

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for the *Congregational Studies Conference Papers* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_congregational-studies-conference_01.php

Courage, Covenants and the Countess

Congregational Studies
Conference 2007



Courage, Covenants and the Countess

**Peter Seccombe
David Legg
Lucy Beale**

**Congregational Studies Conference
Papers 2007**

© 2007 Peter Seccombe, David Legg, Lucy Beale

For information on EFCC and previous
Congregational Studies Conference Papers, contact:

The Administrative Secretary,
The Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches,
PO Box 34,
Beverley,
East Yorkshire,
England
HU17 0YY

e-mail: efcc@cix.co.uk

Visit the web-site: <http://www.efcc.org.uk>

Except where stated, the paintings and photographs reproduced with the papers are courtesy of the Evangelical Library. The Library is a source of most of the books referred to in the papers, many available for loan to members. Details are available from The Evangelical Library, 78A Chiltern Street, London W1M 2HB. Telephone: 020 7935 6997.

Contents

Foreword.....	5
John Semper	
Gilmour of Mongolia	7
Peter Seccombe	
Bringing up Children for God.....	23
David Legg	
Selina Countess of Huntingdon 1707–1791: A Most Remarkable Lady.....	59
Lucy Beale	

The papers are printed in the order in which they were given at the Conference; as usual the contributor is entirely responsible for the views expressed in his paper.



Peter Seccombe was until his retirement pastor of Spicer Street Independent Chapel, St Albans, Hertfordshire. He now lives in Herefordshire.



David Legg is a member of Ashford Congregational Church, where he serves on the leadership team and as a home group leader. To support his wife and three sons, he works as an engineer in the defence industry.



Lucy Beale was the wife of the late Rev. Alan Tovey, and served for 31 years as Head of RE at Beverley High School, East Yorkshire. She is now married to Rev. Peter Beale and is a member of Bulkington Congregational Church, Warwickshire.

Photographs by Dr Digby L. James

Foreword

As Evangelicals whose primary focus and authority are the Scriptures, it was good to have a solidly biblical paper among the three given at our 2007 Conference. David Legg had clearly put in a great deal of painstaking work and preparation, which produced a stimulating and thought-provoking paper.

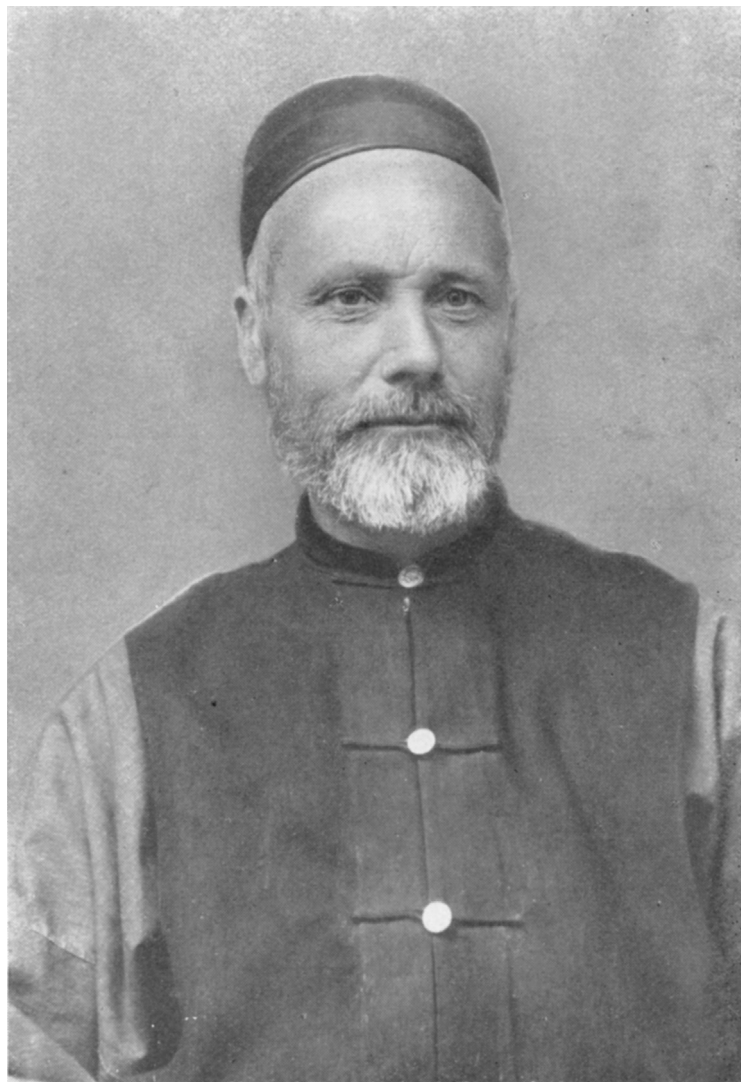
It would also be true to say that as Christians we often find much help, instruction and encouragement from the lives of believers who have run the race before us. Christian biography was something recommended by Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones as a great help on the Christian pathway. Our two other papers by Peter Seccombe and Lucy Beale focussed on two such notable saints, one who laboured with some success, leaving a rich legacy behind her, and the other who saw little real fruit from a life of courageous and strenuous labour. However, both the Countess of Huntingdon and James Gilmour have lessons for us in faithful service, use of the resources and talents which God entrusted to them, perseverance in the course of duty, and not least an overwhelming commitment to and love for their Lord.

We are grateful to all three contributors for making it a memorable day. No particular comments have been reached me about the new format of two longer papers and one short one. (We really would appreciate some feedback!) I have the impression that it certainly eased the lunch and tea arrangements, and allowed just a little more time for browsing at the bookstall. Having said that, it still remains a pretty tight schedule. We continue to be most grateful to the Rev. Robert Stivey, the officers of Highbury Quadrant Congregational Church and all the helpers on the day for their warm hospitality and the excellent repast that was prepared for us. It makes for a very happy day.

We still rely largely on recommendations to others in order to boost the numbers attending the conference. Please do all you can to encourage others in your church to come along with you. Next year's conference will take place, God willing, on Saturday 15 March 2008, at the same venue.

John Semper

Wigtown



James Gilmour

Gilmour of Mongolia

Peter Seccombe

1. The modern missionary movement

The modern missionary movement can be traced back to the very last years of the 18th century and its history is studded with the names of some very remarkable men and women who endured great hardship and demonstrated enormous and courageous faith in order to bring the gospel to men and women in far off places. People like William Carey, David Livingstone, Hudson Taylor, C. T. Studd, Judson of Burma. Less well known today, but famous and influential in his own age and worthy of being named alongside such famous pioneers, is our subject this morning: James Gilmour of Mongolia.

2. Personal Interest

As mentioned in the leaflet about today's conference, my wife and I have a personal interest in God's work in Mongolia. This is as a result of the church, of which I was then pastor, Spicer Street Chapel in St Albans, sending out two of our members, Erik and Emma Thomson, to work there in 1997. Three years later we were able to visit them for two weeks. At that time they were working in a town called Sainshand in the Gobi desert, a 10-hour journey south from the capital, Ulaanbaatar, on the Trans-Siberia railway. They are now based in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, where Erik is teaching in the Bible College.

3. Historical, cultural and religious background

What is now the country of Mongolia is what used to be called Outer Mongolia. Inner Mongolia is in the north of modern China. In James Gilmour's time (the 19th century) both Outer and Inner Mongolia were part of China and he travelled and worked in both, as well as in China itself.

Let me sketch in briefly some historical background: In the early 13th century the most famous Mongol ever, Ghengis (or Chinggis) Khan united the previously warring Mongol tribes, and with a large and loyal army of perhaps as many as 200,000 men established what became, under his son, the largest land empire the world has ever known. It stretched westwards as far as Hungary. His grandson (Kublai Khan) completed the subjugation of China and set up his capital in what is today's Beijing. However, in less than a hundred years the Mongol empire began to disintegrate, (as all great empires do sooner or later); the Mongols were expelled from Beijing and the balance of power in the region began to change. By the mid 18th century Mongolia had come completely under the control of China—a control which became increasingly brutal, so

that to this day Mongolians despise the Chinese. Mongolians began to look to Russia to the north and west of them rather than to China to the south.

In 1915 Outer Mongolia became formally independent from China and in 1921, the newly formed Communist Party took over the country. Three years later it was declared the Mongolian People's Republic—the world's second communist country. For a few years it was able to be relatively independent of Russia, but once Stalin had established his control in Russia such independence was effectively lost and Mongolia came under Russian dominance until the later 1980s. In 1990 it became a multiparty democracy although the old Communist Party (now calling itself ex-communist) won two successive elections and remained in power until 1996.

What about its religious history? As early as AD635 Christianity had reached China by means of a Nestorian monk from Syria called Alopen who would have travelled along the ancient trade route to the East, the Silk Road. There is evidence of some Christian influence in Chinggis Khan's court in the 13th century. Although Tibetan Buddhism had been influential amongst the Mongolian nobility for some time, it was not until the late 16th century that it became the state religion and all pervasive in its influence. By the 19th century as much as half of the male population were Buddhist priests (or Lamas).

The London Missionary Society, formed in 1795, and at that time inter-denominational and thoroughly evangelical, first sent missionaries to work amongst Mongolians in 1817. Edward Stallybrass from Royston in Hertfordshire and his young wife Sarah, together with Cornelius and Betty Rahmn from Sweden, went first to Irkutsk in Russia and sixteen months later moved to Selenginsk, just north of the modern Russian/Mongolian border. They were soon joined by two or three other missionaries. The idea was that Mongolians could best be reached from a base in Siberia. The mission had the support of the then Russian Tsar, Alexander I. But when his brother Nicholas succeeded him, he reversed some of Alexander's reforms and instituted a policy of 'Russification', of which the watch words were Autocracy, Nationality and Orthodoxy. Missionaries were compelled to leave the country in 1840. The main achievement of this period of missionary work was the translation of the Bible into Mongolian or, to be more precise, the Buriat dialect of Mongolian, spoken by Mongolians in the north and in Siberia. The first LMS missionary to return to Mongolia some thirty years later met at least one man with a tatty copy still in his possession. That missionary was James Gilmour.

4. Outline of James Gilmour's life

James Gilmour was born at Cathkin about five miles north of Glasgow on 12 June 1843, the third in a family of six sons. Cathkin was an estate of several

farms and James's father was a tradesman on the estate as his father had been before him. It was a godly home. The family were members of a congregational church in Glasgow and they walked the five miles there and back each Sunday. Family worship took place each morning and evening, and at other times mother would read suitable Christian books to the boys.

James did well at school and at the age of nineteen went on to Glasgow University, at first living at home and after a while moving into a small house in the city belonging to his father (the family was evidently not poor). He worked hard, used his time well and gained prizes in Latin and Greek. He was known as a cheerful fellow with a good sense of humour and a great zest for life. It was during the early part of his time at university that the faith of his parents and grandparents became his own. Looking back to this time at his ordination service several years later, he said,

After I became satisfied that I had found 'the way of life' I decided to tell others of that way and felt that I lay under a responsibility to do what I could to extend Christ's kingdom.¹

He began to think about entering the Christian ministry and had a growing conviction that God was calling him to missionary service. So he went on to say at his ordination service:

Having decided as to the *capacity* in which I should labour in Christ's kingdom, the next thing which occupied my serious attention was the *locality* where I should labour. Occasionally before I had thought of the relative claims of the home and foreign fields, but during the summer session in Edinburgh I thought the matter out and decided for the mission field; even on the low ground of common sense I seemed to be called to be a missionary. Is the kingdom a harvest field? Then I thought it reasonable that I should seek to work where the work was most abundant and the workers fewest. Labourers say they are overtaxed at home; what then must be the case abroad, where there are wide stretching plains already white to harvest with scarcely here and there a solitary reaper? To me the soul of an Indian seemed as precious as the soul of an Englishman, and the Gospel as much for the Chinese as for the European; and as the band of missionaries was few compared with the company of home ministers, it seemed to me clearly to be my duty to go abroad.

But [he went on], I go out as a missionary, not that I may follow the dictates of common sense, but that I may obey that command of Christ: Go into all the world and preach. He who said *preach* said also *go ye into all the world and preach* and what Christ hath joined together let not man put asunder ... My going forth is a matter of obedience to a plain command; and in place of

¹ *James Gilmour of Mongolia: His diaries, letters and reports*, edited and arranged by Richard Lovett, M. A. (3rd edition, London: The Religious Tract Society, 1895), p. 41.

seeking to assign a reason for going abroad, I would prefer to say that I have failed to discover any reason why I should stay at home.²

So he had approached the LMS. The upshot was two years of theological study at Cheshunt College, primarily though not exclusively a congregational college—the old Trevecca College. Whilst there, books like Angel James' *Earnest Ministry* and Baxter's *Reformed Pastor*, together with some of Bunyan's writings, made a profound impression on him. During his second year he was tempted (so he regarded it) to try for the college's first prize having only gained the second in his first year. However, he concluded that instead of devoting maximum time to academic studies he should give himself in his final months at Cheshunt to serious Bible Study—and he came to regard that as the most profitable time in his two years there. (Would that more students at theological and Bible Colleges would give more time to serious Bible study!)

A fellow student in his Glasgow University days, the Rev. John Paterson of Airdrie, testified that James Gilmour was earnest, honest, faithful to his convictions (and) as a student endeavoured to influence others for good more by the silent eloquence of a holy life than by definite exhortations.³ Whether or not that was an accurate assessment, it is clear that by the time he had reached Cheshunt College he was much more forthright. A Dr H. R. Reynolds, who knew Gilmour during his time there, later recalled that, though he was somewhat shy and reserved, 'underneath a canny demeanour there was burning a very intense enthusiasm'.⁴ He says that he soon found 'that there was an intense fire of evangelistic zeal and an almost stormy enthusiasm for the conversion of souls to Christ'.

From Cheshunt he went on to the missionary seminary at Highgate (not far from where we meet today). Along with other students, Gilmour found the course largely a waste of time, and he was influential in an investigation being set up which led to the subsequent closure of the seminary.

Having been accepted by the LMS, James Gilmour sailed for China on 22 February 1870. He was twenty-seven years old. On board ship he volunteered his services to the captain as ship's chaplain. The captain accepted his offer with some reluctance but thought he was too young to preach; he said he could read Anglican prayers and read from a book of sermons, which the captain provided, at services. This he did for one Sunday but thereafter preached his own sermons! He wrote back, 'I was under the impression that

2 Ibid. p. 42.

3 Ibid. p. 29.

4 Ibid. p. 34.

they had not heard much plain preaching [so] did my best to let them hear the gospel plain and simple.⁵

There were already a number of LMS missionaries working amongst the Chinese but Gilmour's heart was set on re-opening gospel work amongst Mongolians from a base in China rather than Russia. He arrived in Beijing three months after his departure from Liverpool. A month or so later news came that there had been a massacre of French Roman Catholic Missionaries in the port city of Tientsin and there was fear that this might presage a widespread attack on missionaries and other foreigners. Gilmour wrote,

We are living on the slope of a volcano that may put forth its slumbering rage at any moment ... Now is the time for trying what stuff a man's religion is made of. We may be all dead men directly; are we afraid to die? Our death might further the cause of Christ more than our life could do ... God, do Thou make my faith firm and bright, so that death may seem small and not to be feared. Help me to trust Thee and Christ implicitly so that with a calm mind I may work while thou dost let me live ...⁶

Gilmour had immediately begun Chinese language study. But at the same time he was making plans to travel into Mongolia as soon as possible and, accompanied by a Russian merchant, set out in early August, less than three months after his arrival. Travelling in a camel cart, it took him a month to cross the Gobi desert and to reach Urga, the capital (modern Ulaanbaatar). He longed for the ability to communicate with the nomadic Mongolians he met on the way but had to content himself with giving out Christian literature. One Sunday he wrote in his diary:

Oh that God would give me more of His Spirit, more of His felt Presence, more of the spirit and power of prayer, that I may bring down blessings on this poor people of Mongolia! As I look at them and their huts, I ask again and again how am I to go among them; in comfort and in a wagon, with all my things about me? Or in poverty, reducing myself to their level? If I go among them rich, they will be continually begging, and perhaps regard me more as a source of gifts than anything else. If I go with nothing but the Gospel, there will be nothing to distract their attention from the unspeakable gift.⁷

By the end of September he had reached the northern frontier with Russian Siberia and found lodgings with a Scottish trader in the town of Kiachta. He had travelled some 900 miles. He now met with all kinds of difficulties. Neither the Russian nor Chinese authorities would recognise his passport and he had to wait for months for another to arrive from Beijing. No-one had any sympathy for the work he had come to do. He found great difficulty in finding a

⁵ Ibid. p. 44.

⁶ Ibid. p. 59.

Mongolian language teacher. He was intensely lonely and suffered fits of depression—something which he was to know repeatedly in the years to come.

By December he had decided to leave the town and go out into the Mongolian countryside and try and persuade a Mongolian to allow him to share his tent. In fact to this day Mongolians are extremely hospitable and it is the accepted custom for them to accommodate in their tent (ger) passing travellers. Gilmour found his way to a cluster of gers where he was welcomed into that of a single man. He stayed with him for the next three months. On the first evening he experienced another common feature of Mongolian life then and still today: drunkenness. In this case it was a lama who burst uninvited into the tent. During these three months his ability to speak the language improved rapidly as did his understanding of Mongolian culture. And he made a lasting good impression on those he met. He began to be known as 'Our Gilmour'.

Following these three months he did some travelling in Siberia visiting the scenes of the earlier LMS missionaries. Then it was back to the countryside to stay with another Mongolian and his wife and their son who was a lama, all three of whom were addicted to whisky! By this time he could read most of the Mongolian Bible and was beginning to be able to write in the Mongolian script. He could, he said, write a 'bad letter'.

This first journey through Mongolia lasted for fifteen months. At least 600 miles of the return journey was done on horse back. The whole venture gave him a taste not only of Mongolian culture but of Mongolian weather. The winters are long and harsh with temperatures dropping to -40 or even -50 degrees. March is characterised by terrible wind and sand storms. The short summer can see temperatures of plus 40 degrees or more.

After a few months in Beijing, in April 1872, nearly two years after his arrival in China, he set out on another exploratory visit, this time to more settled agricultural Mongolians living in villages in the east of the country. It involved a round trip of 1,000 miles. He was to spend his last years working amongst these people. They spoke Chinese and could, he reasoned, be reached by Chinese speaking missionaries. So he concluded *his* first priority should be to reach the nomads in the Gobi desert and beyond.

His normal pattern for the coming years was to spend his winters in Beijing, contacting the many Mongolians who visited the capital, and the summer months itinerating amongst the nomads. For his first winter back in Beijing he rented a room at the Great Yellow Temple on the outskirts of the city because he had discovered that Mongolians tended to gather and stay there. He said, 'I live as a Chinaman, all but the clothes and the paganism'. But he was already discovering that Mongolians had little interest in the gospel.

He had come to realise that one of the ways to make effective contact with them and gain their confidence was to give them some medical help. Having picked up some understanding of basic remedies from the mission doctor at the LMS hospital in Beijing, founded in 1860, he normally carried with him a supply of medicines as well as Christian literature. And yet this had its own hazards. On one occasion he was encouraged by a man who had shown some interest in the gospel. The man had cataracts in both eyes so Gilmour made arrangements and provided the wherewithal for him to go down to a hospital in Beijing. But the operation was unsuccessful and left the man completely blind. The man who had gone with the patient explained to him what had happened: 'I saw the jewel of your eye in a bottle on the shelf. These Christians can get a great deal of money for these jewels which they take out of our eyes ...' When the two of them came back to where Gilmour was staying they stirred up a great deal of hatred against him.

After further journeys into Mongolia in 1873—his fourth year on the missionary field—Gilmour reported: 'In the shape of converts I have seen no results. I have not, as far as I am aware, seen any who even *wanted* to be a Christian. But by healing their diseases I've had opportunity to tell many of Jesus the great Physician.'

I have mentioned already Gilmour's sense of loneliness. In these days of cheap and almost instant communication with people living many thousands of miles away, and even in remote places, it is easy to forget how isolated these early missionaries (and indeed their successors for many years) must have felt. Letters from Britain took five months or more to reach Gilmour. He repeatedly urged the LMS directors of the need of a colleague. 'All that I can do I am quite willing to do, but my own progress is most seriously hampered because I am alone'.⁷ But for years his appeals were in vain.

However he himself was soon to take the initiative in finding a companion and fellow worker—a wife in fact. He did so in an unusual way, perhaps characteristic of the man but not, I think, to be commended to others!

He had proposed to a young Scottish lady but discovered she was already committed to another. So, as he wrote to a friend, 'I then put myself and the direction of this affair—I mean the finding of a wife—into God's hands, asking him to look me out one, a good one too'. (Well that would be good advice for any man wanting a wife!) The mission directors may have disappointed him but God didn't!

An old college friend named Meech had also joined the LMS and had originally been intended to work alongside Gilmour amongst Mongolians.

7 Ibid. p. 77.

However, much to Gilmour's frustration and disapproval, the Mission directors had changed their minds and designated Meech to work amongst Chinese in Beijing. Whilst staying with the Meeches in May 1873 (three years after his arrival in China) he spotted a portrait of Mrs Meech's sister, Emily Prankard. He evidently liked the look of her and, no doubt just as important and more so, he liked what he heard the Meeches say about her. Towards the end of the year he asked Mrs Meech if he could enter into correspondence with her sister and forthwith wrote to her with a proposal of marriage! Extraordinarily, she consented! Because a letter from Gilmour to his parents written at the same time as his proposal to Emily, had been delayed, they were taken completely by surprise when a letter arrived from Emily's parents telling them of the planned marriage!

Emily set sail for China in the Autumn of 1874 and arrived on 1 December. She was met at the port by a man in an old overcoat with a scarf round his neck. A week later they were married. In a letter to a friend he summarised what had happened:

I proposed in January, went up to Mongolia in spring, rode on my camels till July, and came down to Kalgan [a town in inner Mongolia at a narrow pass in the mountains which was an important trading junction on the route up to Mongolia and Russia] to find that I was an accepted man! I went to Tientsin to meet her; we arrived here [Beijing] on Thursday and were married on Tuesday morning [Dec 8th]. We had a quiet week, then I went to the country on a nine days' tour and came back two days before Christmas. We have been at home ever since. Such is the romance of a matter-of-fact man.⁸

Emily proved to be just the wife he needed—even though she was English rather than Scottish! He described her to that same friend as a 'jolly girl, as much, perhaps more, of a Christian and a Christian missionary as I am.' She was to pick up the language quickly. The first year of their married life was spent in Beijing, where James' help was needed in the mission hospital while its doctor was on furlough; but thereafter she travelled with him on his annual trips into the desert, enduring its hardships and living in a tent—now one of their own but providing little in the way of privacy. 'There is no retirement possible to those who live in tents among the Mongols,' he wrote, 'At our meals, our devotions, our ablutions, there they were—much amused and interested of course'. The bonus was their friendliness.

After less than six years together Emily's health began to deteriorate and two years later, on medical advice, they returned to Britain for a period of rest and recuperation. It was 1882. In addition to Emily's health problems,

8 Ibid. p. 103.

Gilmour himself had been in China for twelve years with little break from his labours and was nearly due for a furlough. We would say today, long, long overdue for one! But for Gilmour a change had to be as good as a rest. The LMS organised for him a long list of deputation meetings into which he threw himself with great energy. And he was persuaded to use the written notes of his experiences over the past twelve years for the preparation of a book entitled *Among the Mongols*. It had a great reception not only amongst the Christian public but more widely. The *Spectator* magazine published a glowing review. It likened the author to a real life Robinson Crusoe! It referred to the suspicions of Mongolians if Gilmour went off for a walk on his own or wrote his diary or did other things, and said, 'as a suspected missionary is a useless missionary, Mr. Gilmour gave them all up and sat endlessly in tents among lamas. And he says, incidentally, that his fault is impatience, a dislike to be kept waiting!'

The book was influential in stimulating interest in missionary work amongst Mongolians. It has even been suggested that it may have been Gilmour's greatest contribution to the missionary movement, being a major factor in others going later to this part of the harvest field.

James and Emily returned to China in 1883 after an absence of eighteen months. The following year James set out on another journey into Mongolia, this time on foot. This time he took no medicines with him and his aim was primarily to revisit people who he had previously had opportunity to teach about the gospel. They welcomed him, not least those who had benefited from his medical help previously, but there was little to encourage him in terms of response to the Lord Jesus. But there was an exception which must have made the whole wearisome, foot sore journey more than worthwhile to Gilmour. Here it is in his own words (I will give you an extended quote because it will give you a better picture both of the man himself and the kind of situation in which he spent much of his time):

An occasional rest and a bite of snow varied the painful monotony of the few last long miles; the river was reached at last and, crossing it, I was soon in front of the cluster of huts I had come to visit, and on looking up I was agreeably astonished to find that the first man to come out to meet me was the mandarin of the district. He was soon joined by others, and, rescued from the dogs [a constant hazard he had to face—some of them would have been rabid] I was escorted to his tent, seated by the fire, and supplied with a cup and a full tea-pot. I had intended to drink tea in his tent only for form's sake; but his tea was good, the snow seemed only to have increased my thirst, the man himself was sincerely friendly; under the circumstances my stoicism broke down, and the mandarin's tea pot was soon all but empty. Meanwhile, his tent had been filling with friends and neighbours to whom the news of my arrival had spread and in a little while I had round me a representative from nearly every family in the village.

He then went on to a mud built house and goes on:

The priest I had come to visit was busy lighting a fire which would do nothing but smoke, and the room was soon full (i.e. of smoke). Finding him alone, I told him that I had come to speak to him and my other friends about the salvation of their souls and was pressing him to accept Christ, when a layman I also knew entered. Without waiting for me to say anything, the priest related the drift of our conversation to the layman, who, tongs in hand, was trying to make the fire blaze. Blaze it would not but sent forth an increasing volume of smoke, and the layman, invisible to me in the dense cloud, though only about 2 yards away, spoke up and said that for months he had been a scholar of Jesus and that if the priest would join him they would become Christians together. Whether the priest would join him or not, his mind was made up, he would trust the Saviour. By this time the cloud had settled down lower still. I was lying flat on the platform, and the two men were crouching on the floor—I could just see dimly the bottom of their skin coats—but the place was as beautiful to me as the gate of heaven, and the words of the confession of Christ from out of the cloud of smoke were as inspiring to me as if they had been spoken by an angel from out of a cloud of glory.⁹

Neighbours arrived and stayed to eat and it was not until late at night that Gilmour had the opportunity to talk privately to this his first convert in fourteen years of missionary labour. His name was Boyinto. Early the following year he was baptised by an American missionary down in Kalgan.

But this great and long awaited encouragement was soon followed by great sorrow. Emily's health had been restored to some extent by the eighteen months back in Britain. But painful symptoms now began to re-appear. She tried to continue with all her duties in the work in Beijing as well as caring for three boys, Jimmie and Willie and a baby Alexander. But she became steadily weaker. James began to realise that she was not going to recover. She died in September 1885 a little less than eleven years after their marriage. The following year he sent his two older though still young sons back to Britain for their education. After seeing them off on the boat at Tiejintsin he returned alone and sorrowful to Beijing. (I assume he kept the one year old Alexander with him in Mongolia but he died two years after his mother, aged three).

The year his wife died, Gilmour had come to the conclusion, somewhat reluctantly I think, that he should leave the work amongst the Mongolian nomads to the American missionaries now settled in Kalgan and focus instead on those who had settled in the eastern region whom he had visited thirteen years previously—that is to say an area in modern Inner Mongolia. He concentrated on three towns spending about a month in each in turn and

9 Ibid. p. 161–162.

ministering to both Mongolians and Chinese. Most of the time he lived in Chinese inns and lived very simply and cheaply—much as the locals. For this he was criticised by some fellow missionaries and by mission authorities back in Britain. He responded:

I feel called to go through all this sort of thing and feel perfectly secure in God's hands. ... One thing I am sure of. The thousands here need salvation; God is most anxious to give it to them; where then is the hindrance? In them? I hardly think so. In God? No. In me, then! The thing I am praying away at now is that he would remove that hindrance by whatever process necessary. I shall not be astonished if He puts me through some fires or severe operations, nor shall I be sorry if they only end by leaving me a channel through which His saving grace can flow unhindered to these needy people. I dare not tell how much I pray for.

He went on:

It is the foreign element in our lives that runs away with the money. The foreign houses, foreign clothes, foreign food, are ruinous. In selecting missionaries, physique able to stand native houses, clothes and food should be as much a *sine qua non* as health to bear the native climate. Native clothes are, I believe, more safe for health than foreign clothes; they are more suited to the climate, more comfortable than foreign clothes, and so dressed, a Chinese house is quite comfortable. In past days I have suffered extreme discomfort by attempting to live in foreign dress in native houses.¹⁰

Each day he would set up a tent in the main thoroughfare from where he would sell Christian books, give medical help to the sick, preach the gospel and talk with enquirers. It was this latter, personal work with individuals, that he found the most productive. However during these latter years he knew of only two Mongolian converts and a dozen or so of Chinese ones—and of the latter one caused scandal and another robbed him.

At long last, in 1888, fifteen years after he had appealed urgently to the LMS directors for a colleague they sent one—a medical doctor, Dr Roberts. Gilmour was thrilled and rejoiced in the fellowship and skilled help of this man. But in less than a month he lost him. Dr Mackenzie in the LMS hospital at Tientsin died suddenly and Roberts had to move there to replace him. Gilmour wrote 'It would be untrue to say that I am not walking in the dark. I shall do my best to hold on here single handed.'¹¹

A year later the LMS sent out another medical doctor, Dr Smith, to work with Gilmour. But when he arrived he found Gilmour looking worn out and ill. It soon became clear to Dr Smith that he should be persuaded to return to

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 212–213.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 216.

Britain immediately for a period of rest. Gilmour set off for home the same month as Smith had arrived and reached this country on 25 May 1889. The break did him good and he rejoiced particularly in time spent with his two boys. How easy it would have been for him to say he had done enough and that for his boys' sake, as well as his health's, he should not return to Mongolia.

Perhaps, we may think, he would have been right not to do so! But his heart was in Mongolia and after just 8 months, in January 1890, he was on the boat back. He returned to those three towns in the East and buried himself in his work again. But he slowed down a bit (only a bit) and moderated slightly the severity of his life style.

He enjoyed the company and fellowship of Dr Smith. But within a few months Dr Smith's wife died; and as a result of this shock and his own ill health Smith returned home early the next year (1891) But as he left, another young man called John Parker arrived to work with Gilmour.

In the summer of 1891 Gilmour attended the annual LMS meetings in Tientsin. He stayed with Dr Roberts and his sister, chaired some of the meetings and preached memorably at a Sunday evening service. He also conducted services for Chinese preachers who were attending the meetings. He had appeared to be fit and vigorous but at the end of a busy week he went down with typhus fever. This, aggravated by a cardiac problem he had suffered for many years, proved fatal. Within TEN days he was dead. He died on 23 May 1891, aged forty-eight.

6. From Gilmour to the present day

John Parker continued working in the area where Gilmour had spent his last years but had to retire early because of ill health. A succession of other LMS missionaries also came including Eric Liddell's parents. Frans Larson, a Swede, worked for the British and Foreign Bible Study and did a remarkable work amongst Mongolians. Cecil Polhill Turner, one of the Cambridge Seven, and his wife, were already in China with the CIM when Gilmour died. Although their primary burden was for the Tibetans they also worked amongst Mongolians. And then there were those doughty women, Eva and Francesca French and Mildred Cable, a member of Westminster Chapel, who together, working with the CIM and again from bases in China, reached out to the Mongolians, traversing the Gobi desert and gossiping the gospel at every opportunity over the first forty years of the 20th century. Overlapping with them, a Brethren missionary, Reginald Sturt, went to China in 1907 with a passion to evangelise Mongolians and from bases in China travelled widely to reach them over forty years. He saturated the land with Gospels and evangelistic tracts. But then, as someone has written, 'the dark curtain rolled completely over Mongol lands'.

And it did not begin to be rolled back until 1990 following the collapse of the USSR, although prior to that an Englishman, John Gibben, who had gone to study in Mongolia, with the help of a Mongolian lady who became his wife, had been working on a modern translation of the New Testament into Mongolian. It was completed in 1989 and thirteen days after the first free elections in Mongolia in July 1990, 5000 copies were being printed in Hong Kong ready for immediate shipment into the country!

In 1990 the number of Christians in Mongolia (I am talking now of the country of Mongolia) was thought to be tiny in spite of all the work that had been done up until the 1940s. Some say there were only four or five. But now the country was open once again to Christians from other lands. There was a degree of religious freedom within certain limits. Seventy years of communism had dealt a severe though certainly not a fatal blow to the hold of Buddhism. (An atheistic regime can be used to further God's purposes and open doors for the gospel!) A colloquial translation of the New Testament was available. Suddenly significant numbers professed faith in Christ. Churches were planted. A Bible College was established. A Scripture Union bookshop was opened in Ulaanbaatar. It is estimated that there are now about 300 churches and 30,000 Christians. If the latter figure is correct it represents 1% of the population of three million. Sadly, and perhaps inevitably, it includes significant numbers who are probably not converted at all. Syncretism is common, as well as false teaching, not least the prosperity gospel. Mormonism and other sects are there in strength. Even so there has been remarkable growth and a remarkable work of God. Erik Thomson tells me that there are Mongolian missionaries in Afghanistan and some preparing to go to North Korea and down into Inner Mongolia, where there are many more Mongolians than in Mongolia itself.

Who can tell what relationship the spiritual harvest being reaped in Mongolia today has to the sacrificial, persistent seed sowing of James Gilmour and his 19th and early 20th century successors—and to the prayers for the evangelisation of Mongolia which James Gilmour's life and writing stimulated?

One of the things that stand out in Gilmour's story and which is a challenge I think to all of us is *his perseverance in the face of great difficulties and discouragements*. He suffered bereavements, acute loneliness, severe depression, harsh living conditions, criticism from fellow missionaries and mission authorities and saw very few conversions. He wrote in his diary in 1888:

May 7.—Downcast day. No one to prayer.

May 9.—In terrible darkness and tears for two days. Light broke over me at my stand today in the thought that Jesus was tempted forty days of the devil after His baptism, and that He felt forsaken on the cross.

May 27, Sunday.—Service, Romans 12. Present, four Christians. Great depression.¹²

Quite early on some doubted the worthwhileness of this work. Gilmour insisted on continuing. The Mongols had as much right to hear the gospel as any other man. To him the question was not so much whether great results were likely to appear as to whether it was a duty to preach the gospel to every creature. Motivated by a great love for the Lord Jesus and great zeal for His kingdom and great concern for the lost he pressed on in spite of all the difficulties and disappointments. It may well be of course that he had more converts than he ever heard about and that only eternity will reveal the true fruitfulness of his work.

Bibliography

- James Gilmour, *Among the Mongols* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1885).
 James Gilmour, *More About the Mongols*, ed. Richard Lovett (London: Religious Tract Society, 1893).
 Richard Lovett, *James Gilmour and his Boys* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1894).
James Gilmour of Mongolia: His diaries, letters and reports, edited and arranged by Richard Lovett, M. A. (3rd edition, London: The Religious Tract Society, 1895).
 Richard Lovett, *James Gilmour of Mongolia* (London: Religious Tract Society, n.d.) (this is an abbreviated version of the above).
 W. P. Nairne, *Gilmour of the Mongols* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, [1924]).
 C. Silvester Horne, *Story of the LMS 1795–1895* (London: London Missionary Society, 1895).
 Hugh P. Kemp, *Steppe by Step* (London: Monarch Books, 2000).
 Michael Kohn, *Mongolia* (London: Lonely Planet, 2005).
 Robert Storey, *Mongolia: a travel survival kit* (Chiswick: Lonely Planet Publications, 1993).

All except the last three are long out of print. Facsimiles of the first seven are available on CD-ROM via the EFCC office.

¹² Ibid. p. 149.

JAMES GILMOUR



Gilmour's medical tent



Gilmour dressed for a walking tour



*The young Samuel being brought to Eli in the Temple by his mother, Hannah (1 Samuel 1).
(from thebiblerevival.com/clipart)*

The Covenants

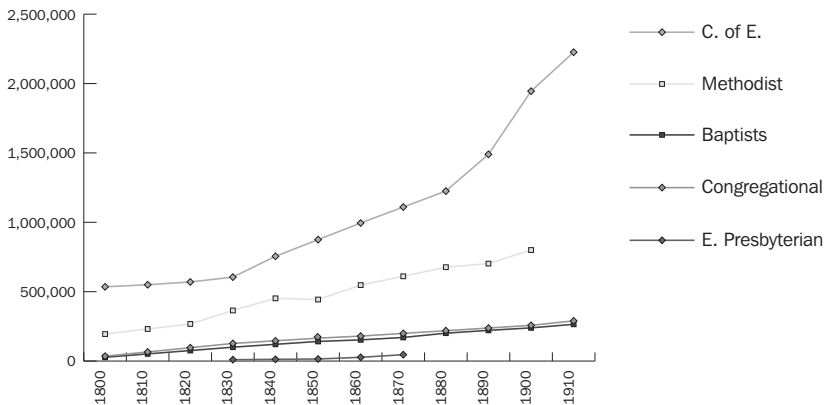
Bringing up children for God

by David Legg

It is often said that before attempting to change people's behaviour, it is necessary to engender a sense of need, without which sense, nothing will be achieved. Therefore, before turning to what both the theory and practice of godly child upbringing should be, let us first look briefly at what has been happening in the U.K. over the last 200 years, that is, the gap between the theory and the practice.

1. The Gap between Theory and Practice

The number of Evangelicals in the United Kingdom at any point in time is difficult to estimate, partly because the raw data do not correspond precisely to Evangelicals, but also because the definition of 'evangelical' is hotly contended. However, if we crudely assume that the 19th century denominations Methodist, Congregationalist, Particular Baptist and General Baptist were broadly evangelical, then Graph 1 below charts their approximate growth in membership throughout the century.¹ Also shown in Graph 1 is the trend for the Church of England Easter Sunday communicants over the same period. Many of these would be regarded as Evangelical. Together, growth over the course of the 19th century exceeds 200%. If the C. of E. growth is taken out of



Graph 1—19 century Protestant Church Growth

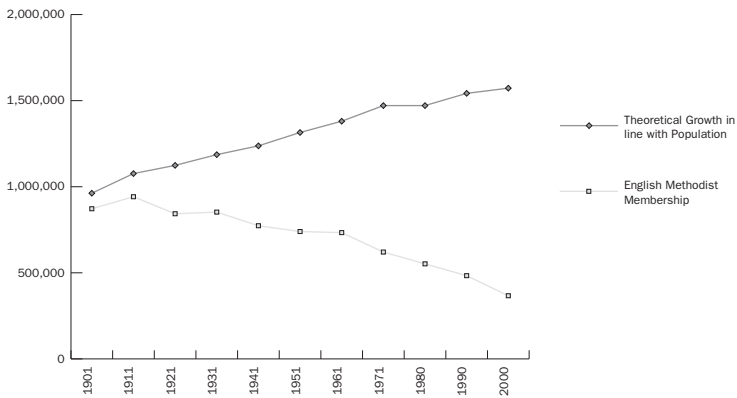
¹ The figures were taken from A.D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740–1914* (London: Longman, 1976), and have been interpolated in places to provide the visually appropriate continuity that is required for graphical presentation of the available data.

the equation, the figure exceeds 300% (these figures relate almost exclusively to England).

The immediate question is: How does 19th century compare with 20th century? The answer, according to the valuable book *Operation World*,² is that the number of protestants in the UK has been declining since the early 1900s, with evangelical church membership now standing at 2,000,000 people. His definition of ‘evangelical’ is, of necessity, *prima facie*, but this seems no cruder than the one implied above.

The growth of the 19th century has not been maintained during the 20th. In fact, the growth has been reversed, as shown in Graph 2. This graph shows English Methodist growth during much of the 19th century, but decline throughout the 20th (figures based on Currie, Gilbert and Horsley).³

Evangelical groups of churches such as the Methodists, Baptists and Congregationalists started to dilute their evangelicalism during the middle of the 19th century, but continued to grow apace until the beginning of the 20th century. Some examples taken from Currie, Gilbert and Horsley⁴ will illustrate this: Baptist Union membership rose from 239,114 in 1900 for some years before declining through most of the 20th century, the 1995 membership being 158,000. The Congregationalist picture is more complex because of the merger with the English Presbyterian denomination 1972, but well over



Graph 2—Methodist Decline/Population Growth

2 Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (Carlisle: O.M. Publishing, 1993).
 3 Figures based on R. Currie, A. D. Gilbert and L. Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in Great Britain since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) and Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (Carlisle: O.M. Publishing, 1993) (last 2 points approximated).
 4 R. Currie, A. D. Gilbert and L. Horsley, op. cit.

300,000 Congregationalists and English Presbyterians in 1900 eventually merged to become the 177,900 members of the United Reformed Church in 1995. A loss of evangelical distinctiveness was accompanied by a loss of members eventually.

In approximately the same time period, the population of the U.K. went from 30 million to nearly 60 million. If the number of Evangelicals had grown in line with normal population growth during the 20th century, we would expect there to have been a 100% increase in church membership. This would be a similar shape to the upper line in Graph 2 above (bearing in mind that Graph 2 only covers the Methodists).

Therefore, if 20th century Evangelicals had at least managed to direct their children after them in the faith, even without adding outsiders to the church, there would now be more than twice as many Evangelicals as in 1900. Instead of that 100% growth, we have a 60% decline. Instead of 200% of the 1900 membership, we have something like 40%.

What are we to think of these statistics? We could simply conclude that God does not care about Christians' children any more than non-Christians', and that he has therefore saved fewer and fewer of them in each successive generation.

2. The Importance of the Family or Household

And yet, to say that God does not care about Christians' children is hardly a satisfactory understanding of the statistics, because it fails to take into account both observable trends and God's stated opinion on the subject: Time and time again, he spells it out in the Bible that he wants godly children. For example, he explained through the prophet Malachi:

2:15 ... he [the LORD] was seeking godly offspring.

In Deuteronomy 6:2, he says:

... so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live ...

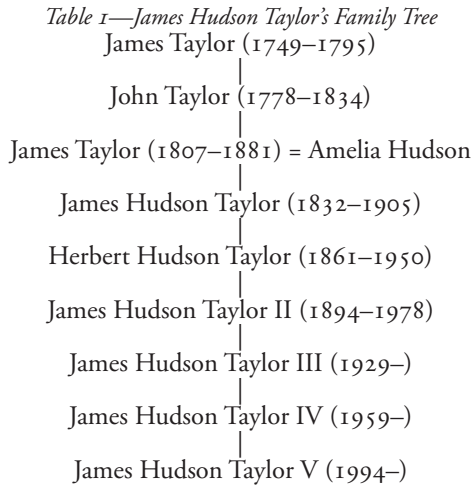
Clearly, the 19th century statistics are God-honouring; the 20th century ones are not. In the light of the following verses from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, both Christians and their children have been failing by a long way to obey God's revealed will.

6:1 *Children*, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

6:4 *Fathers*, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

The vital combination of parents bringing up their children to be godly and of children responding in godly obedience is all but unrecognisable in the 20th

century church statistics. And yet anecdotal evidence is clear that often Christian parents do manage to bring up their children in such a way that many or all of them embrace Christ and profess him lifelong. Furthermore, many churches contain ‘dynasties’ where particular families have been largely Christian for many generations. Although such families are commonplace, an example seems in order. I recently purchased a book about the family of the well known James Hudson Taylor, missionary to China and founder of the China Inland Mission. The title of the book is *God’s Grace to Nine Generations*.⁵ See Table 1 below.



Sometimes, as per Ephesians 6:1, children as *individuals* are held personally accountable for obeying their parents. This is one way in which God relates to humans; on the one hand he relates to individuals, not just to groups of people. Another example: He holds us responsible for our own individual behaviour:

Ezekiel:18:4 The soul who sins is the one who will die.

Thankfully, God also offers grace to individuals so that they need not ‘die’.

The Bible also tells us ways in which God relates to *nations* (see the book of Obadiah), to *churches* (Revelation 1:11ff, Chapter 2, Chapter 3) and to *households*. The concept of the household is usually the same as that of the family in the Bible. Nowadays in the West, it is different because not many

5 James Hudson Taylor III, *God’s Grace to Nine Generations*, series editor Julia Cameron (Sevenoaks: OMF Publishing, 1999).

families have servants, but in Bible-times, servants were commonplace and formed part of the family. So when Abram lamented the fact that he had no son who would inherit all God's blessings to him, he naturally concluded that all his wealth would be inherited by his chief servant (Genesis 15:3), so firmly were servants regarded as being part of the family.

Genesis 15:3 And Abram said, 'You have given me no children; so a servant in my *household* will be my heir.'

So in what ways does God relate to families or households? Here are some examples from the Bible.

a. God *separates* families from the world and saves them, either physically, spiritually, or both.

Acts 11:14 'He [Simon Peter] will bring you a message through which you and all your *household* will be saved'.

Genesis 7:1 The LORD then said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and your whole *family*, because I have found you righteous in this generation'.

Acts 16:31 They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your *household*'.

Other examples include the families of Rahab and Zacchaeus.

b. He expects *godly* families to live up to his standards, to be different from the World around them:

Colossians 3:

v18 Wives, submit to your husbands, ...

v19 Husbands, love your wives ...

v20 Children, obey your parents ...

v21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, ...

v22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters ...

Jos. 24:15 'But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD'.

c. God blesses and protects certain households. Notice how the blessing given to the individual is graciously extended to cover the whole family.

2 Samuel 6:12 Now King David was told, 'The LORD has blessed the *household* of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God'.

2 Timothy 1:16 May the Lord show mercy to the *household* of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.

d. Households are not only blessed; sometimes they are cursed or afflicted directly by God.

Points a. to d. above, when collected together, show us how God relates to families or households. He chooses them and sets them apart from the world,

making promises to them. He saves them from their sin, enemies and destruction. He expects them to be faithful to him and keep his rules. He blesses and protects them, but also afflicts them. They must respond in obedience and faith. All these amount to the practical outworking of what the Bible calls ‘covenants’. All of the above verses were written or spoken because God entered into a covenant relationship with certain families or households. All the major Biblical covenants have to do with families.

3. Covenants and Genesis

Many words have been expended to answer the question of what a covenant is; see for example *The Christ of the Covenants* by O. Palmer Robertson.⁶ Often, learned and theological definitions of what a covenant is turn out to be so narrow that they exclude obviously covenantal relationships (such as marriage, for example) from being classed as covenants. The following definition attempts to avoid the problem of over-complication.

Definition of Covenant:

A covenant is a *relationship* that is formally expressed in terms of one or more of the following: *Promises, Obligations and Signs*. So, for an everyday example, a marriage is based upon a marriage covenant. The man and woman formally *promise* fidelity to each other; the man is *obliged* to love his wife; a ring is given as a public *sign* (and ‘seal’) of the relationship.

Sometimes, not all three elements are present in a covenant, but often they are. For example, in God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17, there are many parts including *promises* (‘to be your God ...’ v. 7), *obligations* (‘walk before me and be blameless’ v. 1) and a *sign* (or ‘seal’) (‘circumcision ... the sign of the covenant’ v. 11), such that all three basic elements are present in force. (Where the term ‘seal’ is used together with ‘sign’, it means that the sign not only symbolises the covenant, but also guarantees it too. More on seals in Section 8.5).

In order to understand the Bible, it is necessary to understand about its covenants. If we do not understand the covenants in the Bible, we cannot understand its structure or detail. In particular (for the purpose of this paper: the bringing up of children), it is necessary to be clear about the importance of God’s covenant with Abraham. Many behave as if it had been obliterated first by the Old Covenant and then by the New Covenant, buried under at least two archaeological layers, irrelevant. The following passage from Galatians explains that God’s covenant with Abraham cannot be set aside; its purpose is

6 O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980).

to bring blessing to the Gentiles, i.e. nowadays, and that subsequent covenants, for example ‘the law’, could not make it redundant.

Galatians 3:14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles ...

¹⁵ ... Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.

¹⁷ What I mean is this: The law [that is, the Old Covenant], introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.

Most versions of the Bible make both the Abrahamic Covenant and the book of Genesis seem irrelevant:

- They label the first two thirds of the Bible ‘The Old Testament’. Because a testament sounds similar to a covenant, this accidentally suggests that Genesis and the Abrahamic Covenant are part of the Old Covenant which has been superseded (see later). ‘Genesis is interesting history that can be ignored nowadays’, is implied. ‘You may find some helpful principles in there and some good stories, but it’s obsolete.’
- The first book is named ‘Genesis’, meaning ‘beginnings’. This is a most unhelpful title because the contents of the book are absolutely fundamental to the understanding and correct application of the whole Bible. A much better title might have been ‘Foundations’ or ‘Origins’ as per Philip Eveson’s commentary on Genesis.⁷

There is an organisation called ‘Answers in Genesis’. The fact that such a name is required illustrates how the book of Genesis has been misunderstood, sidelined and generally considered unimportant. Because of this malaise and as an antidote to it, the importance and relevance of the Book of Genesis cannot be overstated. In it we find both the Covenant of Creation and God’s covenant with Abraham. These major covenants are foundational to the covenant structure of the Bible. See Dr Golding’s historical survey of covenant theology.⁸

Whereas the 1658 *Savoy Declaration*⁹ (Chapter 7—Of God’s Covenant with Man) breaks down God’s relationship with man into just two separate covenants, the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace (see Illustration 1), 20th century writers have recognised that there is a fundamental *Covenant*

7 Philip Eveson, *The Book of Origins*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2003).

8 Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology* (Fearn, Tain: Christian Focus, Mentor Series, 2004).

9 *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order* (London, 1658); reprinted in *Evangelical and Congregational*, 2nd ed. (Weston Rhyn: Quinta Press, 2003).

DAVID LEGG

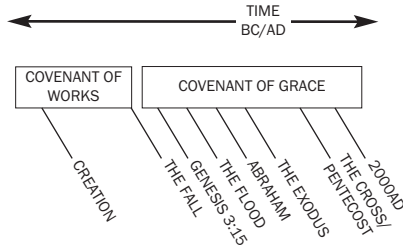


Illustration 1: Summary of biblical covenants as per Savoy Declaration 1658

of Creation which is the basis of God’s relationship with man, for example O. Palmer Robertson, in *The Christ of the Covenants*.¹⁰

William Dumbrell, in *Covenant and Creation*,¹¹ takes this idea further and states (page 43) that there is ‘a covenant implied by the fact of creation itself ... There could only be one biblical covenant, of which the later biblical covenants must be sub-sets.’ In Chapter 1 he also demonstrates that God’s covenant with Noah is in fact a confirmation of the Covenant of Creation, not a separate covenant: He writes ‘the evidence of Genesis 9:9–17 strongly implied that the covenant which was confirmed with Noah had been brought into existence by the act of creation itself.’

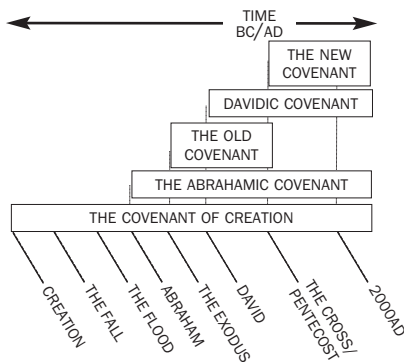


Illustration 2: The persistence of covenants

¹⁰ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980).

¹¹ William Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002).

This paper argues that there are five main covenants in the Bible that give it structure and coherence (Illustration 2). There are other covenants that compete for inclusion in the top five. Also, most of the five major covenants can be broken down into a number of smaller covenants, revealing more detail, but that would complicate the overall picture unnecessarily.

At any point in time, in Illustration 2, we can draw a vertical line through the covenants. All the covenants with which the line intersects are legally binding on people alive at that point in time. For example, when Jesus explains about the origin of circumcision, he does not say that the reason people should have been circumcised was because Moses said so, that is because of the Old Covenant. He seems to correct(!) himself:

John 7:22 Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath.

Although Jesus and the Jews were legally bound by the Old Covenant, he is showing us that the Abrahamic Covenant was still in force, and that actually circumcision came from Abraham ('the patriarchs') not from the Old Covenant ('Moses').

It is also necessary to have in our minds the notion of a '*Controlling Covenant*'; this is always the covenant on top (in Illustration 2). The Controlling Covenant has the effect of redefining some of the details of the underlying covenants. For example, if we draw a vertical line down through the new Covenant, we might be concerned that the Abrahamic Covenant, still being in force, tells us to be circumcised! However, this is not necessary, because the Controlling Covenant, that is the New Covenant (the one on top), has converted the sign of circumcision into baptism (as per Colossians 2:11-13).

¹¹In him [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in *baptism* ...

The Controlling Covenant can never cause God to be unfaithful to any of his previous promises, but it can relax obligations (i.e. circumcision becoming less bloody now that it has been turned into baptism). The Controlling Covenant can also expand previously given promises, so that for example, the promised land given to Abraham becomes the New Earth under the New Covenant. In the same way, the Creation Covenant's Sabbath is converted into the Lord's Day under the New Covenant. The day of the week changes, and the regulations are relaxed a little, e.g. no death penalty for non-observance, as there was under the Old Covenant (Exodus 35:2).

Therefore, Illustration 2 above presents a complete but simplified (abstracted) picture of the covenant structure in the Bible.

The remainder of this paper describes the five major covenants, only touching briefly on the Davidic because it is not within the scope of the main argument.

- The Covenant of Creation
- The Abrahamic Covenant
- The Old Covenant
- The Davidic Covenant
- The New Covenant

4. The Covenant of Creation

As part of creating the World and everything in it, God created Mankind and gave the whole human family the following obligation:

Genesis 1:27–28 So God created man in his own image, ... God blessed them and said to them, ...

‘... fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over ... every living creature ...’

The creation of man in God’s image provides the immediate context for giving Mankind the obligation to have dominion over Creation. As Genesis 1 and 2 unfold, the mystery of how finite Man can possibly ‘image’ the Infinite Creator is gradually revealed. There are three main things that Mankind is obliged to do:

- (a) Mankind must image God by ruling over the Earth (Genesis 1:26).
- (b) Mankind must image the Creator by working six days and resting on the Sabbath (Genesis 2:3; Exodus 20:10–11).
- (c) Men and women must image God in his relationship to his people through marriage (Genesis 1:27; 2:18; Ephesians 5:31–32).

To be sure, there are many ways in which Man is like God and can therefore be said to have been made in his image. But much more important, when it comes to considering the Covenant of Creation, is the notion that Man must image God functionally.¹² That is, not only *are* we like God, but we must also *behave* like he does. Hence, (a), (b) and (c) above must be seen as the main obligations that form the Covenant of Creation. To summarise the Covenant with respect to Man and his obligations, we could simply say ‘Man must “image” God’. To this basic obligation were added some signs and also some promises.

12 Robert C. Newman, ‘Some Perspectives on the Image of God’ in *Man from Biblical Theology*, Research Report 21 (Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1984); Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 34.

At first sight, the Covenant of Creation may not look like a covenant. Indeed, as already mentioned, traditionally authors describe something called the Covenant of Works. What they identify as a whole covenant amounts to little more than God's command to Adam that he should not eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. To say that the Covenant of Works satisfactorily describes God's initial relationship with Mankind fails to take into account most of the information given in Genesis 1 and 2 (Indeed William Dumbrell completely disposes of the idea of the Covenant of Works¹³). A more substantial covenant can clearly be identified in those chapters by stepping back from the chapters a little and establishing precisely what God's relationship was with Mankind, and by summarising it in terms of Obligations, Promises and Signs.

The two covenant obligations that are most under attack today are:

- The Sabbath, and
- Marriage,

so what follows are some thoughts on these obligations and some applications for today.

Although it is helpful to look to later passages of Scripture for explanations of the details in the Covenant of Creation, the writers and speakers in the later passages always appeal to Genesis 1 and 2 for the authority behind what they are explaining. For instance, the Sabbath aspect of the covenant is explained in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:9), but the authority is shown in verse Exodus 20:11 by appealing to Genesis 2:3.

... but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (alluding to Genesis 2:3.)

In the same way, the 21st century people of God must accept the authority of Genesis 2 and ensure that a Sabbath's Day's rest is observed in the family. Not only will this form good habits in the rising generation, but it will also provide opportunity to spend time in spiritual activity with them, showing how in practice we call the Lord's Day a delight (Isaiah 58:13).

Genesis 1:27 makes it clear that man and woman together must image God.

... in the image of God he created him; male and female.

But, the fact that this is through the marriage relationship only becomes clear in 2:18 where God, in effect, says that for man to image God adequately, he needs to have 'a helper suitable for him'. This doctrine is unfolded gradually through the rest of the Bible, reaching fulfilment in Revelation 21 as the

13 Dumbrell, op.cit. See the summary on p. 43 and his Excursus on p. 44.

bride of Christ is presented to the Lamb, but the basis for it all is found in Genesis 1.

The Covenant of Creation is *everlasting*. After the Flood, this covenant was formally confirmed and added to in the presence of Noah and his family (Genesis 8:15–9:17). It is initiated in Genesis 1 and 2 but also ratified formally as a covenant in Genesis 9:9.¹⁴ When God confirms and adds to the Covenant of Creation in Genesis 9, he makes it clear that the covenant is *everlasting*. It is important to note that it is more than God's promise not to flood the Earth again that is *everlasting*; it is the whole covenant. So, in Illustration 2, the Covenant of Creation is shown as persisting throughout all time including the present day, when the subject of Man in the Image of God is being challenged by atheism, humanism, evolutionism, feminism, alternative lifestyles, antinomianism etc. Atheism says that Man has created God in his own image. Humanism says that Man is the measure of all things; forget God. Evolutionism says that we are all here by accident, not with the purpose of imaging God. Feminism strikes at the rôle women in imaging the relationship of God's people to God in marriage, by saying that marriage is outmoded, wifely submission is degrading and that women are not meant to help their husbands. Meanwhile, so-called alternative lifestyles attempt to tear apart marriage by pretending that men don't need women and that women can ignore men. Into all this confusion, the Covenant of Creation speaks, saying 'No, you must image God in the ways he has prescribed in Genesis 1–9'.

Those are the obligations of the covenant; what of the promises and signs? The signs appear to be the two trees and, in particular, whether Adam and Eve would eat from them or not. They were there to crystallise the two alternatives built into the covenant promise. Alternative number one was the promise of eternal life as signified (and possibly imparted) by the Tree of Life. Alternative number two was death. The Tree of Knowledge was clearly stated to be out of bounds by God in Genesis 2:17, and connected with death.

By letting part of Creation (the serpent) get the better of them, by rôle reversal of the husband and wife, Adam and Eve failed to image God. Less subtly, they also broke a direct command of God by failing to believe him, because even before the Fall, faith was a basic part of Man's relationship with God. So, for the first time, a failure to believe God's promises (i.e. a lack of faith) led to a failure to image God and to a broken covenant. The translation of Hosea 6:7 is not indisputable,¹⁵ but would appear to support a view of covenant theology that includes the Covenant of Creation:

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 45.

Hosea 6:7 Like Adam, they have broken the covenant—they were unfaithful to me there.

5. The Abrahamic Covenant

After the Fall, a pattern of selection and rejection emerges: God selected Seth and rejected Cain the murderer; he selected Noah and his family, but rejected everyone else in the Flood; he selected Shem, but rejected Ham and Japheth soon after the Flood. Finally, God selected Abraham and his descendants and rejected nearly everyone else in order to establish a people for himself. Although there had previously been godly lineages, for example that of Seth, God had never established an identifiable godly nation before. This, he decided to do, through Abram, renaming him Abraham which means ‘father of many’.

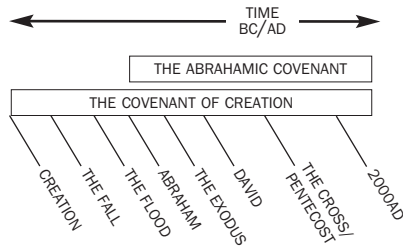


Illustration 3: The Everlasting Abrahamic Covenant

Abraham’s personal relationship with God was based upon faith (Genesis 15:6), as it had been with his forbears from Abel onwards (Hebrews 11, especially verse 4); in fact Abraham is known as the ‘the man of faith’ (Galatians 3:9). So, when God promised him Canaan, a son and heir plus many other descendants, Abraham believed God and God gave to him complete righteousness. To show that he was serious in his promises to Abraham, and to ratify the covenant, God gives him a vision which is described in Genesis 15. Some animals were cut in half, and God passed between them as if to say: ‘If I do not keep my covenant, may I become like these dead animals’. So Abraham could be in no doubt that God was going to keep his promises and covenant. This all happened when Abraham was aged between 75 and 85 years.

God first promised Abraham children in Genesis 12:2 when he was 75 years old, and God’s covenant with him is revealed mainly in Chapters 12, 15 and 17. The fullest ‘cutting’ of the covenant is in Chapter 17 when Abraham

was 99 years old. He didn't become father of the promised son until a year later when he was 100 years old. So, Abraham has to wait 25 years for God to keep his promise. What happens in the other chapters, 13, 14 and 16? Why does the writer bother with them? Why didn't he just merge 12, 15 and 17 to give us a neat can-do summary of the covenant?

In chapters 13 and 14, we see Abraham, man of faith, trusting God, acting righteously and bravely, in contrast with Lot who was weak and only trusted God feebly. But then in Chapter 16, disaster struck when Abraham wobbled in his belief of one particular promise. He had been waiting ten years for the promised son and, all of a sudden, Abraham and Sarah replayed what happened in the Garden of Eden: Roles were reversed when Sarah took the initiative and presented Abraham with her maidservant Hagar to act as a surrogate mother for the son of promise. Whoever said the Bible was not up to date? Abraham temporarily lost his grip on God's promise and a different son was born instead of the son of promise.

So when the covenant was re-established in Chapter 17, God told Abraham to 'walk before' him 'and be blameless', adding a new covenant sign, circumcision. On the positive side, circumcision spoke of trusting God (Romans 4:11) and being devoted to him (Genesis 17), also of regeneration (Romans 2:29; Colossians 2:11). On the negative side, the selection of the particular organ for circumcision served to remind Abraham of its misuse in chapter 16. Also the shedding of blood in circumcision was part of a long pattern of blood-letting that started in Genesis 3:21 and continued for thousands of years with animal sacrifices, many subsequent circumcisions, and the Cross. In this way, the blood of circumcision reminded Abraham and his descendants of sin, and of how we come into the world as sinners for whom blood must be shed, for 'without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sin' (Hebrews 9:22).

Table 2 below shows how the Abrahamic Covenant is both an everlasting covenant and a family covenant. In fact, all the major biblical covenants without exception are family covenants. All but one are everlasting.

Table 2—Summary of God's Covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17

Obligations

... walk before me and be blameless. v. 1.

... you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants ... v. 9.

Every male among you shall be circumcised. v. 10.

Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant. v. 14.

Promises

[I] will greatly increase your numbers. v. 2.

You will be the father of many nations. v. 4.

I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. v. 6.

... an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. v. 7.

I will be their God. v. 8.

I will bless her [Sarah] and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her. v. 16.

... your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. v. 19.

And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. v. 20.

But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year. v. 21.

Signs

I will confirm my covenant between me and you ... v. 2.

... your name will be Abraham v. 5.

You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. v. 11.

For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money ... v. 12.

My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. v. 13.

... her name will be Sarah. v. 15.

6. The Old Covenant and the Davidic Covenant

By this stage, a pattern should be becoming clear: Covenants do not just evaporate and disappear when a newer covenant appears; they persist for ever. However, there is one exception to this. One covenant was intended to be temporary and it is the Old Covenant, sometimes referred to (confusingly for us) as the 'First' or 'Former' Covenant.

Hebrews 8:13 By calling this covenant ‘new’, he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and ageing will soon disappear.

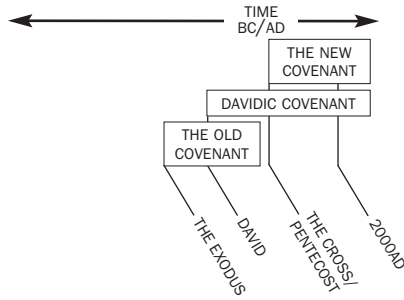


Illustration 4: The Old and Davidic Covenants

It was never intended by God to be permanent, although many of its themes carry on into the subsequent covenant, the New Covenant. For example, the redemption of the people from Egypt, the sacrifices offered and the office of priest all make their way into the New Covenant. The redemption from Egypt becomes redemption from sin and enemies; the animal sacrifices are perfectly and finally fulfilled by Christ’s sacrifice; the office of priest is partly fulfilled by Christ in his mediatorial rôle, and partly by the priesthood of all believers.

The dietary rules in Leviticus, however, are not binding upon modern Christians. As 1 Corinthians 10 makes clear, the themes of the Old Covenant serve as examples for New Covenant believers.

1 Corinthians 10:6 Now these things occurred as examples ...

That is why, despite being obsolete and without direct binding power over Christians, the Old Covenant is rich in examples, principles and pictures which provide a wealth of spiritual food and direction. It occupies the largest portion of the Bible. What Christian would want to dispense with the Psalms? Nevertheless, pieces of the Old Covenant have to be understood in their original context, and their essential principles or ingredients extracted; then those same essential truths must be re-applied in the New Covenant way, because the New Covenant is the ‘Controlling Covenant’. Without such an approach to, say the Psalms, precious verses can be read and scandalously disregarded. For example, who would want to lose this promise just because it originated under the Old Covenant?

Psalm 103:17 But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children—with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

The Kingdom of Israel was a prototype of God's later Kingdom. The covenant obligation placed upon the people was to exemplify and image God's eternal kingdom, primarily through keeping God's law. If they are faithful to the covenant, God will live with them (signified by the temple) and they will remain in the Promised Land. However, before the Old Covenant is finished and over, another important covenant makes an appearance.

6.1 The Everlasting Davidic Covenant

Because it arises in the context of the Old Covenant, and in the same frame of time, it is necessary to deal with the Davidic Covenant in parallel with the Old Covenant. A kingdom is incomplete, of course, without a king. The various Jewish kings were sometimes good, sometimes bad, the good being types (pictures) of Christ the King who would come and bring his spiritual kingdom with him. After one bad king, Saul, God raised up David, a good king 'after his own heart' (1 Samuel 13:14). Although David's kingdom would eventually crumble, be divided into two and the people taken off into exile, God made an everlasting covenant with David. This is the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7:

7:16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.

What makes this covenant everlasting (like all the others except the Old Covenant) is its fulfilment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke 1:32 'He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.'

This is why Illustration 2 above has that slightly odd shape, with the Old and New Covenants not simply butting up to each other, but being separated by the Davidic Covenant.

6.2 The Failure of the Old Covenant

The principle new sign introduced for the Old Covenant is that of the Passover. This is because the basis of the Old Covenant is the people's redemption from Egypt (Hebrews 8:8-9). They were passed over by the Angel of Death because of the sacrificed passover lamb; the Egyptians were punished because they chose to remain outside God's covenant. All these elements are clearly adopted by the New Covenant, but not before the Old Covenant has been seen to fail.

Israel rejected God, broke his laws, worshipped idols and eventually lost the Promised Land. Although a remnant made it back to the Promised Land, it was not long before they were conquered by successive empires. By the time

of the Roman Empire, a new covenant was needed, because of the failure of the people to keep the old one (Hebrews 8:8).

Hebrews 8:8–11 *But God found fault with the people* and said : “The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 9 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. 10 This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 11 No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. [italics indicate my emphasis]

7. The New Covenant

It is important to realise that the New Covenant is not a replacement for everything that went before, it is a replacement for the Old Covenant. All the other covenants are still in force; see Illustration 5 below.

Some might think, at this point, that Hebrews 8:11 is teaching that children cannot be included in the New Covenant until they come to faith for themselves: ‘they will all know me’, but:

- a. the prophet is not talking about children in the passage: ‘No longer will a *man* ...’
- b. the phrase ‘the least of them’ is talking about people’s social class, not their age.
- c. the writer is describing the essential difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant as being how the New will be better than the Old because it is a spiritual covenant. Instead of being redeemed merely outwardly in their bodies from Egypt, the people will now be redeemed spiritually so that they know God, not through outward ceremonies, but in their hearts (v. 10). They will obey his law because they want to and are enabled to by regeneration. Many of God’s Old Covenant people grew up to be unbelievers, but they still remained members of his covenant people, often for many generations. Under the New Covenant, this is no longer true, because those who grow up to be unbelievers forfeit their covenant membership (Romans 11:22). This is the contrast that the passage is making (more on Romans 11 later).
- d. the previous discussion of the Abrahamic Covenant shows that it is still in force and ‘everlasting’, so Genesis 17:7 and 2 Corinthians 1:20 still apply to believers’ children nowadays; God still promises to be their God.

THE COVENANTS

Otherwise Hebrews 8 would, somehow, be undoing the Abrahamic Covenant!

- e. Many Old Testament prophecies make it clear that the New Covenant will hold blessings for the children of God's people (Isaiah 49:22–23, 25, Jeremiah 32:39–41). In verses *such as these*, Old Testament imagery is used to portray future New Testament spiritual blessings for believers and their children.
- f. the New Testament makes it clear that believers' children are not relegated to mere Gentile status, but are holy even if only one parent is a believer (1 Corinthians 7:14).

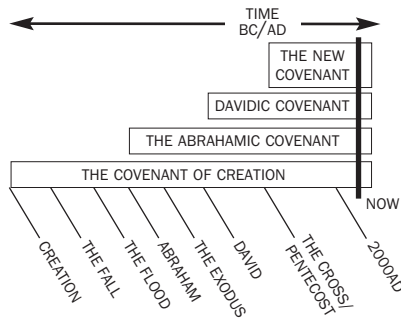


Illustration 4: Covenants Now in Force

An unbiblical attitude to ‘covenant children’ was exhibited by Jesus’ disciples in Mark 10:13–14.

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, *for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these*’.

Some would say that this passage illustrates Jesus’ love of all children in a purely sentimental way, but in the light of verses such as Psalm 137:9, such a view is just theologically vague (if politically correct). Jesus loved those particular children because they were covenant children, children of his people. Jesus was committed to blessing them because of God’s promises to Abraham such as Genesis 22:17, and the passages mentioned above from Isaiah 49 and Jeremiah 32.

The next objection is that ‘*such as these*’ in Mark 10:14 merely means that we need to be like the little children (as is explained in v. 15). This is a mistake because it means that the reader has failed to apply v. 14 before moving on to the next verse, and has confused the separate meanings of the two verses.

Perhaps, such an objection merely shows an unwillingness to believe Jesus' gracious statement concerning the status of the covenant children? What Jesus was actually saying was that these children were examples of people who were enjoying the benefits and privileges of being in his kingdom. The fact that Jesus makes reference to the 'Kingdom' where he could have used the term 'covenant' makes it absolutely clear that he is placing the children under the care of the New Covenant, not the Old. This is because the Kingdom of God is really a New Covenant concept. The Kingdom was modelled, imaged and typified, warts and all, under the Old Covenant, but only under the New Covenant is it realised and completely fulfilled.

The New Covenant makes possible what was impossible under the previous covenants (see Illustration 2). The failure to image God under the Covenant of Creation is turned around, and now God's people are able to image God by living in a Christ-like fashion. The formation of a pure and spiritual people of God that was only partially achieved under the Abrahamic Covenant is made achievable under the New Covenant. The pictures and examples provided by the Old Covenant come to fruition under the New. By the time the New Covenant culminates in the general Resurrection and establishment of the new Earth, all the themes of all the covenants will have been fulfilled under the banner of the New Covenant. This is even true of the Promised Land which was lost because of the people's failure to keep the Old Covenant. By the time that the New Covenant has finished its work with the Promised Land, it will have grown to become the whole New Earth (Matthew 5:5; Romans 4:13).

Circumcision, the sign and seal of the Abrahamic Covenant which was retained under the later Old Covenant, is replaced by something less bloody, baptism (Colossians 2:11-13). A much neglected, but indisputably biblical notion, is that baptism also pictures the divine cleansing promised of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:47, Matthew 3:11). For the believer, God promises through the sign and seal of baptism that he forgives (washes away) his sin and will cleanse him inwardly through the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, God promises to wash away his people's children's sin (Acts 16:31-33) and give them the Holy Spirit too (Acts 2:38-39). All that is required is to believe the promises and put them into action (see later). We have to be very careful here, because the essential New Covenant obligation is to believe *such as the ones* in this paragraph. If we try to wriggle out of believing them by explaining them away, that is unbelief, and will result in us missing God's blessing. Think also of Jesus' indignation in Mark 10:13-14.

Acts 2:38 Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the

gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call’.

An example of misinterpretation is the way that Acts 2:39 is sometimes divided up. It is possible to read the verse in *such a way* that it seems to be talking about three separate groups of people: ‘you’, ‘your children’ and ‘all who are far off’. But this would be to fail to recognise that Peter is restating God’s covenant promises by using the language of the covenants as in Deuteronomy 1:39; 4:9; 6:7; 12:28; 30:2 (Old Covenant), Genesis 17:7 (Abrahamic Covenant), also 1 Corinthians 7:14, Ephesians 6:1–3 (New Covenant). Consequently, a correct division of Acts 2:39 is into two groups of people as follows: ‘you and your children’ (Jews), and ‘all who are far-off’ (Gentiles). With the correct division, it is then unthinkable that the second group of people would exclude their children, thus the promise of the Holy Spirit is identical for Jews and Gentiles. Not only is this interpretation of the verse intellectually satisfying, but it also honours the covenant context of Peter’s sermon, and ties in neatly with what Paul explains in Ephesians 2:11–13:

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

8. The Persistent Themes of the Covenants

Each covenant consists of features that do not necessarily find their way unchanged into subsequent covenants. However, each feature can readily be understood to be part of a much broader ‘theme’. These themes persist from one covenant to the next, for example the theme of Eternal Life, is very important(!) and recurs in various shapes and forms throughout all the covenants until it is fulfilled for ever. The recurring promises, obligations and signs are shown in Table 3 below.

The remainder of this section covers a sample of five important recurring themes:

- The Promise of Eternal Life
- The Promise of Salvation for Children
- The Obligation to Believe God’s Promises
- The Obligation to Obey God and Produce Godly Offspring
- The Signs and Seals of the Covenants

Table 3—Themes of the Main Covenants

Promises	Obligations	Signs
<i>Creation Covenant</i> Eternal Life or Death.	Image God through World Dominion, the Work and Rest, and Marriage. Believe God. To bring up godly offspring. Malachi 2:15.	Tree of Life. Tree of Knowledge.
<i>Abrahamic Covenant</i> God would be his God and the God of his descendants. Heir of the World (Romans 4:13). The Promised Land. Resurrection. Many descendants. Blessings for descendants.	Take possession of the Promised Land. Believe God. Walk before God and be blameless. Direct his family in God's ways.	A new name 'Abraham'. Stars and sand on the seashore. A sacrificial vision. Genesis 15. Animal sacrifice. Circumcision. Genesis 17.
<i>Old Covenant</i> To be Israel's God. Blessings for them and their children. Psalm 37:25 Remaining in the Promised Land.	Take possession of the Promised Land. Believe God. Keep God's law. Teach God's law to their children. Deut. 6:7. Keep the Sabbath. Exodus 20:8.	The Passover. Circumcision. Animal and other sacrifices. The Temple, etc.
<i>New Covenant</i> Inherit the New Earth. Resurrection.	Be Christ-like. Believe God (Romans 4).	The Lord's Supper. Baptism.

Eternal Life thereon.	Keep the Law of Christ.
Be with God for ever.	Whole of life a sacrifice.
God's Law written on hearts by the Holy Spirit.	Bring up children to be godly.
Salvation for children.	Observe the Lord's Day.
Isaiah 49:25.	Revelation 1:10.

Final Fulfilment

Christ's sacrifice.

Resurrection to eternal life or eternal death.

God's people live with him for ever.

God's people inherit the New Earth (including the Promised Land).

God's whole family complete.

The wedding of Christ and his people.

Sinlessness for God's people.

God's people, at last, in the image of God.

8.1 The Promise of Eternal Life

The promise of eternal life first appeared in the Garden of Eden when God gave Adam and Eve two trees as signs of the Covenant of Creation. The Tree of Life promised eternal life to them if they would keep God's covenant. Because they broke the covenant and ate from the other tree, the Tree of Knowledge, this did not mean that the promise of eternal life was suddenly abandoned by God. However it had to be delayed and modified since Adam and Eve were now bound to die. So, the promise of eternal life became the promise of the Resurrection. Although hinted at earlier in the Bible, the promise of resurrection really becomes clear with Abraham.

Romans 4:13 Abraham and his offspring received the promise that *he would be heir of the world*.

Hebrews 11 also makes it clear that Abraham was expecting to be resurrected.

Hebrews 11:16 Instead, they were *longing for a better country*—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God ...

Hebrews 11 suggests something that is proved elsewhere—that eternal life and the resurrection of the body are an integral part of the most basic promise of all, the promise that God will be our God (Genesis 17:8). This is proved in Mark 12:26 where Jesus refutes the Sadducees (who did not believe in the resurrection so they were sad-you-see).

Mark 12:26 *Now about the dead rising*—have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, '*I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*'?

In this single sentence, Jesus proves the doctrine of the bodily resurrection from the simple statement that God was Abraham's God. In other words, when God promised in Genesis 17 to be Abraham's God, he was also guaranteeing his resurrection and his eternal life. In this way, both the Covenant of Creation and the Abrahamic Covenant were both affecting God's relationship with Abraham, the former because it had been broken and meant that Abraham had to die, the latter because it will reverse his death through the Resurrection and restore eternal life to him, as offered in the Covenant of Creation. This is roughly the same situation that we are in today, regretting the broken Covenant of Creation (Romans 3:19), but inheriting the promises made to Abraham (Galatians 3:14), because both of these covenants are still in force (Imagine drawing that vertical line through all except the Old Covenant in Illustration 2). In the same way that God being Abraham's God meant that the promise of resurrection was his, so it guaranteed all God's promises. The covenant statement 'I am your God' is taken by Jesus as an irrevocable, indefatigable covenant commitment.

We see complete continuity between the covenants. What is undone under one covenant is later repaired. The details change, but the essential ingredients of God being his people's God and giving them eternal life are preserved.

Another thing to observe is that the fate of the children is bound up with that of their parents. Under the Covenant of Creation, Adam and Eve's descendants were plunged into sin and death. Under the Abrahamic Covenant, Abraham's descendants were promised that God would be their God with the implied bodily resurrection and eternal life.

Abraham himself never received the fulfilment of the promise in Romans 4:13. In fact, he never even inherited the Promised Land (not yet, anyway), which represents just a small portion of the world. This is because God has planned that all his people will inherit the new Earth together one day after the Resurrection (Hebrews 11:16, 40). In the mean-time, Abraham had to content himself with a token of God's promise. He lived in the Promised Land and was buried there in anticipation of the Resurrection (Genesis 50:13). The token of living in the Promised Land is adopted into the Old Covenant where it is first won, then lost, regained and lost again. Under the New Covenant, Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed one last time, and the occupation of the Promised Land is replaced by explicit New Covenant (Controlling Covenant) teaching about the Resurrection. It becomes clear that God's people will, one day, inherit the new Earth (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1ff).

In this way, the thread of inheriting the Earth starts under the Covenant of Creation with Adam and Eve losing it. It then becomes just the promise of inheriting the land under the Abrahamic Covenant. Under the Old Covenant,

God dwells with his people in the Promised Land. Only under the New Covenant does it become totally obvious that the whole new Earth is intended for God's people. Once on the new Earth, redeemed humanity will keep the Covenant of Creation by filling the Earth, subduing it and ruling over creation. They will enter God's eternal Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:9). Even the marriage part of the Covenant of Creation will be fulfilled with the wedding of the Lamb and his bride (Revelation 19:9).

8.2 The Promise of Salvation for Children

It can readily be seen from Scripture that God's dealings with mankind overflow to their children. This is first hinted at in Genesis 3:15, but is most clearly expressed in Genesis 17:

Genesis 17:7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

For God to be Abraham's God was a promise of complete commitment to him by God. It promised salvation to him. The fact that God also promised to be the God of Abraham's descendants means that he promised to save them too. We have seen previously that this promise had conditions of faith and obedience attached to it (Section 5), but this should not be allowed to detract from the magnanimity of the promise.

Furthermore, we have seen previously that God's covenant with Abraham was an everlasting covenant. This means that it is still in force today and that the New Covenant, currently in force, is built upon it (see Illustration 2). All through history, God has been saving Abraham's descendants. And nowadays everybody knows of a Christian family that has Jewish roots (whether they realise it or not) because there are so many of them. It is obvious both from Genesis and observation that God is keeping his promise.

It is also edifying to note that there are numerous other passages in the Bible that show God's saving blessings to parents being shared with their children, his covenant promises of salvation benefiting the children. Isaiah 49:22 says 'See, I will beckon to the Gentiles ...', demonstrating that the passage is referring forwards to New Covenant times. The chapter then talks about God saving his people's children (v. 25). That the passage really is talking about children (and not just affectionately about adult offspring) is obvious because of verse 23, which talks about the Gentiles bringing with them *foster children*. It talks about them being *nursing mothers*. So, Isaiah 49 predicts the continuation of the Abrahamic Covenant into New Covenant times, i.e. now.

To Jeremiah is revealed that God will propagate godliness down through the generations. He defines the essential difference between the Old Covenant

and the New in chapter 31, but talks about an everlasting covenant in chapter 32.

32:38 They will be my people, and I will be their God. 39 I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. 40 I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me.

Both parents and children will receive God's spiritual blessings (v. 39). This will be consummated in the inheritance of the promised land by God's people, including their children. Again, this can only be talking about the New Covenant (v. 40). Once more, unity with the Abrahamic Covenant is shown (v. 38).

Since these promises are clearly conditional, does the Bible distinguish between covenant children who are saved and those who are not? Roman 11 explains how salvation for *such* children is not automatic.

Romans 11:17-19: If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in'.

The picture here is of Jewish families being replaced by Gentile families. Note that the branches being broken off are not individuals, they are families or the unbelieving parts of families. Individuals who trust Christ cannot be broken off, as is taught elsewhere (John 10:28); however, their unbelieving family members can, as is explained in v20:

11:20: Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

In Romans 11, to have your branch '*cut off*' means in practice that your children grow up to be non-Christians, whereupon they surrender their covenant blessings and become like the heathen. However, God's gifts and his calling are irrevocable, so ...

11:23 And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

The claiming of God's promises, repentance and earnest prayer can remedy any situation. But exactly what is the problem that might lead to our children not being saved?

8.3 The Obligation to Believe God's Promises

Covenants are broken outwardly when we fail to follow God's commands. However, it is always the case that failure to obey God is preceded by a failure to take his promises seriously and by a failure to believe those promises properly, i.e. a lack of faith. For example, Adam and Eve's outward breaking of God's covenant was preceded by their failure to take seriously his promise that those who ate from the Tree of Knowledge would certainly die.

In contrast Abraham, the man of faith, believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. His descendants, however, failed to take God's threats in Deuteronomy 4:25–28 seriously and so they lost the Promised Land. Threats, after all, are just negative promises.

Similarly, if we today fail to believe God's promises, we too will break his covenants and regret it. And yet, there is every encouragement to believe all the promises that we find in the Bible:

2 Corinthians 1:20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ, ...

Therefore, if we want to obey God's commands such as 'Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord', the first thing we should do is to believe God's promises inasmuch as they affect child-rearing. 2 Corinthians 1:20 assures us that they are all still relevant to us today. For example:

Proverbs 22:6 Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Unless we see the promise in the verse, our child-training will have no power because we will not be doing it in faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Genesis 17:19 is of no value to us when we pray for our children unless we take hold of the promise contained in the verse and argue with God that the 'everlasting covenant' must still be in force today, insisting that God be God of our children as he has promised. We need to put verses such as 2 Corinthians 1:20, Galatians 3:14, Genesis 17:8, Jeremiah 32:39–41 together. We need to believe them, and pray for our children in the light of such verses. If, instead, we are sceptical and try to think of subtle reasons why these verses may be inapplicable, then the decline of the 20th century will be repeated in the 21st. Reading the Bible is not primarily an intellectual activity; it is a spiritual battle against our own unbelief.

8.4 The Obligation to Obey God and Produce Godly Offspring

That godly people must keep God's commands, and that there are blessings and benefits therein is beyond dispute. However, the connection between obeying God and him blessing us and our children is not so obvious. Verses like Deuteronomy 5:29 and the following chapter establish the principle that whether God blesses us and our children depends upon whether we obey him or not.

Deuteronomy 5:29 Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!

The above connection between godliness and blessing for our children is established in the Bible, so does this mean that our behaviour must be perfect in order to ensure their salvation? Surely not, or nobody's children would ever be saved! We sin constantly. And the sins we do constantly are not little ones but big ones. The Law says, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart ...' Which of us has even started to do that? Therefore, we are always all guilty of breaking the greatest commandment all the time. This means that any idea of there being a direct and absolute connection between our godliness and the salvation of our children is ruled out.

Furthermore, we glimpse the exact opposite in Genesis 27—the story of the dysfunctional covenant family! Isaac was sinning by showing favouritism and deliberately trying to bless the wrong son. Rebecca was sinning by engineering a daring deception by the right son. Jacob was lying to his father. Esau had despised his birthright, and was failing to honour his agreement with Jacob. Yet amidst all the direct and obvious sin, Isaac was relying on God to keep his promises. By so doing, the writer to the Hebrews tells us that Isaac blessed both sons (Hebrews 11:20). In particular, he passed on God's blessing of Abraham to Jacob. So seriously did God take Isaac's faith, that he even blessed the right son, the promised son, without Isaac realising it until afterwards!

How can we possibly reconcile this contradiction? On one hand God says he will bless godliness to our children; on the other he seems to bless Jacob purely because of his father's faith and nothing to do with his behaviour (which was despicable). The only sensible reconciliation would appear to be that God blesses us on the basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice. Faith in Christ gives us all the basic blessing of the covenants. That same faith also produces godly behaviour. Godly acts, when performed in faith, are the means of God blessing still further. So there is a virtuous circle that relates faith to godliness and godliness to blessing, and blessing to faith in the rising generation.

Teaching our children to obey God's commands when combined with a reliance on him to change their hearts produces godly children. Training children in a faithless way may produce only rebellion from natural sinful hearts, but training them whilst trusting God's promises is a means of God's grace entering their lives. Read in this way, it is obvious that Ephesians 6:4 is expecting the children mentioned to become Christians. God's grace produces the heart-change, teaching the gospel and training the child are the means of the grace arriving. Faith in God's promises unleashes the grace and motivates the godly father to do Ephesians 6:4. John Stott is well worth reading on Ephesians 6:1-3.¹⁶

Similarly, Malachi 2:15 teaches us that it was God's intention from creation that marriage should produce godly children. Obeying God's commands, in this case by not divorcing your wife, results in a stable marriage and a happy home where Ephesians 6:4 can be done successfully. This alone would reverse many of the bad 20th century trends.

The converse is to fail to obey God's commands. This always results from a failure to believe God's promises, as shown in the previous section. Unbelief leads to disobedience. Disobedience means that the channels for God's grace are dammed up. No grace, no salvation.

When God unfolds his covenant to Abraham, offering blessing for him and for all his descendants, he starts by telling Abraham that he must walk before him and be blameless (Genesis 17:1). A little later, in Genesis 18:19, the Lord explains that he chose Abraham specifically so that he would do Ephesians 6:4. Thus is demonstrated real unity of God's purposes and promises in the Abrahamic Covenant, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Add in Malachi 2:15, and the set of covenants is complete with the addition of the Covenant of Creation. All four covenants work together through promises, faith, grace and obedience to produce salvation for God's people and their offspring.

8.5 The Signs and Seals of the Covenants

Every biblical covenant has its signs, or seals, that is ceremonies or objects that picture and guarantee the covenant blessings to the recipient of the particular sign. In the case of the Covenant of Creation, the signs would appear to be the Trees of Life and Knowledge (although this is not altogether indisputable). For the Abrahamic Covenant, the main sign was circumcision, which was carried forward and adopted into the Old Covenant. To it was added the Passover. Upon the arrival of the New Covenant, some fresh signs were needed to

16 John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester: IVP, 2003).

distinguish the new wine from the old. Thus, the Passover was replaced by the Lord's Supper. Instead of looking backwards to a corporeal redemption from Egypt, this now looks back to a spiritual redemption bought by Christ, and to on-going fellowship with him. In the case of circumcision, it has been replaced by baptism. Without delving into the precise meaning of Colossians 2:11-12, it can readily be seen that these verses teach the equivalence of the two signs.

Colossians 2:11-12 In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism ...

Furthermore, that circumcision and baptism are equivalents, can be seen from Table 4 below which summarises their main meanings.

Table 4—Comparison of Circumcision and Baptism

Circumcision	Baptism
Regeneration (circumcision of the heart) by God.	Regeneration by the Holy Spirit.
The need for blood to be shed for the remission of sin.	Washing away of guilt with no more need for blood shedding.
Belonging to God.	Belonging to God through unity with Christ.
Principle sign and seal of the Abrahamic Covenant, administered once upon entry to the blessings of the covenant.	Principle sign and seal of the New Covenant, administered once upon entry to the blessings of the covenant.
Given to the males of God's people and to their male descendants.	Given to all God's people and all their descendants, both male and female.
Given to Abraham's family plus proselytes.	Offered to anyone who believes the gospel.

Q. What is the purpose of the signs and seals of God's covenants?

A. To help us to believe God's promises.

When we believingly baptize both converts and our children, God promises to forgive their sin through unity with Christ, and to cleanse away their sin by the Holy Spirit. This is conditional, as previously discussed, but is nevertheless a real promise. Circumcision of the heart has become a New Covenant phenomenon, as pictured by baptism (Romans 2:29). With the coming of the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit is poured out on all peoples

(Joel 2:28). That the Holy Spirit being poured out is spoken of in baptism cannot be doubted because of what the Authority on baptism stated of Jesus:

Matthew 3:11 'I [John the Baptiser] baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*'

See also Acts 10:47 and Acts 19:1–5. Circumcision looked forward to the shedding of blood for the remission of sin. That blood has now been shed, so baptism looks backwards only briefly to the Cross and the baptism of suffering that Jesus endured (Mark 10:38), because it now pictures the washing away of guilt. The Old Covenant sprinkling of blood has been replaced by the New Covenant washing with water.

Circumcision, sealing the 'I will be your God' and 'you will be my people' of Genesis 17, is replaced under the New Covenant by being baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3), or baptized in the names of the Trinity (Matthew 28:19).

Circumcision marked entry to the Abrahamic Covenant and all its blessings and responsibilities, so seven days after a son was born he was circumcised. Nowadays, around 2000 AD, when a child is born to a Christian, he or she also enters the covenant community with all the blessings and responsibilities of the various covenants as shown in Illustration 5. The book of Acts and some of Paul's writings tell us that whole households were baptized when they entered into a covenant relationship with God (Acts 16:15; 18:8, 1 Corinthians 1:16). In the same way, a new child who is born into the covenant community cannot be denied the sign and seal of the blessings and responsibilities. Such a child already has the reality of the covenant relationship; how can he be denied the sign of it? Faced with the awesome responsibility of bringing up a child in the training and instruction of the Lord, believing parents need all the help they can get to trust God and believe his promises, putting them into practice on a day-to-day basis. This is where infant baptism comes in. Conceptually, it has no theological existence of its own; it forms a logical part of the principle of household baptism. It is done to help Christian parents produce godly children in fulfilment of the Covenant of Creation (Malachi 2:15), demonstrating again the basic unity of all the covenants. Notice how, in the Acts and 1 Corinthians passages cited, we are not even told whether there were any children in each household. Common sense says that there were, but the question is beside the point because the principle being exemplified is that of household baptism (not just infant baptism). Therefore, the whole family was baptized including slaves, children and any other dependants. This is the precise equivalent of when Abraham was

circumcised: So were all the males in his household, regardless of whether they had yet come to share Abraham's faith.

Notice also, how everything only gets better under the New Covenant: females are now allowed the covenant signs as well as males; all nations are being drawn to Christ, not just the Jews. The painful bloody business of circumcision which went hand in hand with messy destructive blood sacrifices is done away with. The small company of Jews who entered Egypt have now become like the sand on the sea shore and are rapidly becoming like the stars in the night sky. The outward formal religion of the Old Covenant is replaced by the internal Holy Spirit religion of the New. It is inconceivable that those who were previously covenant children should now be 'excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise' as Paul explains in Ephesians 2:12.

2:12 ... remember that at that time you *were* separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and *foreigners to the covenants* of the promise ... [but no longer!]

9. In Practice Nowadays ...

9.1 Faith and Baptism

As a New Covenant parent, if you don't make use of the covenant sign of baptism, you still have to keep the obligations of the covenant to bring up your children for God, but it is much harder to do. It is like not employing, say, a plumber to do a difficult job; he has the right tools to do the job, makes good use of them, and finds it easy. The alternative is that painful 20th century experience known as DIY. God forbid that we should be DIY parents!

Q. Why should a covenant sign such as baptism make a difference to keeping the covenant?

A. Because the sign correctly understood and viewed through the eyes of faith causes God to respond with his grace. Even where God's promises are only glimpsed faintly, the visible sign is used by the Holy Spirit to inspire faith in God's promises. Even if we are illiterate and backward, we can visualise the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and observe the picture of the washing away of sin.

Our attitude should be the same as that of the believing parents whom Jesus commended in Mark 10:13ff. as they brought to him their little children for him to lay his hands on them and bless them. Are you now thinking of some way to explain that the passage does not apply to you? Beware for 'the kingdom of God belongs to *such as* these.'

9.2 Prayer

The most obvious corollary of believing God's promises and understanding God's covenants is that we turn to prayer. Take, for example, King David in 2 Samuel 12:

15 After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. 16 David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground.

Suddenly, David was presented with the prospect of having to achieve a whole life-time's parenting in just seven days. What is the only thing he can do? Pray. And did God hear David's prayer? The answer seems to be 'yes' and 'no'.

12:23 But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.

The child's life was short, but David is confident that they will meet again one day. Prayer is the fundamental way of putting into practice our faith in God's covenant promises.

Table 5—The Christian Parents' Prayer

'Father in Heaven, we feel the awesome weight of your first covenant at Creation where you gave us the responsibility of imaging you in front of the heavenly beings, where you created marriage so that godly parents would in turn produce godly offspring.

'We recognise not only our own fallen nature, but also the sinful nature of our children, and feel the frustration that we can do nothing to circumcise their hearts so that they will love you.

'At the same time, we thank you that you promised Abraham our father that you would be his God and the God of his children. We thank you that now by faith, not only Jews, but all who are in Christ inherit that same promise, that you will be not only our God but also the God of our children, for all your promises are "Yes" in Christ.

'We understand that for you to be our God means that we must be holy, but we also understand that you have provided the way for us to be holy. You provided cleansing of our sin through your Son. You provide cleansing of our hearts by your Spirit.

'We thank you for the visible seal of your cleansing that is applied to both us and our children, namely baptism, and ask that you give us the grace by your Spirit to bring up our holy children in the training and instruction of the Lord.

'Do not allow this branch of your holy olive tree to be cut off. Rather grant that this family would stand by faith in you and your promises.

‘And we rely on you, Jesus Christ, Lord of the covenants, to be very jealous for your own reputation, faithful to your promises and powerful to save, so that our children may follow in the footsteps of their parents in every way that is good.

‘We rely on your perfect life and atoning sacrifice to cover up our sins and failings as parents, so that your grace and faithfulness may be shown to the next generation, that our children might bear your image.

“To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

9.3 A Godly Example

A lasting memory from my own childhood is the way that some professing Christians treated others. It must be difficult for a child to see through the poor behaviour of Christians to the unchanging holy God that such Christians carelessly misrepresent. So, as we relate to each other, we should always bear in mind the effect that we are having on young observers who miss nothing, remember everything, and draw their own conclusions. They should be regarded as our spiritual nephews and nieces, and factored into both our prayer and exemplary behaviour (in both senses!)

9.4 Grandchildren and Grandparents

Though parents tend not to realise it at the time, when they are busy bringing up their own children, they are also doing something else: They are actually teaching their children how to bring up their grandchildren. Therefore, not only do adults need to be taught how to bring up their children, so do our children.

Psalm 78: ⁵He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, ⁶so the next generation would know them, *even the children yet to be born*, and they in turn would tell their children.

A very obvious and vital grandparental rôle is that of prayer for your grandchildren. Psalm 78 (above), however, shows that concern for our grandchildren starts before they are born, and is of greatest importance even as we start to bring up our own children.

Another way in which Christian grandparents need to start their rôle before actually attaining grandparenthood is in preparing to be a good example to our grandchildren. Good habits formed while we are young will pave the way for setting a good example when we are old; the converse is true of our current bad habits: They must be dealt with before the almond tree blossoms, for the sake of those *‘yet to be born’*.

9.5 Parenting Courses

Many churches offer parenting courses as a kind of pre-evangelism event. These are aimed at current unbelievers with a view to breaking down barriers and building on friendships formed at mother and toddler groups for example. However, churches in America are ahead of Britain in that many offer parenting courses and marriage courses to church members. What possible reason could there be for not doing this? Such parenting courses present an opportunity to address issues that only affect parents, going into them deeply and in ways that might not be appropriate when little Johnnie is sitting there in the congregation next to his parents.

9.6 Teach Biblical and Covenant Theology

After people are converted, the years pass and many become aware that they do not really understand much of the Bible and are making no progress with it. Some revisit the same comforting verses again and again and stick strictly to the New Testament. They are failing to understand the sovereignty of God throughout all history and to relate it to the big issues of life, like bringing up children for God.

Teaching Systematic Theology through preaching, catechisms etc. is tremendously valuable, but Covenant Theology really belongs under the heading of Biblical Theology. Therefore, we must make sure that children and adults are taught Biblical Theology, including Covenant Theology. Otherwise, they may know the *mechanics* of bringing up children, but they will not *understand* where it all fits in biblically.

Final Remarks

So am I saying that the decline of the 20th century is entirely due to us failing to baptize our infants? Certainly not. If you have skipped to the end without reading the first eight sections, you'd better go back.

Bringing up children for God is a matter of understanding, believing and applying Covenant Theology. This is the responsibility of the whole church family: parents, grandparents, spiritual aunts and uncles, and children themselves. It is based upon faith in God's covenant promises. This works itself out in following biblical instructions on prayer, baptism, teaching and training.



Selina, Countess of Huntingdon. A portrait sent to the Bethesda orphan house near Savannah, Georgia (founded by George Whitefield) after Whitefield's death. She holds a crown of thorns in her right hand and has her right foot resting on her coronet. Photograph by Dr Digby L. James courtesy of Bethesda Home for Boys, Savannah.

Selina Countess of Huntingdon 1707–1791: A Most Remarkable Lady

Lucy Beale

My interest in Selina began in the Easter of 1991 when with my late husband, Alan Tovey, I attended the Conference of a group of churches known as ‘the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion’, for it was the 200th Anniversary of the death of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon. The following year I was reading *The Elect Lady* by Gilbert Kirby when my dad asked me to speak at the Llansamlet Senior Citizens and so I spoke to them about the Countess. Then in September 1995 I visited Trefecca near Talgarth in Breconshire, South Wales where Selina founded a college and in 2001 spent a sabbatical at Westminster College, Cambridge, which is the continuation of that college and contains a wonderful portrait of her. So began my interest in Selina which has been renewed by reading Faith Cook and Edwin Welch’s excellent books on the Countess. She was indeed a most remarkable lady.

Background

Lady Selina Shirley was born on 24 August 1707 at Astwell House (near Brackley, Northamptonshire), now known as Astwell Castle. Thus this year marks the tercentenary of her birth.

In many respects the world into which Selina was born was very different from our own (e.g. contrast jet travel with a coach from London to Manchester taking 4½ days), yet spiritually and morally the state of affairs in England and Wales in the 18th century was very similar to today. Voltaire wrote: ‘There is only just enough religion left in England to distinguish Tories who had little from Whigs who had none.’ Montesquieu said: ‘There was no religion in England. Everyone laughs if one talks of it.’ Carlyle summed up the situation: ‘Soul extinct, stomach well alive.’ ‘It was an age of startling contrasts—the nobility were building large and gracious houses while the poor lacked almost every necessity of life.’¹ It was an age of brutality and violence—much stemming from excessive drinking—an age of sexual immorality, gambling, corruption in public life, and many other social evils. Eighteenth century Christianity prior to the spiritual awakening of the 1730s and ’40s was

1 G. W. Kirby, *The Elect Lady* (3rd Edition, [Reading]: The Trustees of the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion, 2003), p. 13.

in a sad state—many bishops were more interested in fox-hunting than in the spiritual well-being of the flock, and one was described as ‘always sober as a bishop, though frequently drunk as a lord.’ In many dissenting churches, unitarianism was prevalent.

Early life

It was at this time, then, in 1707, that Selina Shirley was born into the nobility, the second of three daughters of Washington Shirley, heir to the earldom of Ferrers. After her birth she was taken to Ireland to Carrickmacross in County Monaghan, where life cannot have been easy for them, because despite the Shirley wealth, Washington’s own income was modest. Selina would have had a tutor, but she only received a very basic education as later evidence shows she was better at speaking than writing.

Sadly when she was six Selina’s parents split up, probably because of financial worries or infidelity on Washington’s part. Her mother left her with her father and older sister Elizabeth, taking her younger sister Mary to France. It is no wonder that ‘even during her juvenile days’ she retired to a closet for prayer, pouring out ‘all her little troubles’.² Her troubles cannot have been all that little for in later life the Countess seems not to have talked of her childhood and adolescence. She was much closer to her father than her mother as we would expect and the few surviving letters suggest. Her father addresses her as ‘Dear Linny’ or ‘Dear child’, whereas her mother addresses her as ‘Madam’. Later her mother did not attend her wedding ceremony.

At the age of nine ‘an episode took place which had a profound effect on Selina. Already a sensitive and serious-minded child, she was greatly touched by the sight of a funeral procession in which the body of a child about her own age was being carried to the grave. She followed the procession and listened intently to the words of the funeral service.’³ A lasting impression was made upon her, and she frequently visited the child’s grave. Thomas Haweis records the reminiscence: ‘There the first impressions of deep seriousness about an eternal world laid hold on her conscience: and with many tears, she cried earnestly to God on the spot, that whenever he should be pleased to take her away, he would deliver her from all her fears, and give her a happy departure.’⁴ Shortly afterwards her own family suffered a bereavement through the death of her grandfather on Christmas day 1717. At ten Selina returned to live in London with her father and older sister and later moved to Staunton

2 T. Haweis, *An Impartial and Succinct History of the revival and progress of the church of Christ, from the reformation to the present time with faithful characters of the principal personages*, vol. 3 (London: 1803), p. 239f.

3 G. W. Kirby, op. cit. p. 14f.

4 T. Haweis, op. cit. p. 239f.

Harold in Leicestershire. Thus began a period of legal wranglings over the properties and estates which lasted for the next hundred years.

Marriage

At eighteen Selina prayed that she might marry into a serious family. ‘From the turmoil of her own family Selina was to pass into the tranquillity of her husband’s family’.⁵ On 3 June 1728 at the age of nearly twenty-one Selina was married to thirty-two-year-old Theophilus Hastings, 9th Earl of Huntingdon, and she went to live at Donington Hall, the family seat of the Huntingdons near Ashby-de-la-Zouch in Leicestershire, which today is the headquarters of British Midland Airways (BMI Baby). They were a devoted couple. ‘He recognized in his wife outstanding qualities of character, and she in turn had a deep and abiding affection for her husband.’⁶

As Countess she moved in high society, but was always glad to return from London to Donington Hall, where she took a keen interest in the welfare of all who served on the family estate, and became known as ‘Lady Bountiful’—a ‘do-gooder’. She was interested in music and some of the political issues of her day. Selina delighted in her good works and ‘was deeply religious, but as yet she knew nothing of a spiritual conversion. She had not come to realize that men and women are “saved by grace through faith” and “not of works”.’⁷ She was trying to commend herself to God by her own efforts, and needed, like Nicodemus, to be born again. I wonder if that is true of us. I know for a while in my own life I thought that if I prayed, read my Bible, went to church and tried to be good, then God would accept me—I was trying to earn my salvation just like Selina.

Conversion

Meanwhile a religious revival was beginning, led by some preachers nicknamed Methodists, notably George Whitefield and John and Charles Wesley. Selina had a sister-in-law, Lady Margaret Hastings, who, together with her sisters Ladies Anne and Frances, had put her trust in Christ alone for salvation after hearing the gospel preached by Mr Benjamin Ingham of Ossett in Ledstone Hall, Yorkshire, at their half-sister Lady Betty’s private chapel. ‘Since I have known and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation I have been as happy as an angel’, Margaret told Selina in June of 1739.⁸ The Countess saw the transformation in her sister-in-law’s life. She saw that she possessed a peace

5 E. Welch, *Spiritual Pilgrim: A Reassessment of the Life of the Countess of Huntingdon* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), p. 16.

6 G. W. Kirby, op. cit. p. 16.

7 Ibid. p. 17.

8 T. Haweis, op. cit. p. 241.

and joy which had eluded her despite all her good works. So Selina tried harder, and got more and more depressed. Then she experienced a serious illness which was almost fatal, and was no longer able to carry out her good deeds. 'She felt lost, and despaired of the future. God was in fact speaking to her, convicting her of her sin and need, had she but realized it.'⁹ On 26 July 1739, and nearly thirty-two years old, she 'lifted up her heart to Jesus the Saviour',¹⁰ with the earnest prayer that she too might know that happiness through Christ and the forgiveness of her sins that her sister-in-law had found. God answered her prayer and she was filled with 'joy unspeakable and full of glory'. She determined 'to present herself to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, which she was now convinced was her reasonable service.'¹¹

'The reality of the Countess's conversion is beyond question. The change in her life was dramatic. She took every opportunity to confess openly her new-found faith in Christ, and did all she could to encourage those who preached the gospel of grace. Members of the nobility were taken aback by such a sudden change in her life. It seemed as though she had taken leave of her senses and become a religious fanatic.'¹² Some urged her husband to restrain her, but he would not interfere with her religious views. He did, however, suggest that she consult with Martin Benson, the Bishop of Gloucester, who more than met his match in Selina. (He regretted ordaining George Whitefield, whom he blamed for Selina's change of heart.) When shortly after her conversion John and Charles Wesley preached in the neighbourhood she sent a message to them assuring them of her determination to live to promote the glory of the Saviour who had died for her.

After her conversion her visits to court grew less frequent. One day the Prince of Wales (the future George III) asked where the Countess was, and Lady Charlotte Edwin cynically replied: 'Why, I suppose, she is praying with her beggars.' To this the Prince replied: 'Lady Charlotte, when I am dying I think I shall be happy to seize the skirt of Lady Huntingdon's mantle to lift me up with her to heaven.'¹³

In 1738 the first Methodist society was formed in Fetter Lane, London, and Lord and Lady Huntingdon were frequently present to hear preachers such as Whitefield, the Wesleys, and Howell Harris, the well-known Welsh

9 G. W. Kirby, op. cit. p. 19.

10 T. Haweis, op. cit. p. 242.

11 A. C. H. Seymour, *The Life & Times of Selina Countess of Huntingdon* (London: 1839), p. 15 (a reset repaginated reprint Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2000).

12 G. W. Kirby, op. cit. p. 21.

13 F. Cook, *Selina Countess of Huntingdon* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), p. 127.

preacher. Many were converted. The Countess used her position to influence the nobility to hear the gospel. She was anxious that they should hear her chaplain, George Whitefield's sermons, and so she invited them to her home to hear him preach. 'Lady Ann Frankland, daughter of the Earl of Scarborough, was one of the first among the aristocracy to be converted as a result of hearing Whitefield preach.'¹⁴ Of course there was hostility, and many negative reactions, but the Countess had one factor on her side which is lacking today: 'Nearly everyone believed, some as a matter of course and some uneasily, in their immortal soul.'¹⁵ Crowds came to her home in London to discuss religion: doctors, poets, statesmen, lords and ladies, etc. But she did not confine herself to those of her own station in life. It has been said that 'while her drawing rooms were fitted with brilliant assemblies, her kitchen was crowded with the poor, to whom she dispensed her charities for the relief of their wants, and directed them to Jesus Christ as the only remedy for their guilt.'¹⁶ As Gilbert Kirby states, 'Rarely ... has the conversion of one woman, albeit a lady of noble birth, had such tremendous effects on the community at large. Eternity alone will reveal the full extent of the Countess's gracious influence.'¹⁷ We will never know the full effect of her zeal, vision and generosity.

The Countess and her Family

Lady Huntingdon was devoted to her husband and children. Over a period of ten years she bore seven children, six of whom survived; but all but one predeceased her. Her first child, Lord *Francis*, was born on 13 March 1729, his brother *George* a year later in 1730, a daughter *Elizabeth* in 1731, and a son *Ferdinando* in 1732. *Selina*, the second daughter, died in infancy in 1735, and another daughter, also named *Selina*, was born in 1737. Finally a son, *Henry*, was born in 1739. From a family point of view Lady Huntingdon's life was a sad one. Her two sons, Ferdinando and George, who were 11 and 13 years respectively, died of smallpox within a very short time of each other in 1743 while away boarding at Westminster School in London. Then shortly after this, on 13 October 1746, her beloved husband died of a stroke. At the time of this terrible bereavement the Countess was only 39 years old. But she refused to give way to self-pity. As Edwin Welch writes,

¹⁴ G. W. Kirby, op. cit. p. 22.

¹⁵ Margaret Lane, *The Queen of the Methodists: Selina, Countess of Huntingdon* (Worcester: City of Worcester Building Preservation Trust, 1987), quoted in G. W. Kirby, op. cit. p. 19.

¹⁶ Quoted by G.W. Kirby, op. cit. p. 23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 23.

The death of her husband marks another turning point in the life of the Countess. It cannot be doubted from the evidence of her letters to him that she was deeply in love. His death must have been a great emotional shock. There is no direct evidence, because she never expressed her grief in writing. Indirectly we learn a little of what she must have felt from two sources. Howell Harris, recording a private meeting with her in April 1747, says: 'she consulted me about which was best, to live retired and give up all, or fill her place, and I said the latter I thought was right ...' A year later, in a letter to the Countess of Hertford, she spoke of her withdrawal from the world in 'a little retreat' close to her husband's tomb. She did not become a recluse, but during her widowhood all her earthly responsibilities were to disappear, and she was able to devote all her time and abundant energy to religious matters.¹⁸

In September 1758 her son Henry died in Brighton, or BRIGHTHELMSTONE as it was known at the time, but he had shown evidence of true faith before he died. He was just 18 years old. Selina wrote to Charles Wesley the previous month, 'All things work together for good, and in this blind hope under all the most unintelligible events I rest secure, and am determined to make no explanations for myself or others.'¹⁹ By the age of 51 Selina had lost her husband and four of her seven children. Then her daughter Selina died at the age of 26. She had shared her mother's faith, and accompanied her on her travels throughout England and Wales. The Countess wrote at this time to William Romaine: 'It pleased our dear God and only Saviour to take from me, May 12, 1763, at three quarters after four in the morning, my dearest, my altogether lovely child and daughter, Lady Selina Hastings, the desire of my eyes, and continual pleasure of my heart ...'²⁰ That Selina should have died with a personal faith in Christ was a great comfort to her mother, who deeply missed the love and companionship of her daughter. In fact Elizabeth was the only child out of the seven to outlive the Countess (her son Francis, the tenth Earl, died in 1789). Selina, like Job, was stripped of husband and family, but her faith triumphed. As Faith Cook writes, "The antidote to her sorrow lay not so much in putting her bereavement behind her, as in focussing on the delight that Selina was now experiencing in a better world and in throwing her energies once more into the work of God."²¹

The Countess and her Chapels

The Countess was a member of the Established Church, i.e. the Church of England, and never meant to leave it. 'However, many of the "Methodists"

18 E. Welch, op. cit. p. 64.

19 F. Cook, op. cit. p. 179.

20 Rylands MS, Letter 73.

21 F. Cook, op. cit. p. 216.

whom the Countess had befriended had themselves been expelled from their churches because of their evangelistic zeal, and were driven to preach the gospel in the open air and in the streets. The Countess felt that in such circumstances she should embark on a scheme for establishing chapels in different localities which would serve as preaching stations for such men, and where new converts might be built up in their faith.²² This was possible because, as a member of the nobility, she was entitled to have domestic chaplains. In 1748 George Whitefield had been appointed as her personal chaplain; others included William Romaine, Thomas Haweis and John Berridge. The first such chapel was built in Brighton (although recent research suggests Hull) next to her own house, and opened in 1761. It cost £698, for which she sold her own jewels, and remained in existence until 1969. This is how it came into being.

In the spring of 1757 Lady Huntingdon took her son, Henry, to Brighton in the hope that his health would benefit from sea-bathing. While there she encountered a gentlewoman 'who, seeing the Countess, made a full stop, and said, "O Madam, you are come!"—Lady H. was surprized at the oddity of such an address from an absolute stranger, and thought, at first, that the woman was not in her senses. "What do you know of me?" said the Countess—"Madam," returned the former, "I saw you in a dream, three years ago, dresst just as you now are."²³ (Augustus Toplady was told this by the Countess on 30 August 1776). She had dreamed that Lady Huntingdon was to be 'an instrument of doing much good'. The Countess got a small group of women together and taught them the Scriptures. They were converted, as were many others, and so the need for a chapel arose. The Countess established one or more religious societies at Brighton, and then built the house and chapel as a meeting-place for them.

As Gordon Rupp states, 'Proprietary chapels were to be a useful device for the evangelicals, and the Countess, by buying a house and putting a chapel alongside, seemed to have solved or at least by-passed the problem which faced other Methodists, who could obtain legal protection only by being licensed under the Toleration Act. But by the Conventicle Act a peeress might have her own private chapel, if its doors were not open towards the public, and in it her own chaplains might preach.'²⁴

Other chapels were built in Sussex, Tunbridge Wells, Bath, and in the course of a tour of Wales the Countess visited Swansea, where, in response to

22 G.W. Kirby, *op. cit.* p. 37.

23 A. Toplady, *Works*, vol. 4 (London: 1794), p. 183.

24 E.G. Rupp, *Religion in England 1688–1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 463.

the pleas of a small group of evangelical Christians, she erected a chapel in 1789 which proved to be a great blessing to the neighbourhood. Still more were built all over the country, as far apart as Hull and St Ives, Reading, Worcester, Lincoln, York, etc. Men such as William Romaine, John Berridge, Howell Harris, Henry Venn, Thomas Haweis and others filled her pulpits in rotation. These men, who were fine preachers and good pastors, 'were to become the core of the new Evangelical Movement, Calvinist in theology, but determined to be loyal to the discipline of the Church of England.'²⁵

In 1782, after a controversy lasting three years with a curate named William Sellon over the admission of vast numbers of the public to her allegedly private Spa Fields Chapel in Clerkenwell, London, resulting in a verdict against her in the Consistory Court (the ecclesiastical court of the Bishop of London), the Countess was forced to become a Dissenter, as the only alternative was to close her chapels and deprive people from hearing the gospel. Thus she took refuge under the Toleration Act of 1689 and her ministers took an oath as Dissenting ministers. The immediate result was that with the single exception of Thomas Wills, the Countess's chaplains withdrew from her service, choosing to remain within the Established Church. Two months later William Taylor joined Wills. As the Bishop of London put it, it was impossible for a clergyman 'to divide himself between sectarianism and the Establishment, between the Church of England and the Church of Lady Huntingdon'. At first the Countess's congregations were described as 'Societies in the secession patronized by Lady Huntingdon', and later her churches became known as 'The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion'. On 9 March 1783 the first public ordination of ministers in her Connexion was held in Spa Fields. In 1789 there were 116 chapels; there are 23 today, all but one in the south of England. At this time she wrote, 'I am to be cast out of the church for what I have been doing these forty years—speaking and living for Jesus Christ ...'²⁶

Today the Connexion is in the charge of Trustees, who are required to subscribe to Selina's Fifteen Articles of Faith, based on the 39 Articles of the Church of England. These are clearly Calvinistic and paedobaptist. The appointment of ministers, who are also required to subscribe to the Articles, is subject to the approval of the Trustees. The identification of a chapel with the Connexion might change depending on the minister: e.g. from 1807 to 1850 the Congregational Church at Lairgate in Beverley was in the Connexion during the pastorate of John Mather, but not at any other time. As Gilbert

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ A.C.H. Seymour, *op. cit.* vol. 2, p. 315.

²⁷ G.W. Kirby, 'The Countess of Huntingdon and the Congregationalists' in *Congregational Studies Conference 1988* (Beverly: EFCC, 1988), p. 32.

Kirby pointed out, 'A history of the different Connexional Churches reveals that, at some time or another, most of them have been pastored by Congregational ministers. In some cases, churches left the Connexion and were reconstituted as Congregational churches.'²⁷ This was often because the congregation wanted to have a settled ministry. As Faith Cook puts it, 'Since the early 1760s the Countess had consistently discouraged any regular or settled pastorates among her churches, but as the eighteenth century drew to a close the desire for settled ministries and the need to build up converts in the faith became increasingly prevalent.'²⁸ It was not until 1868 that regular pastorates became the official policy of the Connexion.

The Countess and her College

Not only did the Countess build chapels, she realized the importance of founding a college where men could be trained for the ministry. As Faith Cook writes, 'Since her early friendship with Philip Doddridge she had been interested in theological education and had supported his work by financing students at his Academy.'²⁹ In 1767 she recalled a delightful spot in Breconshire near Talgarth called Trefecca Isaf (now College Farm), owned by Howell Harris and close to his own home. It was an old stone-built structure dating back to 1576, which could be converted into a small theological college, so alterations were made including the building of a chapel. On 24 August 1768, the Countess's 61st birthday, the College at Trefecca was opened by George Whitefield, who preached from Exodus 20:24, 'In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee and bless thee.' John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley in Shropshire, was appointed by Selina as President of the College, and many preachers were sent out from there. A year later John Wesley was the preacher at the College anniversary. Men of the calibre of William Williams Pantycelyn, Daniel Rowland and John Berridge frequently preached at the College. One can still visit the College and chapel at Trefecca today.

Selina wrote regularly to the students, praying with them and for them, and supported them completely: 'these young men were fed, clothed and taught at Lady Huntingdon's expense'.³⁰ There were between 230 and 250 altogether during her lifetime, and they were like sons to her. She vetted the students herself, and from 1771, after the resignation of Fletcher, personally superintended the college. As Geoffrey Nuttall has shown, Trefecca was a new

28 F. Cook, *op. cit.* p. 439.

29 *Ibid.* p. 233.

30 *Ibid.* p. 313.

31 G. F. Nuttall, 'The Significance of Trefecca College 1768–91' in *Studies in English Dissent* (Weston Rhyn: Quinta Press, 2002), pp. 283–303.

departure in theological colleges, and became a model for those established by other evangelicals, but above all the College was the Countess's own 'Family'.³¹ The anniversaries drew enormous crowds. In 1776 Augustus Toplady was one of the chief speakers, and wrote in some amazement to a friend: 'The congregation was so large that the chapel would not have contained a fourth part of the people who were supposed to amount to three thousand. No fewer than one thousand three hundred horses were turned into one large field adjoining the College.'³² When the funeral of Howell Harris was held at Trefecca in 1773, there were twenty thousand present and nine sermons were preached!

In 1792, a year after the Countess's death, the college moved to Cheshunt in Hertfordshire and became known as Cheshunt College, and then in 1905 a further move was made to Cambridge. In 1968 the college was amalgamated with Westminster College in Cambridge, and seeks to train people for the United Reformed Church and Congregational ministry as well as providing sabbatical terms of study through the Cheshunt Foundation. Several EFCC ministers, including both Alan Tovey and Peter Beale, have benefited in this way from studying at the college.

The Countess and Missionary Endeavour

Selina had always been concerned for the education of children, having opened three schools in Leicestershire in 1739 and attached schools to her larger chapels. Now as a result of her passion for the world wide spread of the gospel she took a keen interest in the Orphan House at Bethesda in Georgia, which George Whitefield had bequeathed to her on his death in 1770. In 1772 she had urged her students at Trefecca, 'Give the Lord your youth and strength over the whole world. He is everywhere, and that will make a happy earth as his presence will a happy heaven.'³³ And so she sent out two young men as missionaries to the East Indies. Although this mission failed she was not daunted, and on 22 October 1772 sent six men and one woman (who acted as housekeeper) to the orphan house in America. They also travelled through the country preaching the gospel to nomadic Indian tribes and to Africans.

Unfortunately the Countess's affairs in Georgia were mismanaged, involving her in a great deal of expense, and not long after the missionaries arrived much of the property was destroyed by fire. Then the American War of Independence began, and the missionaries were forced to leave the orphanage.

³² Quoted by G. W. Kirby, *The Elect Lady*, p. 52f.

³³ Rylands MSS., Letter 139, 3 August 1772.

When the war was over in 1783 the Countess, who would have loved to go herself, sent further students to America and Nova Scotia, where a community of former African slaves had been settled by the British. Meanwhile the anti-slavery movement was gaining momentum in Britain, and the Clapham Sect (a group of evangelicals in the Church of England including William Wilberforce) campaigned for a 'Province of Freedom' for freed slaves. In 1790 the Sierra Leone Company was formed, and founded a settlement there, agreeing also to resettle the disillusioned 'Nova Scotians'. Thus on 28 March 1792 over a thousand converts from the Countess's churches in Nova Scotia arrived in Freetown, Sierra Leone, led by their preachers and singing from their Countess of Huntingdon hymnbooks. Even today there are churches belonging to the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion in Sierra Leone. At the Connexion's Conference which I attended in 1991 I remember seeing slides of the work there. In 2002 the number of churches had grown to 27, and there is considerable enthusiasm for evangelism.

Her Final Years

Selina could hardly have been described as robust, but she was blessed with a strong constitution and an iron will. She survived a number of illnesses and accomplished a vast amount of work. She outlived Whitefield, Grimshaw, Fletcher, the Wesleys, Rowland, Harris and William Williams. By the year 1790 she was scarcely able to see, had a painful eye inflammation and a good deal of pain. The death of her son Francis, the tenth Earl, in 1789 left its mark on her. She mourned particularly over the fact that he had made no profession of faith. Although bodily frail, her mind was as clear as ever, and her heart glowed with love and praise—she caught glimpses of the heavenly mansions. Her faith in Christ never wavered. She was not afraid of dying: she saw death simply as 'the putting off of her cloak.' When asked by Lady Anne Erskine how she was, she said: 'I am well. All is well—well for ever. I see wherever I turn my eyes, whether I live or die, nothing but victory.'³⁴ She looked forward to her homecall with joyful anticipation. 'My work is done; I have nothing to do but to go to my heavenly Father', whispered the Countess the night before she died.³⁵ On her deathbed she was making plans with Thomas Haweis to send missionaries to Otaheite in the South Seas, and was concerned to know whether Thomas Charles of Bala would come to preach at Spa Fields because David Jones of Llangan had to return home. Her last words were 'To know if

34 T. Haweis, *A Short Account of the Last Days of the Honourable and Most Respected Lady, Selina, Countess Dowager of Huntingdon* (London: 1791), quoted in Kirby, p. 82.

35 Letter from Dr J. C. Lettsom to Lady Anne Erskine, 18 June 1791, quoted in F. Cook, *op. cit.* p. 423f.

he comes—that is the point.’ The end came on 17 June 1791. She died in her house in Spa Fields, adjoining her chapel, at the age of 83, and she was interred in an unmarked grave in the family vault at Ashby-de-la-Zouch beside her husband, Theophilus.

She has been called ‘an English Deborah’, and Horace Walpole dubbed her ‘the Queen of the Methodists’. She was by no means perfect: Thomas Haweis said of her, ‘Was she a perfect character? No. This is not the lot of mortals on this side of the grave. When the moon walketh in her brightness, her shadows are most visible.’³⁶ Howell Harris remarked that she could not bear contradiction. However, as Gilbert Kirby writes, ‘She was a woman of strong personality, considerable discernment and outstanding organizational ability.’³⁷ George Whitefield declared her to be ‘all aflame for Jesus’, and Philip Doddridge said of her: ‘I think I never saw so much of the image of God in any woman upon earth.’³⁸ King George III said of her to Lord Dartmouth: ‘I wish there was a Lady Huntingdon in every diocese in my kingdom.’³⁹ Writing fifty years after her death, even one so unlikely as Cardinal Newman was moved ‘by the sight of a person simply and unconditionally giving up this world for the next ... She devoted herself, her name, her means, her time, her thoughts to the cause of Christ. She did not spend money on herself: she did not allow the homage due to her rank to remain with herself: she passed these on, and offered them up to Christ. She acted as one ought to act who considered this life a pilgrimage, not a home.’⁴⁰

By any standards Lady Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, was a most remarkable woman, and her contribution to the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival can hardly be exaggerated. She was devoted to the cause of Christ, had a deep compassion for lost souls, and was a woman of outstanding vision and spiritual energy. In the Spring of 1790 she wrote to Thomas Haweis ‘Let me die with my last breath labouring for him.’⁴¹

The fact that she was a woman is all the more remarkable. She was a true mother in Israel. May we emulate her faith, zeal, generosity and concern for the lost today; and may we, too, pray for God to send revival.

36 T. Haweis, *An Impartial and Succint History ...*, p. 253.

37 G.W. Kirby, op. cit. *Congregational Studies Conference 1988*, p. 30.

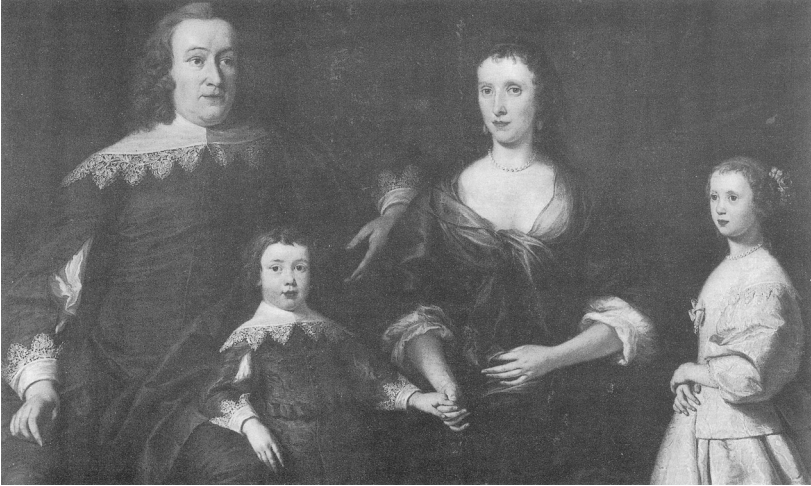
38 H.C. Knight, *Lady Huntingdon [sic] & Her Friends* (1853, reprinted Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 84.

39 Quoted in A.C.H. Seymour, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 283f.

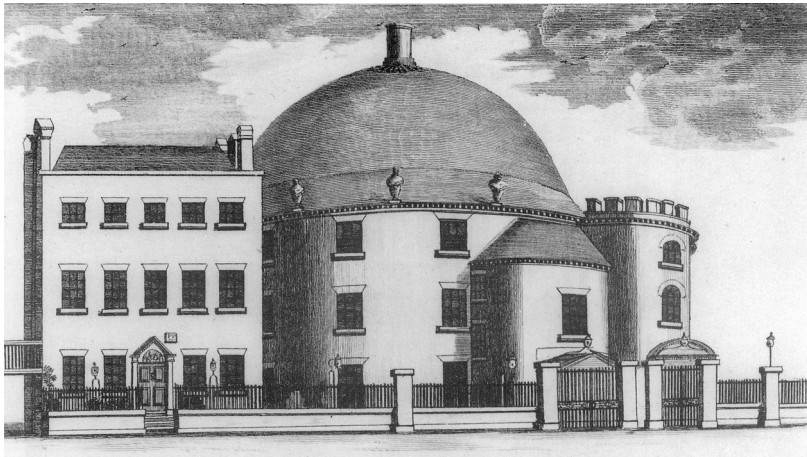
40 J.H. Newman, ‘Selina, Countess of Huntingdon’, in *Essays Critical and Historical* (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1871), vol. 1, p. 387f.

41 MS. In the Leete Collection in the Centre for Methodist Studies at Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

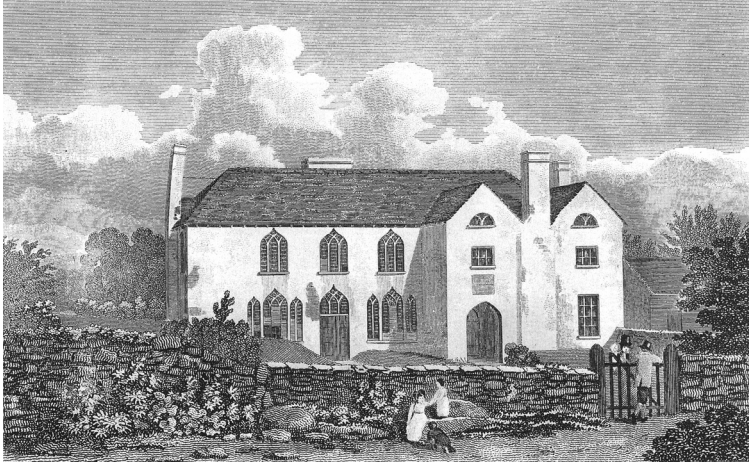
SELINA, COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON



*Theophilus and Selina Hastings (Lord and Lady Huntingdon)
with their children Selina and Henry*



Spa Fields Chapel and house



Trefecca College, 1768



Memorials to Theophilus and Selina Hastings in the Hastings Chapel in St Helen's Church, Ashby-de-la-Zouch

Past Congregational Studies Conference Papers

1981

- A. Tovey, MA, BD Robert Browne: The Morning Star of Congregationalism
D. O. Swann, BA, BD The Church Meeting
P. Seccombe, BD John Angell James

1982

- J. Legg, BA, BD Children of the Covenant (available as a booklet)
A. Clifford, BA, MLitt, PhD The Christian Mind of Philip Doddridge
D. Boorman, BA, MLitt. . . The Origins of the London Missionary Society

1983

- H. Elias, BA, BD PT Forsyth—Prophet of the 20th Century
M. Boland Oliver Cromwell
N. Rees, BD. Prayer Life of the Local Church

1984

- G. T. Booth, MM, BD The Hymn Writers of English Congregationalism
E. S. Guest John Robinson (1575–1625)
G. Fielder, MA, BD RW Dale and the Non-Conformist Conscience.

1985

- Prof. T. Jones, DPhil, DD . . Walter Craddock (1606–1659)
Prof. T. Jones, DPhil, DD . . John Penry (1563–1593)
P. Golding, BTh, MTh Owen on the Mortification of Sin

1986

- P. J. Beale, MA Jonathan Edwards and the Phenomena of Revival
D. O. Swann, BA, BD An Earnest Ministry
P. Collins Thomas Wilson

1987

- D. L. James, MSc, ARCS . . . John Cotton's Doctrine of the Church
M. Plant, BA Richard Davis and God's Day of Grace
B. Jones Lionel Fletcher—Evangelist

1988

- G. Evans, Richard Mather—The True Use of Synods
A. Tovey, MA, BD That Proud Independency
G. Kirby, MA. The Countess of Huntingdon

1989

- G. T. Booth, BD Josiah Conder—Hymn-writer and Compiler
J. Legg, BA, BD The Use and Abuse of Church History
G. Hemming, BA. Savoy, 1833 and All That

1990

- E. J. E. Semper, BA, DipTh David Bogue—A Man for All Seasons
- L. James, PhD Griffith John—The Founder of the Hankow Mission
- I. Rees, BA Jonathan Edwards on the Work of the Holy Spirit

1991

- A. Kelly What Makes Churches Grow
- E. S. Guest Joseph Parker—The Immortal Thor of Pulpitdom
- P. Seccombe, BD RW Dale—Standing Firm or Drifting Dangerously

1992

- A. Fraser, PhD When Evolutionary Thought and Congregational Thinkers Meet
- D. Saunders, MA, BEd. Living Stones—Our Heritage, Our Future
- J. Little, BD John Cennick—Conflict and Conciliation in the Evangelical Awakening.

1993 Some Separatists

- A. Tovey, MA, BD A Reforming Pair—Henry Barrow and John Greenwood
- Prof. T. Jones, DPhil, DD John Penry

1994 Perseverance and Assurance

- I. Densham Sherwood, Selina and Salubrious Place
- N. Bonnett John Eliot—Son of Nazeing
- G. Davies Thomas Goodwin and the Quest for Assurance

1995 Ministers and Missionaries

- P. J. Beale, MA The Rise and Development of the London Missionary Society
- D. O. Swann, BA, BD Thomas Haweis 1734–1820
- B. Higham David Jones—The Angel of Llangan

1996 Freedom and Faithfulness

- E. S. Guest From CERF to EFCC
- D.L. James, DMin, MSc, ARCS Heroes and Villains—The Controversy between John Cotton and Roger Williams
- E. J. E. Semper, BA, DipTh Edward Parsons—Influence from a Local Church

1997 From Shropshire to Madagascar via Bath

- R.G.D.W. Pickles, BD, MPhil The Rise and Fall of the Shropshire Congregational Union
- Philip Swann William Jay—Pastor and Preacher
- Dr Noel Gibbard Madagascar

1998 Eternal Light, Adoption and Livingstone

- G. T. Booth, MM, BD Thomas Binney, 1798–1874
- G. Cooke The Doctrine of Adoption & the Preaching of Jeremiah Burroughs
- A. Fraser, PhD David Livingstone

1999 JD Jones, Lloyd-Jones and 1662

- Peter Williams J. D. Jones of Bournemouth
- John Legg, BA, BD God’s Own Testimony: Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ Doctrine of Assurance
- Mervyn Neal The Great Ejection of 1662

2000 Origins, Theology and Unity

- Ian Harrison. John Wycliffe, Father of Congregationalism?
- Bryan Jones John Owen’s Evangelical Theology
- Dr Kenneth Brownell. Robert and James Haldane and the Quest for Evangelical Union

2001 Grace ’tis a Charming Sound

- Gordon Cooke. At One? A History of Congregational Thinking on the Atonement
- John Hancock Philip Doddridge 1702–1751: Missionary Visionary
- Neil Stewart Baptism in the Congregational Tradition

2002 Lovers of the Truth of God

- M. Plant BSc, Dip.Th. Congregationalists and Confessions
- E. S. Guest The Geneva Bible
- E.J.E. Semper, BA., Dip. Th.. William Huntington

2003 Jonathan Edwards

- Robert E. Davis ‘What Must I do to Be Saved?’ Jonathan Edwards and the Nature of True Conversion
- Robert E. Davis Jonathan Edwards: A Father of the Modern Mission Movement
- Robert E. Davis Jonathan Edwards and Britain: 18th Century Trans-Atlantic Networking

2004 Revival!

- Derek Swann Congregationalism and the Welsh Revival 1904–05
- Cyril Aston. James Montgomery—Sheffield’s Sacred Psalmist
- Eric Alldritt The Greater Excellence of the New Covenant

2005 Missionaries and Martyrs

- Peter Taylor John Williams, Apostle to Polynesia (1796–1839)
- Brian Higham David Picton Jones
- Neil Richards The faith and courage of the Marian Martyrs

2006 Challenge, Memories and Adventure

- Peter Robinson. Congregationalism’s Boom Years
- Peter Beale The Doctor—25 Years On
- David Gregson The Adventure of the English Bible

EFCC *publications*

Telling Another Generation

This book contains a symposium of papers originally written to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of EFCC, and as a tribute to Stan Guest, who has been closely involved in the work of EFCC ever since its formation, and retired as secretary of the Fellowship in 1989.

Serving as a Deacon by John Legg

'Diaconates might find it useful to supply each member with a copy of this work'—*Evangelicals Now*.

Evangelical & Congregational

A brief survey of Congregational history, church order, confessions of faith, the ministry, worship and sacraments. Includes *The Savoy Declaration of Faith*.

After Conversion—What? by Lionel Fletcher

A reprint of the forthright and biblical advice to new Christians by Lionel Fletcher, one of Congregationalism's foremost pastors and evangelists.

Children of the Covenant by John Legg

The biblical basis for infant baptism.

Signs and Seals of the Covenant by CG Kirkby

A biblical review of the doctrine of Christian baptism.

***EFCC also has available these books about
Congregational church government***

Wandering Pilgrims by ES Guest

A review of the history of Congregationalism from its formative years to the present day. The author was involved in the negotiations between those churches which joined the United Reformed Church in 1972 and those who did not.

Manual of Congregational Principles by RW Dale

The definitive work of Congregational church government.

Christian Fellowship or The Church Member's Guide by John Angell James

A practical manual for church members to learn their duties and responsibilities.

Visible Saints: The Congregational Way by GF Nuttall

An historical study of the growth of Congregationalism in the years 1640–1660 by a highly respected scholar of church history.

All these items are available from the Administrative Secretary, The Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches, PO Box 34, Beverley, East Yorkshire, HU17 0YY

