision was national. They believe that a child was brought into the nation, but not into the faith at circumcision. Circumcision served a dual purpose in that it meant one thing for the adult and another for the infant. In the New Covenant, national identity is stripped away. Thus, according to Jewett and Kingdon, no need remains for young ones to have the sacramental sign. The difficulties with their position are multiple.

First of all, the New Testament describes circumcision as a covenantal sign for both infants and adults. Paul argues in Romans 4 that "circumcision is a sign of the righteousness of faith." Orthodox commentators note that the sign was not one of personal faith, primarily, but of the "righteousness" of faith. Christ is referred to as that righteousness (Rom. 3). Thus, the sign pictured Christ. The taking of the sign unto oneself, is the show of faith. The sign itself, however, shows forth Christ.

Nevertheless, circumcision was also a covenantal, and not just a national sign. Jewett and Kingdon would agree at this point. They would say that circumcision was a covenantal sign for adults, and not children. Romans 4 speaks of the *adult* Abraham. Thus, the New Covenant is for adults only, or at least those who are able to make a qualifiable profession.

Take a closer look at Romans 4, however, to see if the passage only speaks of adult-type circumcision. Verse 13 says, "For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants (literally seed, in other words, his children) that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith." The passage speaks of children. A promise was given to them. It was identical to Abraham's. It was the same covenant. Was it a national promise to the children? The answer to that question is the same as that to the question, was it a national promise to Abraham? Whether it was a national or covenantal promise, it came through the "righteousness of faith." We have yet to discuss the substance of the promise. The point is the promise to the children was the same as the oath to the adults. Identical wording — the "righteousness of the faith" in verse 11 speaks of circumcision, and in verse 13 restates the promise to the children — is used to describe the Abrahamic covenant. God made the promise in the circumcision. He, therefore, made it to both adults and children at and through the same sign.

Second, the nation Israel had not been inaugurated at the time of Genesis 17. National identity was established at the Exodus (Ex. 18 & 19). Thus, circumcision could not have been a national sign for those first infants who were circumcised. The sign later included a national aspect, but initially and telically the purpose of circumcision is stated in Romans 4:11 ff. The sign was *trans-national*.

Third, circumcision was never intended to be exclusively a national sign. God told Abraham, "I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make *nations* of you, and kings shall come forth from you (Gen. 17:5-6)." When Abraham circumcised both Issac and Ishmael the promise began to be fulfilled. These two infants developed into not just one, but two nations. More than two nations, however, were to be circumcised. Paul says that Abraham's descendants were "heir to the world" (Romans 4:13). Since they were to be circumcised, the sign was to be applied to the world.

Was all the world circumcised? Yes. We have already noted that Christ's death was The Circumcision. As we are united in that death, we, too, are circumcised. The sign, however, that the church receives is baptism. The New Covenant sign is the transfigured form of circumcision. In that sense, circumcision is extended through baptism and the promise to Abraham is fulfilled in the

baptism of the world. The continuity is confirmed by the multi-national nature of *baptism*.

Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them" (Matt. 28:19). Literally, the verse reads, "disciple the nations," instead of the partitive interpretation which injects the contingency that the national discipleship is not the mandate. The means is baptizing. We have studied the discontinuity between the gender of the personal pronoun *them* and its antecedent *nations* (see No. 1 of this series on Baptism). The explanation for this dissimilarity is that the nations are to be made disciples in family units, step by step. Nevertheless, the nations as such are to be baptized, and from this one can see the distinct multi-national character of the New Covenant initiatory sacrament (cf. Isaiah 52:15 and note "sprinkle many nations.")

More verses could be compiled to reinforce the premise that baptism is multi-national in scope. The point, however, is that baptism and circumcision are parallel in this respect. Circumcision is inextricably in continuity with baptism because its purpose — multi-national application — is carried out through baptism. Paul easily shifts from talking about circumcision to baptism in Colossians 2 because the latter extends the former. To break this continuity breaks down the Abrahamic promise. If Abraham is "heir of the *world*," the earth must be circumcised. History confirms that this never happened before the cessation of the Old Covenant. By viewing baptism in continuity with circumcision, we see how the world is circumcised: Nations have been circumcised through its progressive Christianization.

One final comment must be made about the multi-national character of circumcision and baptism. Up to this point, we have used the word multi-national, except for one reference where the phrase trans-national was substituted. The multi-national description brings out the *many-nation-application* of the sacraments. It does not clarify, however, the trans-national sense of either.

Both sacraments were never intended to be tied to any *one* nation. To connect them with one nation or race, exclusively, cultivates an unbiblical ethnicity. The baptist hermeneutic sees circumcision exclusively connected to Israel, and baptism as more universal. The mandate to Israel, however, was to cut across ethnic boundaries. Their misinterpretation of the trans-national extension of the Abrahamic promise brought rebuke from Christ. They were to be messengers of the covenant, dispensing it around the world to all the nations. They saw themselves, instead, as the depository of the covenant. They became exclusivistic. Therefore, it is better to see the sacraments as trans-national, not bound by any one nation. Their application is multi-national, and that makes them truly *trans-national*.

Therefore, just as the sacraments of initiation do not signify personal faith primarily, but the righteousness of Christ, so neither do they signify a national covenant. Baptists like Jewett and Kingdon maintain that circumcision was a national sign. The same presuppositional error, however, underlies both prongs — circumcision as a *national* sign and baptism as a *personal* sign of faith — of the Baptist interpretation. Whether con-

ceived nationalistically (as in circumcision) or individualistically (as in baptism), the sacrament is seen as a sign of human commitment rather than of Divine Initiative. The Reformed view sees baptism/circumcision primarily as God's act (as we have discussed in earlier essays in this series), and the fact that the sacrament is *applied* personally, familially, or nationally at various points in history does not tie the *meaning* of the sign to personal faith, family commitment, or national covenanting. Both errors stem from defining the sacrament in terms of a human instead of a Divinely Sovereign act. God's claim is reduced to man's commitment.

In our next study, we will continue to examine the relationship between circumcision and baptism.

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE

by Gary North

No. 17: Treasures of Wickedness

Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death (Prov. 10:2).

There are two truths taught by this verse: 1) there are measurable treasures that are the result of wickedness; and 2) righteousness delivers men from death. Both concepts demand an explanation.

Wealthy wicked: The problem of the wealthy plagued David. "For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men" (Ps. 73:3-5). But their success is the basis of their downfall: "Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than their heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily" (Ps. 73:6-8). They do not believe that God sees their deeds: "And they say, How doth God know? And, Is there knowledge in the most high? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches" (Ps. 73:11-12).

Ungodly men prosper. The exegetical challenge is to make sense of this principle in light of the outline of Deuteronomy 28, which proclaims that godly societies prosper, and rebellious societies are destroyed by the judgment of God.

The outline in Deuteronomy 8 provides the key. It presents a *stage theory of development*. First, God gives men His law, so that they might preserve and expand their wealth. Then He gives them a capital base to work with (8:1-9). Second, men begin to prosper. This prosperity is to confirm their faith in the reliability of God's covenant: "... for it is he that giveth thee the power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (8:18). The external blessings are to serve as spiritual reinforcement. Third, they are tempted to forget God, and to assert their autonomy. God warns men against this sin: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (8:17). Fourth,

there is a period of judgment against those who rebel against God in this fashion (8:19-20).

There is a fifth possible stage: *restoration* (Isa. 2). There are two kinds of judgment: *judgment unto restoration* and *judgment unto oblivion*. Whether a society experiences restoration depends upon the ethical response of the society to God's judgment.

The Bible is clear: there are covenantal blessings and cursings that involve the whole society. The Bible is equally clear about the possibility of wealthy wicked people. They may be wealthy in any of the five stages, but wealth in the hands of wicked people as a class is characteristic of the third stage: autonomy and rebellion, which is the prelude to stage four: the comprehensive judgment of God.

The point made by this proverb is that the treasure held by the ungodly profits him nothing. In other words, he has made an entrepreneurial error: thinking that the pay-off was worth the corruption necessary to obtain it, the wicked man's efforts produce a personal loss.

Does this mean that *wealth as such* is unprofitable? No; it means that *wealth is unprofitable for the wicked individual*. There is real value in a treasure — objective in the sense that God imputes value to it — but the wicked man does not appropriate this value without also gaining the vengeance of God. He sees only the value of the treasure and the earthly costs of attaining it; he does not see the *hidden costs of rebellion*. Thus, the subjective value of this treasure to the wicked is ultimately negative, what Proverbs 25:22 describes as "coals of fire" on the heads of the unrighteous.

Mortality tables: Long life is characteristic of covenant-keeping men. Men who honor their parents live long lives (Ex. 20:12). Long life is a universally agreed-upon blessing. Thus, all people can see this beneficial biological result of godliness in society as a whole (Deut. 4:6-8), and they are thereby encouraged to enter into a covenant with God.

Righteous men, in the aggregate, are delivered from death for a longer period of time than unrighteous men are. Individual righteous men may die young, and individual wicked men may die old, but in the aggregate, long life goes to the righteous. Since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), all men eventually die, in time and on earth. Nevertheless, long life points to eternal life. Men to whom the righteousness of Christ is imputed by God's grace can expect eternal life, and therefore long lives on earth. The gift of eternal life which comes at the final judgment is preceded by an earthly parallel — not for every righteous man, but for *men in general* who *adhere in general* to the provisions of biblical law.

People in Third World nations have shorter life expectancies than people in Western, industrial countries because Third World nations are characterized by *paganism* — animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam — and imported Western *socialism* — socialism which came early to these nations, not centuries after free market economics created a massive capital base, as was the case in the West. The oil-rich Moslem nations are exceptions to the rule regarding paganism, but their wealth is dependent upon the productivity of the

West, which has discovered valuable uses for oil. Japan also has escaped the economic curses of paganism by imitating Western law and Western technology. The Japanese have also adopted a Western, linear view of time, and Western doctrines of thrift and hard, smart work. Japan has adopted a Protestant ethic without adopting Protestant theology, and the result has been rising per capita wealth.

Humanism is steadily eroding the capital base of the West, and if socialism continues to be enforced by Western civil governments, then the West will eventually become poor. But in terms of external law, the legal codes of Western nations are closer to biblical law than the law codes of Third World nations. So is the Western view of linear time. The difference can be seen by comparing mortality tables of various societies.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CALENDAR

by James B. Jordan

No. 22: The Calendar Before Sinai, Part I

Popular today in various circles is the notion that the Law of God as given at Sinai represented something wholly new in the world at the time of its presentation, and was completely done away with at the cross. Such modern views, whether presented by Scofield or Meredith Kline, fail to distinguish properly between God's actions in history on the one hand, and God's unchanging and unchangeable moral standards on the other. Historical circumstances change; God's moral character does not.

Further, we are not in a position to dictate to God how He should reveal Himself to us. The fact that He chose to postpone making a *permanent written record* of His law until Mt. Sinai does not give us the liberty to assume that He had not *revealed* that Law earlier, or that there were no written codifications of Divine Law prior to Sinai. In fact, writing is a necessary aspect of the image of God in man, for God created man with a memory system which is selective. This is not a defect; rather, it is a reflex of God's epistemological one-and-manyness, in that man discriminates between what is more and less important for him at a given time, remembering some things and forgetting others. If he remembered everything equally well, he would be insane, for he would be unable to sort matters out and unify particulars coherently. Because man's memory is happily selective, God gives man the complementary gift of writing.

Adam lived 930 years. His memory was createdly selective and also sinfully selective as well. He needed to know how to make permanent, objective, public, written records of contracts, laws, ideas, poetry, etc. We may safely assume, as Christian creationists, that Adam knew how to write. Adam probably wrote the first three chapters of Genesis in their original form (later perhaps modified by Moses). He probably also began a written tradition of recorded Divine legislation. That this was superseded at Mt. Sinai does not imply that it could never have existed.

What we find in the book of Genesis is that the "Mosaic law" was already functioning. The law of evi-

dence concerning torn beasts (Ex. 22:13) is referred to by Jacob in Genesis 31:39. Abraham is said to know God's "mishpatim" in Genesis 18:19, which "mishpatim" are the case laws of Exodus 21:1ff. In Genesis 26:5, Abraham is said to have "kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws," surely a rather comprehensive statement. The law requiring marriage for seduction (Deut. 22:28f.) is seen being implemented in Genesis 34; and because Simeon and Levi broke this law, they were condemned (Gen. 49:5-7). Noah knew the clean from the unclean animals (Gen. 7:2), even though we only know them from the later list dictated by God to Moses in Leviticus 11. Finally, though there are more examples, we see the Levirate law of Deuteronomy 25:5f. functioning in Genesis 38.

Spiralling in on the question of the calendar and festivals, we find that before the Tabernacle was built, there was already a Tent of Meeting (Exodus 33:7-11). Similarly, the children of Israel knew what a feast (*hag*) was (Ex. 5:1; 10:9), even though Scripture nowhere records anything about feasts before this time, and detailed permanently-inscribed revelation concerning them comes later.

Do we have more specific reasons to think that God's people kept feasts (and sabbaths) before Mt. Sinai? Yes, for these were creation ordinances, and are referred to in Genesis 1 and 2. In Gen. 1:14, the lights placed in the firmament are said to be "for signs and for seasons, and for days and years." There is more to this statement than appears at first glance. What makes the verse difficult for modern Christians is that we are too much corrupted by nature-grace thinking.

For some, nature and grace are two separate realms. Sun and moon may govern agricultural cycles, but they certainly have nothing to do with times of worship. *Spiritual* matters, in the area of grace, are certainly not connected up with *earthly* things like the seasons of the year, in the area of nature. After all, salvation means *escaping* this evil world, doesn't it? No, it does not. A true rapture theory sees the wicked as being raptured out of God's field at the end, and the world restored, not destroyed. There is no opposition between created rhythms/times and the time of worship activity.

There are other ways to relate grace and nature, but the problem with all of them is that the nature-grace dichotomy is not Biblical. It is impossible to get an accurate understanding of Biblical revelation using a category scheme which is non-Biblical. Thus, let us reconstruct the matter and speak instead of the relationship between the special and the general. In the church there are special officers (elders) and general officers (laymen). There is special worship (sacramental) and general worship (personal devotions). There is special time (holy convocation; sabbath) and general time (six days of labor). There is such a thing as "drawing near" to God, though He is always totally near to each of us.

If we think this way, and then look back at Genesis 1:14, we might say that the heavenly bodies regulate general times, but not special times. This would be fundamentally wrong, however. Man always proceeds primarily from the special to the general, and only secondarily is there a reflection from the general to the special. Man's first day was a sabbath; he started in special worship and was to proceed into general worship during the second week of creation. Similarly, man started at the center, the Garden of God, the special place, and was to proceed outward to the four corners of the earth, following the rivers. God's special presence, His special nearness, is the initial source and foundation of man's life, which is lived daily in His general presence. Man's most important food is his weekly communion with the sacramental Body and Blood of Christ; the life-imparting character of daily bread is only possible on the basis of the primary life-giving character of the sacrament. We could multiply examples.

Does the text of Genesis 1:14 bear this line of reasoning out? Yes, for it speaks of the lights as *signs* first of all. The early essays in this series pointed out the special nature of these signs as pointing to the primary Spiritual light of God's glory, and to the coming of the Son of God and His kingdom. We are led, then, to take the next term, 'seasons,' in context as related to the special signs, and as referring primarily to appointed times of worship. This is indeed the case.

The word for 'season' is *mo'ed*. It is used for special appointed times, and not for agricultural seasons. The neutral word *'eth* is used for agricultural seasons. Since the general flows from the special, we may say that agricultural seasons flow from God's primary appointment of times of special worship. The sun and moon, which regulate days and years, are given primarily as clocks for special worship, and only secondarily for more general purposes. Thus, *mo'ed* is used for the major feasts in Leviticus 23:2, 4, 37, 44 and throughout Scripture. It is also used for the Tabernacle in the phrase "tent of *meeting*" (ambiguously translated "tabernacle of the *congregation*" in the KJV). In other words, the Tabernacle was the place for appointed worship meetings.

The point of this is that annual festivals regulated by sun and moon are a creation ordinance, every bit as much as the weekly sabbath day. In the sense that one is done away, so is the other (Col 2:16); in the sense that one continues to be relevant, so does the other (Heb. 4:9). Earlier essays in this series have dealt extensively with the question of in what sense the sabbath day is done away, and in what sense sabbath rules remain valid for the New Covenant church. The same reasoning applies to the annual festivals. [Those wishing to receive earlier essays in this series may write for them. A contribution is required, since some photocopying is entailed.]

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