

## THE SPIRIT AS GOD'S RENEWED PRESENCE IN PAUL'S WRITING

God's greatest promise under the 'old covenant' with humanity was that he would make a "*new covenant*" with his people (**Jeremiah 31:31**). This prophecy is so significant that it comprises the longest New Testament quote from the Old Testament; it is quoted in its entirety in **Hebrews 8:8-12** and again in **10:16-17**. This is also the only Old Testament passage in which the phrase *new covenant* appears. The *new covenant* centers around the one final Sacrifice - Jesus Christ - and it is a covenant of forgiveness (**Jeremiah 31:34**). Is this *new covenant* what is being discussed in all of **Acts 2**? Let's consider **Acts 2:5-11, 14, 22-24, 36** (in any translation) regarding the carefully gathered participants and recipients and experience (**Joel 2:28-32**) of Pentecost with Jews and Israelites.

What significant historical act, then, instituted God's new covenant with his people? In keeping with the rest of the early church, Paul recognizes the death of Christ as instituting God's new covenant with his people (see **1 Corinthians 11:25**). Christ's death and resurrection have brought an end to Torah observance (living on the basis of the Old Testament law, **Romans 7:4-6; 8:2-3**); being led by the Spirit has replaced observance as God's way of fulfilling Torah (**Galatians 5:18**); indeed, the righteous requirement of Torah is now fulfilled in those who walk in / by the Spirit (**Romans 8:4**).

How could *Paul*, speaking to Gentile churches, be comfortable with linking what he is saying to them with the prophecy of **Jeremiah 31:31-34**? Do we need to retool our thinking to think like Paul? Should we have *Paul's* zeal in defending the *New Covenant*? He was reared on the Old Covenant scriptures, but he became a *Christian herald* to the Gentiles. In his writings he was continually linking the fulfillment of Old Covenant prophecies to the *New Covenant* Christian experience of the Gentile and Jewish converts.

### The Spirit's Role in the New Covenant

What is the way the *new covenant* is realized "in and among" God's people? Paul also sees the Holy Spirit as the way that covenant is realized in and among them. As a result of his own - and other's experience of the Holy Spirit, *Paul* understands this role especially in terms of **Ezekiel 36:26-27 and 37:14**. *Paul* combines motifs from these two passages in such a way that in the coming of the Spirit into the life of the believer and the believing community God fulfilled three dimensions of the promise:

1. God would give his people a "new heart" - Jeremiah's "heart of flesh" to replace that of stone (**Jeremiah 31:31-33**) - made possible because he would also give them "a new spirit" (**Ezekiel 36:26**). In Paul this theme finds expression in **2 Corinthians 3:1-6**, where the Corinthians are understood to be the recipients of the new covenant in that they were "inscribed" by "the Spirit of the living God" on "tablets

of human hearts" (**v. 3**). Paul himself is the minister of this new covenant, which no longer has to do with "letter" but with the Spirit who gives life (**vv. 5-6**). This same understanding lies behind the similar language in **Romans 7:4-6**, as well as the "circumcision of the heart by the Spirit" in **Romans 2:29**, which echoes **Deuteronomy 30:6** in terms of fulfillment.

2. This "new spirit" is none other than God's Spirit, who will enable God's people to follow his decrees (**Ezekiel 36:27**). As is evident in two Gentile Churches, **Romans 8:3-4** and **Galatians 5: 16-25**, the Spirit's fulfillment of this theme is Paul's answer to the question of "what happens to righteousness (and holy living) if one does away with observance of the Torah? (the Old Testament law)?"
3. 3. God's Spirit means the **presence** of God himself, in that by putting "my Spirit in you... you will live" (**Ezekiel 37:14**). Again, Paul picks up this theme in a Gentile church, **2 Corinthians 3:5-6**. As the Spirit of the living God, the Spirit provides for God's people the one essential reality about God. "The Spirit," *Paul* says in the context of the *new covenant*, "gives life."

Similarly, the language of **1 Thessalonians 4:8** is expressly that of **Ezekiel 36-37**. Any rejection of holiness on the part of the Thessalonians is a rejection of the God who "gives his Holy Spirit" to you. It is the **presence** of the holy God himself, by his Holy Spirit, whom they reject if they reject *Paul's* call to holy living. We may conclude that for *Paul*, Christ has made the *new covenant* effective for the people of God through his death and resurrection; but the Spirit is the key to the *new covenant* as a fulfilled reality in the lives of God's people.

### **The Indwelling Spirit (God's Presence)**

What illustrates God's "divine **presence**" or God's "dwelling in" his people? Intimately related to the divine **presence** theme and the *new covenant* passages in the Old Testament are the many texts in *Paul* that speak of the Spirit as "dwelling in or among" the people of God. This theme is found first of all in the texts that locate the Spirit within the believer. The Spirit is spoken of as being "in you / us" (**1 Thessalonians 4:8; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 14:24-25; Ephesians 5:18** [in the imagery of "filling"]). The location of "in you / us" is the heart (**2 Corinthians 1:22; 3:3; Galatians 4:6; Romans 2:29; 5:5**). This in turn becomes the language of "dwelling in" (**1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Romans 8:9-11; Ephesians 2:22**).

What imagery term points to God's renewed presence among his people? In the temple imagery of **2 Corinthians 6:16**, which presupposes the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the community from **1 Corinthians 3:16**, Paul understands God to be present among his people. In

making this point, he draws on the language of the *new covenant* promise of **Ezekiel 37:27**: "I will dwell among them and they shall be my people." This passage points toward the ultimate expression of the language of indwelling - in the imagery of the *temple*.

- 1) Where else do we find *new covenant* "temple imagery" in *Paul's* writings?
- 2) Does *Paul* say Christians are to be *renewed* in the spirit of their mind?
- 3) Does *Paul* say we can grieve the Holy Spirit in thought, word or deed?
- 4) Do we need to retool our thinking to fit with *Paul's* thinking and terms?

**NOTE:** Source Materials from Pauline Epistles Class 2007.