

#### 4. Faith and Faithfulness in the New Testament

The coming of the Messiah signaled the end of the former age and the inauguration of the new age Yahweh promised through His prophets. This latter age would profoundly transcend its predecessor, while yet being intimately connected with it. These two ages correspond as *promise* and *fulfillment*, so that the pre-messianic age served a prophetic and preparatory function in anticipation of Messiah's coming and the fullness of the times. Thus, to the question of the role of the Mosaic Covenant and its administration in light of God's restorative purposes being bound up in Abraham, Paul answered that the Law (and the age it governed) served a *pedagogical* role: It governed and instructed the covenant household in its season of preparation until it had "come of age" and was equipped to fulfill its identity and calling as Yahweh's royal son. Most importantly, Israel's entrance into its mature sonship was to come through its Messiah; He would embody Israel such that, in Him, Israel would become Israel indeed (Galatians 3:1-4:7).

*This same promise-fulfillment dynamic – centered in Jesus the Messiah – applies to the concept of faith and is the key to understanding the relationship between faith in the preparatory era and faith in the new age inaugurated by Jesus through His resurrection.*

In this regard, two related considerations are critically important to grasp:

- 1) The first is that this promise-fulfillment dynamic highlights *discontinuity* as well as *continuity* in the relationship between Old Testament faith and its New Testament counterpart. While the two are intimately related, they are not the same and must not be confused or collapsed into one another. This error is reflected in the Puritan practice of assigning the same title, *Church*, to both Old Covenant Israel and Christ's New Covenant body. This betrayed the Puritan conviction that both communities were essentially the same people of God constituted and related to Him in the same fundamental way. And this essential sameness implied sameness in their respective faith toward Him. A more contemporary example of this confusion is the assumption that God's "faithful" during the preparatory era were Christians just as are believers subsequent to the Christ event.
- 2) The second is the fact that the continuity and discontinuity in the matter of faith are determined and defined by the Christ event itself (encompassing everything from the incarnation to Pentecost). Messiah's coming and accomplishment – His *faithfulness* to His Father's design – are the basis and mechanism for the transition from the preparatory age to the age of fulfillment, and so it is with the faith-faithfulness which characterizes God's people in each of these ages.

The implication of these observations is that every question and conclusion respecting the relationship between Old Testament and New Testament faith must be centered in Jesus Himself. And not simply Jesus as a sinless man and vicarious sacrifice for sinners, but Jesus as the *Messiah* – the One revealed and promised throughout the preparatory salvation history; the One in whom all of Yahweh's purposes and promises are "yes and amen"; the One who embodies in Himself the faithfulness (righteousness) of God.

a. It follows, then, that the place to begin in considering New Testament faith is with Jesus Himself, even as we see in Him the substance of true humanness. Many Christians don't associate faith with Jesus, primarily because faith is so closely associated with justification: Sinners are justified through faith in Jesus and His atoning death; treated in this way, faith has no pertinence to Him. But the truth is, the Scripture defines and presents Jesus of Nazareth as the quintessential man of faith (cf. Psalm 91 with Matthew 4:5-7). This is the case in two respects:

1) First and foremost, He came into the world as the *new Adam* – a man sharing in Adam's fallen humanness, but unto the end that He should condemn and destroy that corrupted humanness in Himself and inaugurate a new human race which shares in His resurrection life – the life that constitutes the humanness for which God created man (ref. Romans 8:3; 1 Corinthians 15; cf. also Psalm 8 with Hebrews 2:1-18). Jesus opposed and condemned Adamic humanness, and He did so by living a life of unqualified and unblemished faith/faithfulness. At every point, Jesus confronted and withstood the Adamic nature He'd taken to Himself in incarnation, thereby exposing man's falseness and condemning it by living as true man in contradiction of it. In Paul's language, Jesus "condemned sin in the flesh." But, because the essence of sin is unbelief, Jesus' sinless life consisted in a life of perfect faith/faithfulness.

2) Jesus came into the world as a New Adam – the quintessential faithful man. But He did so for the sake of His Father's design to banish the curse and purge and regather the alienated creation to Himself (Genesis 3:15). God had determined that His restorative work would be effected through a man, but specifically, a descendent of Abraham (cf. Genesis 12:1-3, 22:1-18 and 28:10-14 with 32:1-30). *God's purpose for His creation was bound up in Israel, the Abrahamic "seed," so that Jesus' faith/faithfulness as True Man was precisely His life as the True Israel.* God had pledged to undo the consequences of man's unfaithfulness through Israel, but Israel itself proved unfaithful: It failed to conform to the truth of itself as Abraham's covenant offspring and to the God who had chosen and called it. Israel's faithfulness (its righteousness) consisted in joining its *amen* to Yahweh's, and in this it showed itself intractably unfaithful.

And yet, as previously emphasized, Yahweh's faithfulness – His integrity respecting His purposes and covenant commitment – depended absolutely on the faithfulness of the Abrahamic seed, so that Israel's faithlessness had cataclysmic significance – not just for the nation, but the world of men, the entire creation and even God Himself. If Israel failed to fulfill its identity and calling, God's design and covenant oath would be overthrown and He'd be proven unfaithful; He'd have failed to "keep faith" and fulfill what He'd promised to Abraham and bound Himself to. Thus Jesus embodied Israel in Himself in order that, in Him, Israel should become Israel indeed and fulfill its calling on behalf of the world.

Yahweh's faithfulness depended upon Israel being Israel and He secured Israel's faithfulness by the incarnation – by sending His Son as the promised son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:67-73). Thus Jesus' faith/faithfulness was precisely His fulfillment of Israel's calling on behalf of the world. And because Israel's unfaithfulness necessitated this, Jesus' embodiment of Israel was for Israel's sake as much as the world's. Jesus was the faithful son Israel could not be, and this faithfulness had two critical dimensions, *both of which focus on Israel's unique and critical role in Yahweh's purpose for His creation:*

- First, He added His amen to His Father's by agreeing with Him *on behalf of* man and His design for him. As noted above, He did so by being faithful man: God's New Adam and His True Israel through whom the divine purpose for man was to be realized. (These two dimensions of Jesus' faithful humanness are highlighted in His baptism and testing.)
- But Jesus also added His amen to His Father's by agreeing with Him *against* man. Man's unfaithfulness had brought himself and the creation under God's curse (Genesis 3:17-19). And Israel, His chosen instrument for undoing the creational curse, was itself under Yahweh's covenant curse (Deuteronomy 27-30), even as the nation shared in Adam's alienated and corrupt humanness. And so, as part of embodying Israel in Himself, Jesus embodied and owned Israel's guilt and curse (Galatians 3:10-14).

Jesus agreed with Yahweh against Israel and took Israel's due, but in order that He should restore and reconstitute Israel in Himself. (Hence Jesus' appointment of twelve apostles.) In Him, Israel would become Israel, and so fulfill its ordained role as Yahweh's instrument of global and cosmic restoration. *Jesus' ultimate goal in taking upon Himself Israel's curse was the eradication of the creational curse.* Thus the outcome of the cross was resurrection: new creation embodied in Himself; new creation destined to finally embrace the whole created order (cf. Isaiah 53-55, Zechariah 2-3, 9-11, 14 with Ephesians 1:8-9 and Romans 8:1-25). This is the way in which Jesus' faith/faithfulness must be understood; it not only reveals the true nature of His obedience (Philippians 2), it illumines God's actual design in sending His Son and what it is that the Son actually accomplished. Hence the importance of the contextual rendering, "faith of Christ," in several passages in Paul's epistles (Romans 3:21-22; Galatians 2:14-16, 3:22; Philippians 3:8-9). This is not to deny or in any way negate the principle and obligation of personal faith *in* Christ; it is, however, to emphasize that faith in Christ is faith in the *faithful* Messiah: the Messiah promised in the Scriptures who triumphed in perfect faithfulness as the New Adam and True Israel.

*"On the cross the story of unfaithful Israel came to an end under the curse of the law, so that the story of faithful Israel might continue as the story of the faithful Messiah. It was the summation (and continuation) of Israel in the Messiah that accounted for the fact that Gentiles could, by virtue of union with Messiah, enter into the story and blessings of faithful Israel."*

Jesus was the quintessential *man* of faith, but He was also faithful *Yahweh* – Yahweh returned to Zion to fulfill His pledge of conquest, deliverance, renewal and ingathering. This crucial truth is precisely the reason all four gospel writers highlight John the Baptist and his ministrations as fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy of a forerunner appointed to go before the Lord and herald His return to Zion.

*“In Christ, as it were, Yahweh was no longer holding his peace but was finally crying out in answer to his critics, ‘I have not forsaken them; I am faithful...’ In Christ Jesus the faithfulness of God was not vindicated by a last-minute revision of the relationship between God and his people. Mutual faithfulness (not mere faith) was the sine qua non of the relationship, but only because Yahweh, the faithful God, contrary to every expectation and at great cost, entered the story of his people and, in the person of his Son, established faithfulness there as well. In Christ God played out faithful roles, as it were, on both sides of the relationship.”* (New Dictionary of Biblical Theology)

Man in truth – man as righteous – is man determined and defined by intimate, devoted communion with God characterized by complete and unwavering trust in Him as the ever-faithful Father. Man in truth is man as God’s true image-son, but man as *this* sort of man, and God as *this* faithful God whom men are to trust, are both actualized – they both find their “yes and amen” – in Jesus the Messiah.

*“He who was God and man in one person acted from the side of God in the faithfulness of the divine truth and love, and acted from the side of humanity in the faithfulness of a life wholly obedient to the Father. In the unity of the divine-human faithfulness, Jesus Christ was not only the complete embodiment of the faithfulness of God the Father toward humanity [in and through Israel], but the complete embodiment of the faithfulness of the Son as Man [Last Adam and True Israel] toward the Father... As such, he was at once the complete revelation of God to man and the perfect correspondence on man’s part to that revelation [this correspondence consisting of Jesus’ agreement with God on behalf of man and against man]. He was at once the fulfilled act of reconciliation on the part of God toward man, but he was also the fulfilled appropriation of that reconciliation on the part of man toward God. In that whole movement, **the human obedience of Jesus was not simply an instrumental but an integral and essential part of that divine revelation and reconciliation.** Thus in living out to the full in our humanity the relation of the Son to the Father, and therefore in bringing the Father into direct and immediate relation with the whole of our human life, Jesus Christ was the perfect man perfectly reflecting the glory of God, but as such and precisely as such, the whole course of Christ’s perfect human life on earth was identical with the whole course of the Father’s action toward mankind... Because the human life and work of Jesus was in entire agreement with the life and work of the Father [Jesus’ faithfulness being His “amen” to the Father’s amen], the human activity of Jesus exhibited a perfect parallelism to the saving activity of God himself, but more than that, his activity on earth **was itself** the saving activity of God at work among men and women.”* (T. F. Torrance, Incarnation, emphasis in original)