

Ministers of the New Covenant

“Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

—II Corinthians 3:6

PAUL’S APOSTLESHIP WAS

being challenged by some of the brethren at Corinth and he chose this occasion to write to them. He thus began his epistle by asking, “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?”—

II Cor. 3:1, *New American Standard Bible*

Paul then stated that he needed no such letters of commendation from them, but explained, “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”—vss. 2,3

In his letter, the apostle made important spiritual connections to some Old Testament types.

These types illustrate the making of the New Covenant, and relate to those who will share with our Lord Jesus as the Mediator. Under the administration of Christ's future kingdom, all who are willingly obedient to God's law will be given opportunity for reconciliation with the Heavenly Father, and will attain everlasting life under the terms of the covenant.

THE LAW OF GOD

When speaking of the 'tables of stone,' the apostle was making a connection to the original Law Covenant that was given by God to Moses and the nation of Israel. After Moses had been in the mount for forty days, we read, "He gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God." (Exod. 31:18) These were the same tablets that Moses broke as he descended from the mount and witnessed the idolatry of the children of Israel.—chap. 32:15-20

Israel's falling into idol worship was thus symbolized by Moses breaking the tables of God's law. This was later confirmed by the Prophet Jeremiah, who wrote, "Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD."—Jer. 31:32

TYPE OF CHRIST

God was prepared to abandon his arrangements with Israel, and they did not know whether he

would permit them to come back into covenant relationship with him again. But Moses implored God that he might be permitted to die in place of his people who had sinned against him. He said, “Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.” (Exod. 32:32) Moses had been selected by God for a very special position as mediator of the Law, and he was ready to die for the people’s sins. This was a wonderful illustration of our Lord Jesus—the greater than Moses who would at a future time be willing to die for the sins of the whole human family.

MOSES PRAYS FOR THE PEOPLE

Moses prayed on behalf of Israel, that God would reinstate his covenant with them. “The LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.” (chap. 33:17) Soon afterward, he was given further instructions as to what he was to do. “The LORD said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest.”—chap. 34:1

The first tables of the Law had been written by God on stone tablets that he had provided. “The LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them.”—chap. 24:12

GOD’S SECOND COMMANDMENT

When God commanded Moses to ascend to his presence on Mount Sinai the second time, he was

instructed to chisel out from the earth two new stones and bring them with him. (Exod. 34:1-4) When Moses had performed this task, God then revealed his intentions to him. "He said, Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the LORD." (vs. 10) Further details were also given, "The LORD said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel. And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments."—vss. 27,28

MOSES' FACE SHONE

There was an important and significant difference between the writing of the first two tablets, and those of the second set. "It came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him." (vs. 29) Moses was not aware that his face shone, "When Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him." (vs. 30) Moses then called Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation before him and spoke to them, and when he had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. (vs. 33) When he went into the Tabernacle to speak to God he took the veil off. When he came

out to communicate with the people again the veil was off and his face shone.—vss. 34,35

SPIRITUAL LESSONS

Returning to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we now have the scriptural background as well as the apostle's spiritual perspective in connection with what he was saying to them. After explaining that they were his letter of commendation he assures them, "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."—II Cor. 3:3

The apostle was thus emphasizing a significant and spiritual connection to the old Law Covenant given to Moses and the people of Israel. When God spoke to Moses the second time, he instructed him to dig from the earth and bring with him two new stones when he ascended the mountain to appear in his presence. God then wrote his Law again on these new tables of stone. (Exod. 34:1) Paul points out that Jesus' followers are now 'epistle[s] of Christ' and during this Gospel Age they are being prepared by the Holy Spirit of God to share with our Lord Jesus as Mediator of a new and better covenant that will be administered under Christ's future kingdom.

Later, Paul said, "Being also co-laborers, we exhort you not to receive the favor of God in vain; (for he says, In a Season acceptable, I listened to thee, and in a Day of Salvation I assisted thee. Behold, now is a well-accepted Season; behold! now is a Day of Salvation)."—II Cor. 6:1,2, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*

The apostle was quoting from Isaiah's prophecy where he had written, "Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish [raise up, *Marginal Translation*] the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages."—Isa. 49:8

Isaiah's prophetic words also spoke of the future covenant, and the ministers of that covenant who would be called by God during an acceptable day of salvation, this present Gospel Age. During this age our loving Heavenly Father has been calling from the world consecrated followers of Jesus, and has been preparing them for the future work of Christ's kingdom. Together with our Lord they will share as the Mediator of the glorious New Covenant for the blessing of the whole human family under the administration of his kingdom of righteousness and peace.

Our Heavenly Father, through ministers such as Paul and other disciples of Jesus, labored diligently to assist the brethren at Corinth and in other ecclesias of the early church that they too might become epistles of Christ and share in that grand work of the kingdom. God's law was being written in their hearts of flesh, illustrated by the tables of stone that Moses took from the earth and carried up to God, so that when Christ's kingdom is established they may be given 'as a covenant for the people.' Throughout this Gospel Age this calling has gone out to sincere and consecrated Christians who have also labored in God's vineyard, as epistles of Christ.

OUT OF ZION

Once this calling has been completed, the church, as living representations of God's law, will be brought forth by the greater Moses, our Lord Jesus, and will be used to teach the Father's law to the sin-sick and dying human family. "So all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion [Zion] the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins."—Rom. 11:26,27; Isa. 59:20,21

Moses did not come down from Mount Sinai without the stone tablets of the covenant, and thus Jesus does not come out of Mount Zion to make the New Covenant until the fleshly tables have all been made ready. The forty days that Moses spent upon the mount, during which time the stones were prepared, illustrate the present Gospel Age, the acceptable time prophesied by Isaiah and quoted from by Apostle Paul. This establishes an important truth for the Lord's people during the present Gospel Age.

PREPARATION WORK

The apostle, and those who are being called as ministers of the New Covenant, are also privileged to share in the present work of encouraging and assisting others of like precious faith, as addressed by Jude, who wrote, "You, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit." (Jude 20, *NASB*) We also read concerning the "fulness of the Gentiles," and the calling and testing of the church, which are essential prerequisites to the making of the New Covenant.

(Rom. 11:25-27) It is a blessing to participate in sending forth the Word of Truth to those who respond to the wonderful calling of the present age and who will share in the future grander work of the Millennial Age.

In his letter to the brethren at Corinth, Paul made an important comparison. He said, "If the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory." (II Cor. 3: 7-9) The apostle contrasts the exceeding glory of the New Covenant and its future administration with the making of the old Law Covenant with its fading glory under the mediatorship of Moses.

The work of sealing the New Covenant began with Jesus' first advent, and continues throughout the Gospel Age as the church takes part in the better sacrifices. The Gospel Age has been set aside for completing the work of writing the law of God in the hearts of the church. They will be used as the teaching agencies of the New Covenant during Christ's kingdom. "Even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious." (vss. 10,11) Paul taught that the Law Covenant was to be abolished, but that a New Covenant would be established with a better mediator. It will be *(Continued on page 35)*

(Continued from page 31) God's permanent and everlasting law.

In his letter to the Galatians, he wrote, "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." (Gal. 3:19) When Jesus began his earthly ministry, the progressive work, which would in due time result in the establishing of the New Covenant, began. Luke recorded, "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached."—Luke 16:16

WITH PLAINNESS OF SPEECH

When he wrote to the Corinthians, Paul made an important distinction. He said, "Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness [boldness, *Marginal Translation*] of speech." (II Cor. 3:12) The hope of which he spoke pointed to his own work of ministering to the Lord's people, and on behalf of the everlasting covenant that will never pass away as did the old law.

He further explained, "Not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished." (vs. 13) The veil hid from Israel the fading glory which was upon Moses' face. "Their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart." (vss. 14,15) Israel as a nation was blinded to the truth concerning their Law Covenant, that it was to be abolished and that it would be replaced with a new and better arrangement.

The apostle said, however, that the Jews continued to read about Moses and the old Law.

The glory of the New Covenant will be much greater than was the glory of the old. The veil was upon the hearts of those Israelites who were blinded to this fact. Neither did they accept Christ as their Savior. "Whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." (vs. 16, *NASB*) When an honest heart turns to the Lord, they understand that the law has ended and has been replaced by Christ's sacrifice that will accomplish that which the old Law could never do.

"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (vs. 17) The 'liberty' here referred to is liberty from bondage under the old Law Covenant which Paul had earlier called the 'ministration of condemnation.' Those who are blessed to receive Christ by turning to him have been freed from the Law and its bondage. They enter into the liberty of the sons of God, and into his presence.

WITH UNVEILED FACE

"We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." (II Cor. 3:18, *NASB*) Paul compares Moses' ministry and the veil he wore, with that of the Lord's people during this present age. He places Christ's followers in the very presence of God with unveiled faces.

By accepting the Lord Jesus as our Savior and consecrating ourselves to die with him, we enter into the presence of the Heavenly Father through

him. We then may take on the character qualities of Jesus and become epistles of Christ. In this sense, we may reflect the glory of God as did Moses when he spoke to the people after being in the presence of God. Our lives, behavior, attitudes, and words must reflect the disposition of Christ as proclaimed in Paul's letter that he wrote to the ecclesia at Rome. "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." (Rom. 8.29) During the present Gospel Age, the Lord's people are putting on the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. In doing this, they reflect the glory of the Lord and, as the apostle explains, we 'are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.'

By accepting and following Christ, we take on the glory of God in our characters, and are changed into his image. It is 'from glory to glory' because we are in the glorious presence of God through our Redeemer and then we reflect that glory to others. This is accomplished by the Spirit of the Lord working in our lives and hearts. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."—II Cor. 4:3,4

The true church, being called from the world during this present Gospel Age, reflects the glorious image. Christ Jesus is the very image, or representation, of God, and when we behold and learn of him we may transform ourselves into the same

image. Paul further says, “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”—vs. 5,6

As the people of Israel saw the glory of God reflected in the face of Moses, so we, as spiritual Israelites, see the glory of God reflected in the face of Jesus Christ. Christ is identified by Paul as the antitypical Moses in this illustration, and he has shown the contrast between the making of the old Law Covenant, and the making of the New Covenant. During this age, those who behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ are changed into the same image from glory to glory.

The church by virtue of their sacrifice now and their transformation into the image of God’s dear Son, our precious Savior, are being prepared to become a part of the Mediator of the New Covenant. In his explanation of the type and its antitype, the apostle has not placed the followers of Jesus or identified them with the nation of Israel according to the flesh, and those with whom the old Law was made. He has, however, identified them with the one who mediates the covenant—Moses as the type and Christ as the antitype. They are the antitypical tables of stone, and there is clear evidence that the church is yet being developed as ministers of the New Covenant. May our loving Heavenly Father help us to be faithful for a place in Christ’s glorious kingdom, and share in the blessing of all the families of the earth as ministers of the glorious New Covenant. ■