

A Review of *The Two Covenants* by T. A. Warner

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The Reason for This Review

T. A. Warner published *The Two Covenants* in 1845 at the request of The Black River Baptist Association in New York and The Mad River Baptist Association in Ohio. Warner had moved from New York to become the fifth pastor of the Lost Creek Baptist Church in Ohio. He must have presented this essay at both association meetings. Afterward both groups asked him to publish his work so that others could read it. Therefore, he asked the City Book Store Printing Office in Dayton, Ohio, to print some copies.¹ I have no idea how many.

I am writing this review almost two hundred years later because I was unaware of its existence when I wrote *One Greater than Moses: A History of New Covenant Theology*. After reading it, I wondered why no one in Warner's day reacted to what he wrote.

Background Information

After the War of Independence, many people began moving west in search of a better life—some to Ohio. A few pioneers arrived at the future township of Lost Creek, a small community northeast of Dayton, Ohio, by the early 1800s.

The first members of the Lost Creek Baptist Church began meeting in a home in 1816. By 1821, they erected the first permanent church building in the township.² Meanwhile, five Baptist churches in Champaign County had organized The Mad River Baptist Association in

¹ T. A. Warner, *The Two Covenants* (Dayton, OH: The City Book Store, 1845), copyright page.

² The Troy Historical Society, last modified (date), accessed July 27, 2017, <http://www.thetroyhistoricalsociety.org/stories/hist1880/lost-ck.htm>.

1812. After its inception, the Lost Creek Church joined this association. In 1833, 1003 people belonged to member churches.³

By the early 1800s, 128 Baptist Associations existed.⁴ All the Calvinistic Baptist Churches adopted the 1689 London Baptist Confession or something similar. Thus, they followed the Presbyterians' Westminster Confession, except for the issues of believers' baptism, church government, the role of magistrates, and the progressive storyline of redemptive history.

Often someone within an association wrote a circular letter. If approved, messengers would read the letter at the meetings of other Baptist Associations. For example, in 1819, Brother Avery read a circular letter on "Armenianism [*sic*] and Antinomianism Contrasted," to the Columbus Association. Messengers read this letter at the next meeting of the Mad River Association. Avery wrote:

The Antinomian says that the Moral Law is not binding—that man cannot act, but is acted upon—that the gospel does not require of sinners to repent and believe—that believers need not fear, either their own sin or the sin of others—they are not bound to confess and to pray for forgiveness—that sanctification is not evidence of justification.⁵

In his book Warner defines a covenant as "any transaction between God and his creatures; every requirement of God assumes the force of law; and his creatures are bound to obey the precept in whatever form it may be presented." That is why he could point out, "The bible directs us to form churches of believer's exclusively, and to guard against the admission of unbelievers, by the execution of Christ's laws..." The progressive storyline of Scripture implies

³ OhioLINK, last modified (date), accessed July 27, 2017, http://ead.ohiolink.edu/xtf-ead/view?docId=ead/OCLWHi0759.xml;chunk.id=bioghist_1;brand=default.

⁴ Steve Martin, "A Brief History of Reformed Baptists," 1, last modified (date), accessed July 27, 2017, www.reformedbaptist.org.

⁵ Jacob Drake, "A History of the Columbus Baptist Association (OH) From its Organization to 1837," 13, 14, last modified (date), accessed July 27, 2017, <http://baptisthistoryhomepage.com/oh.columbus.assoc.history2.html>.

that God may require specific laws for an earlier covenant that will not apply for a later covenant. Moreover, God may add laws in a newer covenant, not present in the former.

Judging by his comments, Warner did not agree with the traditional teaching on God's law espoused by Calvinistic Baptists. According to the 1689 London Baptist Confession, the Ten Commandments teach the perfect law of God to believers. Even the Lord Jesus cannot change or add to the law as given to Moses. As a result, believers remain under Moses' authority. In spite of disagreeing on God's law, Warner hoped that Baptists would unite against the error of infant baptism.

The Review

The Lord Jesus prayed for the unity of his people. The apostolic church experienced success because all believers agreed on "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). According to Warner, the present situation in which true believers belong to different denominations is suicidal and advances Satan's evil designs. Therefore, he asks all true believers to leave any church with the same ecclesiastical organization as the nation of Israel, in other words, with a top down hierarchy. In the New Testament God has organized his church under the principles of repentance, faith and believers' baptism.

How can the world become converted when believers disagree over who should be baptized? Warner searches the Scriptures to answer two underlying questions: Who belongs to Christ's church? How does one become a member? He states, "The point, whether churches shall be composed of believers only, or shall embrace believers, and their unregenerate seed, is of great and radical importance, and vital to the interests of religion." Infant baptism and believers' baptism cannot both be true.

Warner admits his own tendency to err and welcomes correction. He also recognizes the

difficulty in convincing others of their faulty thinking. He cites the problem Peter had in accepting that Gentiles could belong to Christ's church as well as Jews. It took a vision from God to change Peter's attitude. In spite of these difficulties, Warner urges believers to resolve this disagreement. Therefore, he shows from Scripture that the idea of one overarching covenant of grace is not biblical by defining and explaining the two covenants.

Before Abraham's day, the Scriptures portray glimpses of two covenants—one typical and the other anti-typical. The seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head promised the coming of Christ to destroy Satan. This was the anti-typical covenant of grace. Yet, since Jesus was so long in coming, animal sacrifices reminded people of their need for vicarious sufferings. These sacrifices pointed to a typical covenant. Warner reminds his readers that God does not apply the term "covenant" to the new covenant until its development in time; rather the Old Testament always refers to it as a promise.

God promised Abraham that in his Seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. This Seed would be Christ who would inaugurate the anti-typical covenant and form his visible church by the rite of baptism. Thus, Warner defines the second covenant as the new covenant.

When God commanded Abraham to be circumcised, he also began to organize the typical church through the rite of circumcision. The law given at Sinai formally organized this group of worshipers and set the nation of Israel apart from other nations. Thus, Warner defines the first covenant as the Abrahamic Covenant. The members of that covenant entered it by their physical birth. They remained in it by circumcision. Since this was a national covenant, God did not require individual members to have saving faith. Some certainly did.

The defining issue for Warner centers on these facts:

Did the Holy Ghost in founding the Jewish Church, as a visible body intend to draw a

line of distinction between saint and sinner, or between Jew and Gentile? And did the Spirit in forming the Christian Church, form it after the same model, or did he intend to draw a line of distinction between the regenerate and unregenerate?

To explain the differences between the two covenants, Warner shows how God employs the same words in both covenants but with different meanings. For example, God calls the worshipers in both covenants, “God’s people.” He continues to call those in the first covenant his people even during times of apostasy. In contrast, God urges members of the new covenant to leave false churches.

Moreover, by definition, a typical covenant can be analogous but not identical to an anti-typical covenant. Circumcision is the public sign of membership in the first covenant whereas believer’s baptism is the outward sign of membership in the second. Paedobaptists insist that circumcision is identical to baptism.

Final Thoughts

As people emigrated west they defined themselves as southerners or northerners. The citizens of Ohio belonged to the northwest. Most people in the southern states believed in slavery while most in the north opposed it. As time passed, tensions between the north and south increased. In 1845, the slave state of Texas joined the union. When this happened, northerners wanted to ensure a balance of power. Also, in 1845, the southern Baptists split from the northern churches to form the Southern Baptist Convention. Politics and the issue of slavery occupied the minds of believers more than baptism.

I am very thankful for the Reformers in recovering the true Gospel. But they did not go far enough. We need a second Reformation to free true believers from those churches who accept

unregenerate members through infant baptism. May the Holy Spirit use Warner's book as a call to action!