

Alan. R. Millard, "Covenant and Communion in First Corinthians," W. Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.242-248.

## CHAPTER XVI

### *Covenant and Communion in First Corinthians*

Alan. R. Millard

[p.242]

While the currents of New Testament inquiries are reflected frequently in studies of the Old Testament, the streams of Old Testament research are followed into the New Testament less often. This is a natural situation in view of the New Testament's claim to fulfil the Old, a claim which Professor Bruce has helped to elucidate.<sup>1</sup> An attempt is made here, with temerity, to approach one of Paul's epistles in the light of a fashionable Old Testament theme.

At present the Covenant concept is being investigated by form criticism on the basis of knowledge gleaned from other ancient Near Eastern Texts.<sup>2</sup> So far, however, very little use of resultant insights has been made in New Testament research, although this is one field where there is much common ground.<sup>3</sup> In a basic study K. Baltzer has demonstrated the persistence of a covenant scheme from the Old Testament into the Dead Sea Scrolls and early Christian literature, without a detailed endeavour to find it in the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> Preamble, historical prologue, stipulations, blessings and curses comprise the basic features of the scheme as represented in documents of the second millennium B.C. Baltzer identified parallels to these in sections of the Damascus Document and the Manual of Discipline from Qumran, and of the Didache, Barnabas and 2 Clement which he de-

[p.243]

finned as dogmatic, ethical, blessings and curses. He located the preservation of the scheme in liturgical forms.

Now although it would be far-fetched to maintain that any New Testament book was constructed on this pattern, it would be surprising were the concept entirely absent from writings concerned with a new covenant. Hence it may be borne in mind when reading the Epistles that they were composed to explain various facets of the application of the New

---

<sup>1</sup> In his *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1959, London, 1960); in *The Apostolic Defence of the Gospel* (London, 1959, reprinted, 1967); most notably in *This is That* (Exeter, 1968), and in such articles as those in *NTS* 2 (1955-56) pp. 176-90, *BJRL* 43 (1960-61), pp. 336-53.

<sup>2</sup> Surveys are available in K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London, 1966), pp. 92-96 and works noted there, and in D. J. McCarthy, *Der Gottesbund im Alten Testament* (Stuttgart, 1966, revised 1967).

<sup>3</sup> F. C. Fensham is an exception, see his studies "The Curse of the Cross and the Renewal of the Covenant" in *Biblical Essays* (Stellenbosch, 1966), pp. 219-26, "Die Offer en Maaltyd"; *Tydskerif vir Geesteswetensk* 5 (1965), pp. 77-85 (not accessible to me), and "Covenant, Promise and Expectation in the Bible" *ThZ* 23 (1967), pp. 305-22 with references. The essays by M. G. Kline in *WTJ* 27 (1964-5), pp. 1-20, 115-139, 28 (1965-6), pp. 1-37, should also be mentioned in this connexion.

<sup>4</sup> *Das Bundesformular* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1960), cf. A. Jaubert, *La Notion de l'Alliance dans le Judaïsme* (Paris, 1963). Since this paper was drafted J. Reumann's paper "Heilsgeschichte in Luke" has appeared (F. L. Cross ed. *Studia Evangelica* 4 [Berlin, 1968], pp. 86-115) where Baltzer's thesis is applied to the New Testament (pp. 108-15); my attention was kindly drawn to this by I. H. Marshall.

Alan. R. Millard, "Covenant and Communion in First Corinthians," W. Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.242-248.

Covenant to those who professed to accept its requirements, though they are not themselves covenant texts. So it is likely that echoes of the ancient scheme will appear.

All covenants were largely concerned with the conduct of the subject party, and the Apostle Paul felt a need for the instruction of the Corinthians in their personal responsibility as adherents of the New Covenant. The covenant theme is patent in the terms of 1:2, violated by the attitudes condemned in 1:10 ff. Further, as subjects they should never engage in any activity contrary to their Suzerain's interests, seeking adjudication of disputes from another authority (6:1-8), or joining with vassals of another power in sensual pursuits (6:9-20; cf. 10:14-30), occupations for which there are numerous Old Testament parallels in political and moral spheres. In ancient times a vassal's persistent disloyalty might result in reprisals by the suzerain, culminating in exile, or in withdrawal of the suzerain's protection against hostile forces. Such a process is described in the long curses of Deuteronomy 28, vividly portrayed in Deuteronomy 29:18-28, and was partially activated in the days of the Judges, to take Israel as an example. A like effect is produced by the New Covenant: the Corinthians were weak, ill, and even dead through their misbehaviour (11:30). Here the Covenant provisions had taken force, as Paul emphasizes in chapter 11 by his juxtaposition of verses 26 and 27. Proclamation of the Lord's Death, which was the solemnizing of the New Covenant (verse 25), implies acceptance of its consequences. The judicial language apparent in the subsequent verses has been observed already;<sup>5</sup> we may look upon it as a reflection of the Old Testament's covenant lawsuits (*rib*) where the Lord takes his people to court for their faithlessness.<sup>6</sup> Paul tries to prevent that shame overtaking the Corinthians by pointing to the effect of the Lord's Supper as proclaiming the inauguration of the New Covenant and their consequent blessing — proclaiming it, we understand, to those outside its circle who could be called upon in court, just as heaven and earth are summoned, being independent witnesses of the Old Covenant.<sup>7</sup> That Covenant told to the pagan nations and works of creation what God had done for Israel (cf. Dt. 29:22-28), at the same time as it was narrated for

[p.244]

the benefit of the subsequent generation (Ex. 13:8). This proclamation may be considered primarily out-reaching to those who observe the life of the church, in the present context, angels (4:9; 11:10) and higher powers (as in Eph. 3:10; 6:12), and also to those who might be drawn by its message (like the "unbeliever" of 14:24).

As the actions against vassals provided for in ancient treaties were intended to be punitive and remedial, so is the hardship which might befall the Corinthians. Indeed, they were required to implement the discipline of offenders among themselves by the "handing over to Satan" (5:5). That so grave a move was not final condemnation is shown by 11:32, it was rather a chastening to bring repentance and restoration. Extruded from the Covenant's present benefits, the miscreant might be brought to realize his error, repent, and be received again. There is an obvious similarity with the machinery of the old Testament covenant which

---

<sup>5</sup> See C. F. D. Moule in W. D. Davies and D. Daube, eds., *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology* (Cambridge, 1956), p. 470 and n. 3.

<sup>6</sup> References in K. A. Kitchen, *op. cit.*, p. 98, n. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Discussion by H. B. Huffmon, *JBL* 78 (1959), pp. 290-93; the stone in Jos. 24:26, 27 is also comparable.

Alan. R. Millard, "Covenant and Communion in First Corinthians," W. Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.242-248.

delivered the disloyal nation to its enemies for a time, they acting as the, unwitting, agents of the Lord (so the Assyrians Is. 8:5 f, etc., Nebuchadrezzar Jer. 25:9 etc.).<sup>8</sup>

The Lord's Supper, we have seen, stressed the covenant-standing of the disciple of Jesus. Perhaps especial weight lies on the Judas-connotation of the words "in the night in which he was betrayed" (11:23)<sup>9</sup> in the light of the Corinthians' lax behaviour there and possible incurrance of guilt (11:27). In ancient times the obligated party laid his hand upon the sacrificial victim, identifying his fate with that of the animal should he break his oath, e.g. "This head is not a ram's head, it is Mati'-il's head... if Mati'-il [breaks] this treaty, as the head of this ram is cut off... so may the head of Mati'-il be cut off...".<sup>10</sup> While many major aspects of Jesus' death cannot be compared with the ancient covenant forms, this one may, and Paul undoubtedly had it in mind at this juncture, as commentators point out, referring principally to Exodus 24 and to the Passover.<sup>11</sup> In the account of the original Passover the precept is present in appropriate guise, "None of you shall go out of the door of his house (marked with the blood) until the morning" (Ex. 12:22). That is to say, any man who left the house repudiated the promised safety of the blood, and exposed himself to death of his own will. An analogous situation is envisaged in Joshua 2:18, 19: none of Rahab's family would be in danger unless they left the house marked by the scarlet strand, but anyone who did would be liable to the same fate as the other citizens of Jericho.

[p.245]

Each time the Corinthian Christians shared the Lord's Supper they purported to show their allegiance to the covenant it symbolized, and therefore could not but expect its provisions to be active upon them for good or for ill. This follows the ancient pattern in which the regular reiteration of the covenant terms by vassals was a condition; compare, for example, the formal requirements of Deuteronomy 16:1-12; 31:10-13 and the blessings and curses listed. Two purposes were accomplished by this prompting of memory: thanksgiving which involved renewal of loyalty to the gracious Suzerain, and recollection of the commitments undertaken in response (well illustrated in Jos. 24:16-18). To facilitate the repetition, copies of the covenant — terms were preserved in some sacred place — in the Ark in Israel, in various temples in other states — or engraved on "public" monuments as at Shechem (Dt. 27:2 ff.) and Sefireh. Remembrance of the establishment of the covenant was, therefore, an integral feature of the pattern.

This similarity with the ancient covenant form is important for the interpretation of 11:24-25. We have seen the place of remembering the covenant among obligations placed upon a vassal, an obvious safeguard against human frailty, against the instinctive revolt at restraint. Yet J. Jeremias would understand these words as "This do, that God may remember me", arguing that "God remembers the Messiah in that he causes the kingdom to break in by the parousia" and "As often as the death of the Lord is proclaimed at the Lord's supper, and the maranatha

---

<sup>8</sup> On the themes of judgment and excommunication see C. F. D. Moule, *loc. cit.*, and G. W. H. Lampe in W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, R. R. Niebuhr, eds. *Christian History and Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 337-61.

<sup>9</sup> It would appear hard to avoid this association of ideas even if the primary sense is of God delivering Jesus to his enemies.

<sup>10</sup> Treaty of Ashur-nirari of Assyria with Mati'-il of Arpad, E. F. Weidner, *Archiv für Orientforschung* 8 (1932-33), pp. 17-27, col. 1, 21 ff.; English translation in D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (Rome, 1963), p. 195.

<sup>11</sup> See W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*<sup>2</sup> (London, 1955), pp. 250 f., 365.

Alan. R. Millard, "Covenant and Communion in First Corinthians," W. Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.242-248.

rises upwards, God is reminded of the unfulfilled climax of the work of salvation until (the goal is reached, that) he comes".<sup>12</sup> He says of the command, "The usual interpretation, according to which it is the disciples who should remember, is strange. Was Jesus afraid that his disciples would forget him?"<sup>13</sup> Yet surely that *is* the point; because Jesus knew that the disciples might forget him and all that he signified, he instituted the meal of the New Covenant. Therein he was to be celebrated often as the Lord and the Lamb, providing the example recalled in exhortation to forgetful readers by Paul in Philippians 2 and by Peter in 1 Peter 2.

The usage of terms for remembrance in the Old Testament and in Jewish literature and inscriptions is a mainstay of Jeremias' views. Many references are collected, of which it is claimed, "for the most part they speak of God's remembrance".<sup>14</sup> However, scrutiny of the Old Testament texts gives reason to doubt the relevance of some and the force of others. At the time Jeremias completed the revision of the current edition of his book an exhaustive monograph on the Hebrew root *ZKR* "to remem-

[p.246]

ber" was published by W. Schottroff,<sup>15</sup> examining each occurrence and rendering unnecessary any detailed analysis here. What comes to notice when reading Jeremias' references is the careful precision of the Hebrew text when the subject of remembering is God, e.g. Exodus 28:29 *l'-zikkârôn lipne yhw' tâmîd*, "as a memorial before the Lord continually", cf. 28:12; Numbers 10:10 *w'hâyû lakem l'zikkârôn lipnê 'lôhêkem*, "And they shall be a memorial of you before your God". In fact, whenever God is the subject, this is made clear either specifically, as in the passages just cited, or by the context of rituals in his sanctuary, as found several times in Ecclesiasticus 45.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the repetition of the Passover meal is to be simply *lakem l'zikkârôn*, "And this day shall be to you for a memorial, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall keep it, a feast ordained for ever" (Ex. 12:14). Therefore the phrase ἐμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ is essential in Acts 10:4 if God is to do the remembering, and is not an optional addition to a firmly established formula.<sup>17</sup> (Accordingly Jeremias' related attempt to take Mark 14:9 as foretelling a remembrance by God is to be rejected.)

In the dedicatory or votive inscriptions recovered from early synagogues the unstated subject of the phrase *d'kîr l'tab* may be understood as God with some degree of plausibility, "May God remember so-and-so with mercy".<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, among scores of comparable Aramaic texts (Nabataean, Palmyrene, Hatrene) are many which add "in the presence of such-and-such a deity", suggesting that the remembering is carried out by human agents in invocation of the

---

<sup>12</sup> *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, ET of *Die Abendmahlsworte Jesu*<sup>3</sup> (Göttingen, 1960) revised to 1964 (London, 1966), pp. 252, 253.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248. The following observations partly repeat the remarks of D. Jones, *JTS* N.S. 6 (1955), pp. 183-91, who deals with the LXX renderings of the O.T. passages.

<sup>15</sup> "Gedenken" *im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (WMANT 15, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1964).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Schottroff's remarks, *op. cit.*, p. 313. The exegesis of Num. 5:15 and 1 Ki. 17:18 as bringing sin to God's memory (Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 248) is disputed by Schottroff, pp. 265-70.

<sup>17</sup> As Jeremias states, *op. cit.*, p. 248, n. 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 244, 245.

Alan. R. Millard, "Covenant and Communion in First Corinthians," W. Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.242-248.

god.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, support for this view as a general interpretation can be found in the Jericho synagogue inscription quoted by Jeremias.<sup>20</sup> The structure was built at the instigation of a group of people whose names are not enumerated, perhaps because they were too many. But after the memorial formula stands the sentence "He who knows their names and those of their children and of their households shall write them in the Book of Life [beside] the Righteous", token of an assurance that they would not be forgotten by God, although men could not recall them by name. Certainly the intention of such texts is to bring the benefactor's name into the presence of God (the absence of a divine name or title may be explained by the context of the memorial, namely in the synagogue or its precinct, just as the pagan texts are found in the vicinity of a shrine and many of them lack a divine name<sup>21</sup>). Now a few Jewish

[p.247]

dedications exhibit their authors' beliefs more clearly, expressing their sanctified bribery: "Remembered be for good Judan bar Ishmael who made this ... As his reward may he have a share with the righteous" (Chorazin inscription, third century A.D.), and "May ... be remembered for good whose acts of charity are constant everywhere and who have given five golden denarii. May the King of the Universe give his blessing in their undertakings" (Hammath-by-Gadara, early fifth century A.D.).<sup>22</sup> The remembrance formula can be understood as addressed to the reader, and his reaction can hardly be expected to take a form far different from that of Ecclesiasticus 45-50 (note especially 44:7-15), giving praise to God for the noble acts of "famous men and our fathers that begat us".

A similar explanation can be given for the common ejaculation *ziikrônoô libraikâ* "his memory for blessing" following the name of a dead person. While some require a visible structure (cf. Gen. 11:4; II Sam. 18:18), it is said of the righteous "their words are their monument" (Genesis Rabbah 82:10). Furthermore, the Ecclesiasticus passage suggests that an unblest memory is almost equivalent to assignment to perdition, the lot of the wicked in Proverbs 10:7. Therefore the expressions *zikro'no' libra|ka* "his memory for blessing", its fuller form *zikro'no' libra|ka' l'hayyê ha|`ôla|m habba|'* "his memory for blessing for life of the next world" *d'kîr l'tab* "be remembered for good" and the like, can be applied to human remembrance as plausibly as to divine.

The result of this approach is to negate Jeremias' claim that in Palestinian Judaism formulae on the style of *d'kîr l'tab* were "understood as a wish ('may the memory of the righteous be a blessing') relating to the merciful remembrance of God" as opposed to the interpretation of "Hellenistic Judaism... referring to the good memories which the deceased left behind among his contemporaries".<sup>23</sup> Thus Paul's words mean that the Supper of the Lord was initiated to remind the disciples of the work he had done.

Dissent from Jeremias' understanding of the remembrance does not preclude a prospective sense in that any covenant looks forward to the continuance of the suzerain's protection and to

---

<sup>19</sup> Schottroff, *op. cit.*, pp. 73 f.

<sup>20</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 245.

<sup>21</sup> Schottroff, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-77 on Nabataean practice. A. Negev, *IEJ* 57 (1967), pp. 253-5 proposes another explanation not yet substantiated.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86; E. L. Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece* (London, 1934), pp. 60, n. 2, 82.

<sup>23</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 246. J. J. Petuchowski, *JBL* 76 (1957), pp. 294-295 had argued against Jeremias' theory from the use of *zkr* "remember" in the Passover Haggadah.

Alan. R. Millard, "Covenant and Communion in First Corinthians," W. Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.242-248.

the obedience of the vassal. At all times the covenant-subjects are to be prepared against a visit from their lord (Gk. παρουσία as in Hellenistic Egypt<sup>24</sup>) or a summons to his presence, and their readiness is shown in the regular recollection of their promises and of his in a solemn repetition linking past, present, and future.

The ancient covenants provided for their physical preservation, principally through sanctions against any who might alter the manuscript or destroy it by some means. With a covenant like the New Covenant, not

[p.248]

committed to writing in the first place but written on the hearts of its adherents (Jer. 31:33 etc.), the possibility of alteration is greater. Others of Paul's letters demonstrate that fact, even among his own converts. For those who destroyed the covenant documents divine annihilation was promised, as much as for those who purposely contravened their terms. Such apostates are condemned by Paul, also, "If any one has no love for the Lord, let him be anathema", which is followed immediately by the cry of the loyal vassal, "Our Lord, come!" (16:22) involving reward and punishment.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile the memorial rite reiterating the basis of the covenant is the most appropriate method of ensuring the faithful continuance of the covenant people. Should the disciples of Jesus forget him, what man would remember him as Lord (cf. Is. 53:8 LXX = Acts 8:33)?

---

© 1970 The Paternoster Press. Reproduced by kind permission of the publisher.

Converted to PDF by Robert I Bradshaw in May 2005.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>

---

---

<sup>24</sup> Arndt, p. 635, s.v., 2b.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. C. F. D. Moule, *NTS* 6 (1960), pp. 307-10.