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Duane E. Spencer, *Holy Baptism: Word Keys Which Unlock the Covenant*. Geneva Ministries, 1984. Xii + 170 pp. Hardcover. \$9.95.

It is my opinion, as someone familiar with the literature, that these studies are the most comprehensive and readable presentation of the anti-immersionist position available today. Spencer does not argue that sprinkling or pouring are acceptable modes of baptism; rather, he argues that baptism is only properly administered when the water falls from above, and that immersion is simply wrong.

This may seem rather a waste of time. Modern conservative Reformed and Presbyterian theologians seem content to argue that sprinkling is permissible. They want to allow for immersion. In fact, however, immersion as a mode grossly obscures the meaning of holy baptism. It is not *our* death and resurrection which saves us; rather it is the *application to us* of Christ's death and resurrection which saves us. Immersion pictures our own death and resurrection, and goes along with a doctrine of salvation by works or inward experience. Sprinkling or pouring pictures the application to us, by the Spirit, of Christ's work, and goes along with a doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.

Of course, if we adopt a modern intellectualist position, then such "mere external rites" are of little consequence. Such a position, however, has nothing to do with the Biblical view of reality. Man is a creature of symbol. He comes up with symbolic ways of organizing and understanding his world, whether he realizes it or not, and those who think that they have the least to do with ritual and symbol are generally most enslaved by it. Just try to change the music in your church (start singing psalms), or the arrangement of the furniture, and see how much of an uproar it causes. How many "anti-ritualist" churches insist that their pastors dress a certain way, and that they drive a certain kind of car, and so forth? They may not want their preachers to dress like priests, but they want them to look like preachers!

Symbol and ritual are inescapable. Either we have good symbols and rituals, or we have bad ones. Either our symbols, our creeds, our hymns, our orders of worship, and our other rituals express the true faith of Scripture, or they run interference with that faith. They are not neutral.

Holy Baptism is the sign and seal of the covenant. It is not the sign and seal of eternal election, for God alone looks on the heart. Man looks on the outward appearance, and we as Christians need to know whom we are to *count as* and *treat as* fellow Christians. Do we count as Christians those who have a flaming testimony? Or only those who speak in tongues? Or only those who talk about spiritual things the same way we do, whom we feel at home with? The answer of the Bible, and of the Church of all ages is this: We count as Christians those to whom God has given the visible sign of baptism, provided they have not been excommunicated from the visible Church.

The visible Church is the community of the covenant, gathered around the Lord's Table. Not all those in the visible

covenant community on earth are eternally saved, for some will not persevere. But all those in the visible community of the covenant are to be treated as Christians. We are to encourage one another to renewed faith, good works, and perseverance.

Our children are baptized, at God's command. The sign and seal of the covenant is placed upon them by the ordained officers of Christ's church, as a sign that they are welcome in Jesus' lap. Small children naturally believe in Jesus, if they have been taught to. Our task as parents is to nurture them in this faith, to help them through crises, to bring about deepening expressions of their faith as they mature, and to encourage them to persevere to the end. Thus, we always count our children as Christians, and treat them as such.

Accordingly, the mode of baptism is extremely important. The immersionist holds that only "believers" are baptized, and that baptism by immersion is a sign of the "believer's" own death and resurrection. The immersionist church, as a result, is caught in a trap of trying to figure out who is really, truly, genuinely, fully, absolutely saved, and who is not. In short, the immersionist church always winds up trying to read the hearts of its members, which is something man cannot do, and is not supposed to do.

The sprinkling/pouring church, on the other hand, applies baptism to those whom God has said are to receive it: adults who profess faith, together with their households, and the infants of the church. The sprinkling church thus does not presume to read the hearts, but treats only of the visible things, leaving the invisible to God.

The question before us, then, is this: To the Law and the Testimony—what does the Bible say? Rev. Spencer's remarkable series of studies answers that question thoroughly and definitively. It is with a great deal of pleasure and confidence that I commend them to the Christian world.

*(Extracted from the Introduction
by James B. Jordan)*

David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: An Eschatology of Dominion*. Reconstruction Press, 1985. X + 318 pp. Hardcover. \$14.95. Reviewed by James B. Jordan.

In my opinion, this is the best introduction to historic Christian eschatology available. It is also a very good introduction to the whole field of "Biblical Theology," especially in the area of Edenic symbolism. Everyone should have and read this book, and to help you get started, let me give you an example of the fine work it contains. What follows is from the second chapter of the book, "How to Read Prophecy":

As I mentioned above, much of the Bible is written in symbols. A helpful way to understand this, perhaps, would be to speak of these symbols as a set of *patterns* and *associations*. By this I mean that *Biblical symbolism is not a code*. It is, instead, a way of seeing, a perspective. For example, when Jesus speaks of "living water" (John 4:10), we rightly recognize that He is using water as a symbol. We understand that when He spoke to the woman at the well, He was not merely offering her "water." He was offering her eternal life. *But He called it "water."* We should immediately ask: Why did He do that? He could have simply said "eternal life." Why did He speak in metaphor? Why did He want her to think of water?

Now this is where we can make a big mistake, and this is the primary error of some interpreters who try to take a "symbolic" approach. It is to think that Biblical symbolism is primarily a puzzle for us to solve. We can suddenly decide: "Aha! *Water* is a special code-word which means *eternal life*. That means that whenever the Bible talks about water sym-

bolically, it is *really* talking about eternal life, whenever someone takes a drink, he is *really* becoming a Christian." It just doesn't work that way (as you will see if you try to apply it throughout the Bible). Besides, what sense would it make for the Bible simply to put everything in code? The Bible is not a book for spies and secret societies; it is God's *revelation* of Himself to His covenant people. The puzzle-solving, mystical interpretation tends to be speculative; it does not pay sufficient attention to the way the Bible itself speaks.

When Jesus offered "water" to the woman, He wanted her to think of the multiple imagery connected with water in the Bible. In a general sense, of course, we know that water is associated with the Spiritual refreshment and sustenance of life which comes through salvation. But the Biblical associations with water are much more complex than that. This is because *understanding Biblical symbolism does not mean cracking a code*. It is much more like reading good poetry.

The symbolism of the Bible is not structured in a flat, *this-means-that* style. Instead, it is meant to be read *visually*. We are to see the images rise before us in succession, layer upon layer, allowing them to evoke a response in our minds and hearts. The prophets did not write in order to create stimulating intellectual exercises. They wrote to *teach*. They wrote in visual, dramatic symbols; and if we would fully understand their message we must appreciate their vocabulary. We must read the Bible visually. The visual symbols themselves, and what the Bible says about them, are important aspects of what God wants us to learn; otherwise, He wouldn't have spoken that way.

So, when the Bible tells us a story about water, it is not "really" telling us about something else; it is telling us about *water*. But at the same time we are expected to *see* the water, and to think of the *Biblical associations* with regard to water. The system of interpretation offered here is neither "literalistic" nor "symbolic"; it takes the "water" seriously and literally, but it also takes seriously what God's Word associates with water throughout the history of Biblical revelation.

What are some of the Biblical associations which might have occurred to the woman at the well, and to the disciples? Here are a few of them:

1. The watery, fluid mass that was the original nature of the earth at the creation, and out of which God formed all life (Gen. 1);
2. The great river of Eden that watered the whole earth (Gen. 2);
3. The salvation of Noah and his family by the waters of the Flood, out of which the earth was recreated (Gen. 6-9);
4. God's gracious revelations to Hagar by a fountain (Gen. 16) and a well (Gen. 21);
5. The well called Rehoboth, where God gave Isaac dominion (Gen. 26);
6. The river out of which the infant Moses, the future Deliverer of Israel, was taken and made a prince (Ex. 2);
7. The redemptive crossing of the Red Sea, where God again saved His people by water (Ex. 14);
8. The water that flowed from the stricken Rock at Sinai, giving life to the people (Ex. 17);
9. The many ritual sprinklings in the Old Testament,

signifying the removal of filth, pollution, sickness and death, and the bestowal of the Spirit upon the priests (e.g., Lev. 14; Num. 8);

10. The crossing of the Jordan River (Josh. 3);

11. The sound of rushing waters made by the pillar of cloud (Ezek. 1);

12. The River of Life flowing from the Temple and healing the Dead Sea (Ezek. 47).

Thus, when the Bible speaks of *water*, we are supposed to have in our minds a vast host of associative concepts, a complex of Biblical images that affects our thinking about water. To put it differently, water is supposed to be something like a "buzz-word," a term that calls up many associations and connotations. When we read the word *water* we should be reminded of God's saving acts and revelations by water throughout Scripture. The Bible uses many of these "buzz-words," and increases the number of them as it goes on; until, by the time we get to Revelation (the capstone of Biblical prophecy), they all come rushing toward us at once, in a blizzard of associative references, some of which are obvious, some obscure. To the one who really knows his Bible and has noted the literary patterns and images, much of the book will look familiar; to the rest of us, it's confusing. In Revelation, we are confronted with all the Biblical connotations of numerous images: not only water, but light, fire, clouds, angels, stars, lamps, food, stones, swords, thrones, rainbows, robes, thunder, voices, animals, stones, wings, scavengers, eyes, keys, trumpets, plagues, mountains, winds, seas, altars, blood, locusts, trees, heads, horns, and crowns.

Revelation also presents us with pictures of a Woman, a Dragon, a wilderness, a mark in the forehead, a sickle, pearls, a winepress, a cup of wine, a Harlot, a river, Sodom, Egypt, Babylon, resurrection, a wedding, a marriage supper, the Bridegroom, and the Bride/City in the shape of a pyramid. And then there's the use of symbolic numbers: two, three, four, seven, ten, twelve, and multiples thereof—24, 42, 144, 666, 1,000, 1,260, 7,000, 12,000, and 144,000.

This is why it's necessary to understand the Bible and its use of symbols and patterns if we are ever to understand the Book of Revelation. The following chapters on the Paradise theme in Scripture are designed to introduce the reader to the Bible's use of imagery. Essentially, this is an exercise in *Biblical Theology*, the technical term for the study of God's progressive revelation of salvation. In principle, the whole Story of redemption is taught in the early chapters of the Bible: the rest is simply built upon the foundation laid there. This is why, as we shall see below, the later revelations depend so heavily on the theme of the Garden of Eden.

As we enter this study of Biblical imagery, let's review the basic rules:

1. *Read visually*; try to picture what the Bible is saying.
2. *Read Biblically*; don't speculate or become abstract, but pay close attention to what the Bible itself says about its own symbols.
3. *Read the Story*; try to think about how each element in the Bible contributes to its message of salvation as a whole.

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