

Historical Background of The New Covenant Advocate

Sometime near the turn of the 19th century, sincere and studious believers in Australia wondered if God's love and purpose was broader than as represented by their minister. To gain further understanding which they hoped others somewhere may have reached, an advertisement was entered in United States newspapers. In substance it asked, "If you have religious views you would like to share, send them for our consideration." In the divine providence, some reader sent a copy of "The Divine Plan of the Ages."

In time, its publishers sent two representatives, successively, who settled, one in Sydney, the other in Melbourne. The success of those early efforts, or the lack thereof, is reflected in an Oct. 1, 1903, announcement, that Brother Otto A. Koetitz and family had left for Germany "to take the place of Bro. Henninges as manager of the Elberfeld Branch. Bro. Henninges, with his wife, will proceed to Australia, where he will open another Branch Office." (R3255) Bro. Henninges may have served at Elberfeld about a year, having moved there from his previous assignment in Great Britain. He and his wife had been dispatched to London early in 1900. And before that he had been actively involved in the work in Allegheny for 7 years (part of which time he was Society treasurer), and Sister Henninges had "been a member of the ... family for twelve years." (R2578, Feb. 15, 1900) She was the "Rose" Ball about whom so much is recorded in R3815.

Proceeding to their fourth assignment, Bro. and Sr. Henninges were met at the dock by the very ones who had "advertised" some years earlier for spiritual assistance—grandparents and great-grandparents of some of Australia's still-faithful brethren of 1987. It was a time of rejoicing and progress which continued long after the repercussions introduced by the Jan. 1, 1907 magazine article which contended that the New Covenant is not now operative. (R3914) This was new doctrine to all these brethren. For over twenty years, readers had been exhorted to claim and to rejoice in the blessing of having their sins forgiven, no more

remembered, and having God's laws written in their hearts and minds, and being His people. (Heb. 8:9-12) They had been assured that Jesus was "the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises." (Heb. 8:6) They had been directed to rejoice in the Holy Spirit's witness to their being sanctified through this covenant. (Heb. 10:14-18) They had been assured that "he is the mediator of the new testament" and that "the death of the covenant victim" enabled the New Covenant blessings to them. (Heb. 9:15-17) They were exhorted to serve God as ministers of this New Covenant in Christ's stead. (II Cor. 3:6-9, 5:18-21) This had been the consistent teaching all through the years of the publishing of, and in the six books entitled "Studies in the Scriptures."

Perhaps the sternest admonition regarding belief in Christ Jesus as our Mediator and the operation now of the blessed New Covenant, which all these brethren heartily believed, appeared in the Aug. 15, 1901 issue. "Proceeding to compare these two prophets, the typical Moses and the antitypical Christ, the Apostle says, 'He that despised Moses' law died without mercy; ... of how much severer punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the Covenant, wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace?' (Heb. 10:28,29) ... So, says the Apostle, in respect to the New Covenant, and in respect to those who have apprehended that it was sealed with the blood of Christ, and that it is in operation now, and that we have the benefits of it conferred upon us—if we would repudiate this New Covenant it would mean that we would thereby repudiate Christ as our Mediator, and would fall into the hands of the living God, to be dealt with directly by him, and that without mercy. The Apostle clinches his argument by saying, 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'—Heb. 10:31." (R2859)

About three years after the first edition of "The New Creation" book was published, the teaching regarding the New Covenant was changed and reversed. Thereafter the magazine printed severe warnings to those who continued to believe and teach what they had learned from the teachings of the Society during the previous 25 years—that the New Covenant opened at Pentecost. That change

followed a conversation sometime in 1905 with Paul S.L. Johnson, a former Lutheran pastor and converted Jew. He suggested “to Bro. Russell that the New Covenant is operative *exclusively after* the Gospel Age” (Epiphany Studies Vol. 10, page 101), in harmony with Charles Russell’s 1880 view.

After 14 years of harmonious, effective service with the Society, the last almost two years being in Australia, Bro. and Sr. Henniges and many other brethren there were unable to accept this new-to-them doctrine. In a little more than two years later, in 1909, “The New Covenant Advocate and Kingdom Herald” began publication, to continue uninterrupted for 35 years.

Bible Students will find in the writings and books of the New Covenant Fellowship, which carry articles written by as many as forty different brethren over the years, much more than a history of this segment of the movement. Though doubtless imperfect, they supply important spiritual assistance in the study of God’s word. The authors carefully considered the Bible context in both prophecy and exhortation to discern the truths which God caused to be recorded. Only by following the reasoned logic in defense of their view can one value the unmodified Scripture examined, and recognize the obscurity which the forced change has cast upon some important doctrines. Let not historical interest be the sole object for the acquisition and use of these studies. Whatever be one’s view of the covenants and sin offering, a spiritual blessing awaits all who give consideration to the interpretive suggestions contained in the pages offered.