

Biblical Theology

Old and New Testaments

by

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Chapter I

The Structure of New Testament Revelation

THERE are three ways in which the structure of New Testament Revelation can be determined from within Scripture itself. To add "from within Scripture" is essential, for we do not dare to impose upon the divine process and its product a scheme from any outside source. If redemption and revelation form an organism, then, like every other organism, it should be permitted to reveal to us its own articulation, either by way of our observing it, or by our receiving from it the formula of its make-up, where at certain high-points it reaches a consciousness of its inner growth. The first of the three ways spoken of runs through the O. T. The O.T. dispensation is a forward-stretching and forward-looking dispensation. Owing to the factual character of Biblical religion its face is necessarily set towards new things. Prophecy is the best indicator of this, for prediction is not an accidental element in prophecy, but of its very essence. But more particularly eschatological and Messianic prophecy are pointed towards the future, and not merely towards the future as a relatively higher state, but as an absolutely perfect and enduring state to be contrasted with the present and its succession of developments. Here, then the distinction between something old and something new, both comprehensively taken, is in principle apprehended. The O. T., through its prophetic attitude postulates the N. T. And there are passages in which the term "new" emerges in a semiconscious manner, as it were, to give expression to the contrast between what is and what shall be (Isa. 65:17; Ezek. 11:19). This technical use of "new" has passed over even into the vocabulary of the dispensation of fulfilment (Matt. 13:52; Mk. 16:17; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 2:17). There is, however, one prophetic utterance in which this form of thought crystallizes into the phrase "New Berith", Greek: "New Diatheke". This is Jer. 31:31-34. Although here the correlative "Old Berith" does not explicitly appear by the side of "New Ber-

ith" still the idea itself is clearly given in the words: "Not according to the berith that I made with their fathers — to bring them out of the land of Egypt." As a matter of fact, in this prophecy, besides the name "New Berith", the two most distinctive features of the new order of affairs are described. The one is: Jehovah will create obedience to the law through writing it in the heart. The other is: there will be complete forgiveness of sin. And, what most closely concerns our present purpose, the "newness" is applied not merely in a general way to religious status, but is most specifically extended to the sphere of revelation and of knowledge of God: "They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them."

After Jeremiah the phrase does not recur in the O. T. Scriptures. We first meet with it again in the words spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper. His blood He calls "my blood of the diatheke" (Matt. and Mk.), the cup "the new diatheke in my blood" (Luke and Paul). It is evident that our Lord here represents his blood (death) as the basis and inauguration of a new religious relationship of the disciples to God. While the former relationship is not referred to as "the old", the implied allusions to Ex. 24 and Jer. 31, even apart from the use of the adjective "new" in Lk. (and Paul, 1 Cor. 11:25) reveal the presence in his mind of a contrast between something past abrogated and something new substituted. This is altogether independent of the choice between rendering diatheke "testament" or "covenant." On either rendering the contrast between two distinct dispensations of religious privilege is involved. Further, it is not obscurely intimated, that the new order of affairs, so far from being in its turn again subject to change or abrogation, is of final significance. It reaches over into the eschatological state, which of itself makes it eternal. This may be gathered from Jesus' solemn declaration about not expecting to drink of the fruit of the vine again, until He shall drink it new (Matt. adds "with you") in the Kingdom of God (Lk., "until the Kingdom of God shall have come"). What we call the "New Covenant" here appears at the outset as an eternal covenant. Into the question of what induced our Lord, who had never before made use of the concept in His teaching, but exclusively spoken of "the Kingdom," to employ it at this one late point, we can not here enter. It ought to be further noticed, that the contrast here drawn is not in the first place a contrast of revela-

tion. The words speak of a new era in religious access to God. Of a new period of divine self-disclosure they do not speak, although that, of course, is presupposed under the general law that progress in religion follows progress in revelation.

From Jesus we pass on to Paul. Paul is in the N.T. the great exponent of the fundamental bisection in the history of redemption and of revelation. Thus he speaks not only of the two regimes of law and faith, but even expresses himself in the consecutive form of statement: "after that faith is come" (Gal. 3:25). It is no wonder, then, that with him we find the formal distinction between the "New Diatheke" and the "Old Diatheke" (2 Cor. 3:6, 14). Here also, to be sure, we have in the first place a contrast between two religious ministrations, that of the letter and of the Spirit, that of condemnation and that of righteousness. Nevertheless, the idea of difference in revelation, as underlying the difference in ministration between Moses and Paul, clearly enters. There is a "reading" of Moses, i.e. of the law and a "speech", a "vision" of the Lord of glory (vss. 12, 14, 15, 16). From the phrase "reading of the Old Diatheke" in vs. 14, some have even inferred that the Apostle had in mind the idea of a second, a new canon to take its place by the side of the old. Vs. 15, however, shows that "reading of the Old Diatheke" simply means reading of the Law, the Law being frequently in the O.T. called by the name of berith, diatheke; hence in vs. 15 the "reading of Moses" is substituted for the "reading of the Old Diatheke."

The Epistle to the Hebrews gives us the clearest information in regard to the structure of redemptive procedure, and that particularly, as based on and determined by structure of revelation. It is not necessary to quote single passages, the whole Epistle is full of it. We read here of the "New Diatheke" (9:15). The phrase "Old Diatheke" does not occur, although other phrases practically equivalent, do. How intimately to the writer the unfolding from the Old into the New is bound up with the unfolding of Revelation, may be seen from the opening words of the Epistle. "God having spoken — spake — in a Son — whom He has appointed heir of all things, who — when He had in Himself purged our sins, sat down, etc." The participle aorist "having spoken" and the finite verb "spake" link the old and the new together, representing the former as preparatory to the latter.

It will be noticed that in this, as in the statements of the O. T., of Jesus and Paul, the new dispensation appears as final. And this applies likewise to the revelation introducing it. It is not one new disclosure to be followed by others, but the consummate disclosure beyond which nothing is expected. After speech in "a Son" (qualitatively so called) no higher speech were possible. Paul also speaks of the sending forth of God's Son from God as taking place in the *pleroma of the time* (Gal. 4:4). Consequently there is nowhere any trace of the cumulative point of view: Prophets, Jesus, Apostles; the N.T. revelation is one organic, and in itself completed, whole. It includes the Apostles, who are witnesses and interpreters of the Christ, but does not have them *ab extra* added to itself as separate instruments of information. It is a total misunderstanding both of the consciousness of Jesus and of that of the N.T. writers, to conceive of the thought of "going back" from the Apostles, particularly Paul, to Jesus. Such a thought is born out of the inorganic, arithmetical frame of mind, which knows only to work with addition of numbers, or at best with multiplication of witnesses. To take Christ at all He must be taken as the center of a movement of revelation organized around Him, and winding up the whole process of revelation. When cut loose from what went before and came after, Jesus not only becomes uninterpretable, but owing to the meteoric character of His appearance, remains scarcely sufficient for bearing by Himself alone the tremendous weight of a supernaturalistic world-view. As a matter of fact, He does not represent Himself anywhere as being by his human earthly activity the exhaustive expounder of truth. Much rather He is the great fact to be expounded. And He has nowhere isolated Himself from His interpreters, but on the contrary identified them with Himself, both as to absoluteness of authority and adequacy of knowledge imparted (Luke 15:16; John 16:12-15). And through the promise and gift of the Spirit He has made the identity real. The Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto the recipients. Besides this, the course of our Lord's redemptive career was such as to make the important facts accumulate towards the end, where the departure of Jesus from the disciples rendered explanation by Himself of the significance of these impossible. For this reason the teaching of Jesus, so far from rendering the teaching of the Apostles negligible, absolutely

postulates it. As the latter would have been empty, lacking the fact, so the former would have been blind, at least in part, because of lacking the light.

The relation between Jesus and the Apostolate is in general that between the fact to be interpreted and the subsequent interpretation of this fact. This is none other than the principle under which all revelation proceeds. The N.T. Canon is constructed on it. The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles stand first, although from a literary point of view this is not the chronological sequence. Theirs is the first place, because there is embodied in them the great actuality of N.T. Redemption. Still it ought not to be overlooked, that within the Gospels and the Acts themselves we meet with a certain preformation of this same law. Jesus' task is not confined to furnishing the fact or the facts; He interweaves and accompanies the creation of the facts with a preliminary illumination of them, for by the side of his work stands his teaching. Only the teaching is more sporadic and less comprehensive than that supplied by the Epistles. It resembles the embryo, which though after an indistinct fashion, yet truly contains the structure, which the full-grown organism will clearly exhibit.

The foregoing gives us the warrant for speaking of N.T. Revelation and of its historic exposition, N. T. Theology. It also explains to us the seeming disproportion in chronological extent of the O. T. and the N. T. This disproportion arises from viewing the new revelation too much by itself, and not sufficiently as introductory and basic to the large period following. Looking at it in too mechanical a manner, one might place the thousands of years of the O.T. over against the scarce one hundred years of the life of Jesus and the Apostles. In reality the N.T. Revelation, being the final one, stretches over all the extent of the order of things Christ came to inaugurate, whence also the Diatheke which it serves is called an "eternal Diatheke" (Heb. 13:20). It is the eschatological Diatheke, and in regard to that time-comparisons are out of place. The disproportionateness is felt somewhat over-keenly by us, because we lack the eschatological point of view, which regards Christ as the "Consummator." Hence we are inclined to speak of the N.T. in its canonical, literary sense, extending, say, from the nativity of Jesus to the death of the last writer in the N.T. canon. Still we know full well that

we ourselves live just as much in the N.T. as did Peter and Paul and John. For clearness' sake we may distinguish between the revelation-overture which opened the salvation-era, and the salvation-era itself, giving to both the name N.T. In our Biblico-theological investigation the former alone is dealt with.

The first and great division within our field, then, is that between revelation through Christ directly and revelation mediated by Christ through the Apostolate. Calling this the overture of the N.T. dispensation, we can still distinguish certain preludes played before the setting in of the overture itself. All that precedes the public ministry may be considered in this light. The voices accompanying the Nativity, the preaching of John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus by John, the probation (temptation) of Jesus, require preliminary attention before entering upon a survey of the revelation-content of his work. On the other hand, such questions as the question of development, and of the method of our Lord's teaching, are so vitally interwoven with the substance of the message brought as to appear of far more than preliminary importance. And to a still stronger degree, of course, this applies to the teaching on the O.T. and on the Nature of God. This yields the grouping of the table of contents prefixed to the present volume.

The question may be raised, whether within the limits of the principles here laid down, there can be expected still further revelation entitled to a place in the scheme of N.T. Revelation. Unless we adopt the mystical standpoint, which cuts loose the subjective from the objective, the only proper answer to this question is, that new revelation can be added only, in case new objective events of a supernatural character take place, needing for their understanding a new body of interpretation supplied by God. This will actually be the case in the eschatological issue of things. What then occurs will constitute a new epoch in redemption worthy to be placed by the side of the great epochs in the Mosaic age and the age of the first Advent. Hence the Apocalypse mingles with the pictures of the final events transpiring the word of prophecy and of interpretation. We may say, then, that a third epoch of revelation is still outstanding. Strictly speaking, however, this will form less a group by itself than a consummation of the second group. It will belong to N.T. revelation as a final division. Mystical revelation claimed by many in

the interim as a personal privilege is out of keeping with the genius of Biblical religion. Mysticism in this detached form is not specifically Christian. It occurs in all types of religion, better or worse. At best it is a manifestation of the religion of nature, subject to all the defects and faults of the latter. As to its content and inherent value it is unverifiable, except on the principle of submitting it to the test of harmony with Scripture. And submitting it to this it ceases to be a separate source of revelation concerning God.

**REDEMPTIVE HISTORY
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