

## *All Elaborated: True*

In the upper room, Christ had said:

I am the *true* vine, and my Father is the vinedresser... I am the vine; you are the branches (John 15:1,5).

Consequently, as we have seen, we have two Israels. On the one hand, there was the first Israel; that is, the natural, national Israel, the old-covenant Israel. On the other hand, there is the new Israel, the true Israel, the Israel of the new covenant, the fulfilment of all that the first, temporary Israel stood for. It all hinges on Christ's use of 'true'. This is the key.

As we have seen, Christ was asserting that he is the true Israel, the Israel of the new covenant. More than that, he was saying that he in union with his people – and he included all who, down the centuries, would come to trust him (John 17:11,20-26; Rom. 5:1-2; 6:3-7; Col. 3:1-4; Eph. 3:1-6, for instance) – together they form this true Israel – 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16), as Paul later expressed it. Or, as the apostle told the believers at Philippi:

We [that is, all believers] are the circumcision [that is, the spiritual, the real, the new Israel], who worship by the Spirit of God (Phil. 3:3).

In his turn, when writing to believers, Peter put it this way:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

To get the full import of Peter's words, so-clearly linking believers with Israel and the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, see Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:12; Psalm 118:23;

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119:18; Isaiah 43:7,20-21; 62:12; Hosea 2:23; Zechariah 6:13; Malachi 3:17.

Clearly, Christ's use of 'true' had made a very deep impression on John; in his writings, he saw the need to use the word (or one of its derivatives) many times. Let me start with his Gospel. Right at the start, he laid down the marker when, speaking about the incarnation of Christ, he stated:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... [John the Baptist] was not the light [that is, the Messiah], but came to bear witness about the light. The *true* light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world (John 1:1-9).

John, of course, was referring to Christ. He is the *true* light.

Having set down the marker, John kept on hammering the point about 'true'. Here is but a sample of the things he said:

The hour is coming, and is now here, when the *true* worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in *truth*, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in *truth* (John 4:23-24).

Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the *true* bread from heaven (John 6:32).

My judgment is *true*, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me (John 8:16).

Because I tell the *truth*, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the *truth*, why do you not believe me? (John 8:45-46).

I am the way, and the *truth*, and the life (John 14:6).

For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the *truth*. Everyone who is of the *truth* listens to my voice (John 18:37).

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To round it off, John made sure his readers were under no illusions; he did what he could to ensure that they fully grasped that he was not repeating mere second-hand tittle-tattle. Speaking of the actual crucifixion of Christ – but his words apply far more widely than that – speaking of himself he said:

He who saw it has borne witness – his testimony is *true*, and he knows that he is telling the *truth* – that you also may believe (John 19:35).

Then again, in his letters, John elaborated on what this *true* and *truth* involves, combining the two key new-covenant words, ‘new’ and ‘true’:

A *new* commandment... I am writing to you, which is *true* in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the *true* light is already shining (1 John 2:8).<sup>1</sup>

We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is *true*; and we are in him who is *true*, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the *true* God and eternal life (1 John 5:20).

As so to the Revelation:

The words of the holy one, the *true* One, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens (Rev. 3:7).

The words of the Amen, the faithful and *true* witness, the beginning of God’s creation (Rev. 3:14)

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and *True*, and in righteousness he judges and makes war (Rev. 19:11).

According to John, the concept of ‘true’ plays a vital role in the discontinuity of the covenants. The concept underlies his well-known observation:

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<sup>1</sup> *alēthēs* and *alēthinōs* have the same root and are similar in meaning.

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The law was given through Moses; grace and *truth* came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

If I may be so bold as to elaborate John's words:

The old covenant was given to Israel through Moses at Sinai; the new covenant, set up in the upper room, came to the new Israel through Jesus Christ.

I am not pretending that John used those actual words, but I submit that that sentence certainly puts the truth in a nutshell.

The writer of Hebrews naturally did not miss the point about 'true'. Taking Hebrews as a whole, the writer clearly showed that, when speaking of Christ and the new covenant, he comprehensively showed that all the God-given features of the old covenant (prophets, angels, Moses, sabbath, land, tabernacle, priesthood, sacrifices, altar, and the like) had been given to Israel to serve as temporary foreshadows, types, illustrations, pictures, or silhouettes of Christ, which he fulfilled in the better, superior, new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 7:11-28; 8:5-13; 12:24) which had been promised in the prophets. Moreover all those shadows – which were, in fact, ineffective, temporary shadows – were rendered obsolete by Christ in the new covenant (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5,13; 9:23; 10:1), he being the reality, the truth, the actuality, the substance of what the shadows represented or pictured. Take the tabernacle:

[The features of the tabernacle] serve [as] a copy and shadow of the heavenly [that is, the real] things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying: 'See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain'. But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises... In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming

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obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:5-6,13).<sup>2</sup>

We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the *true* tabernacle that the Lord set up, not man (Heb. 8:2).

It was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the *true* things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf (Heb. 9:23-24).

The law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities (Heb. 10:1).<sup>3</sup>

I cited Colossians 2:17; let me close this section by quoting it, and the preceding verse:

Let no one pass judgment on you [that is, impose on you – see Colossians 2:8] in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ (Col. 2:16-17).

This is the vital point. The new covenant is effective. It is true, in that sense; it is the real, effective covenant. It has two ordinances – dipping and the supper – and those two ordinances use symbols to convey spiritual reality, but in every other respect the new covenant is actual. Christ's work does not symbolise anything: Christ has atoned for the elect, his blood has propitiated the wrath of God; Christ's continual intercessory, priesthood is effective, and he does and will present all his people faultless before his Father, never to be accused, let alone condemned:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1).

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<sup>2</sup> The word 'true' is not in this extract, but the idea is fundamental to what the paragraph expresses.

<sup>3</sup> See the previous note.

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Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us (Rom. 8:33-34).

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen (Jude 24-25).

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To summarise Christ's announcement in the upper room, and linking 'new' and 'true': the old is over; the new has come; all the shadows are superseded by the reality.

The old Israel, the 'nation of God', the old covenant with its temple, priesthood, sacrifices, sabbath, feasts and all the rest – all is over, fulfilled, rendered obsolete in Christ and by his work. Christ is the reality that those shadows represented. Now he and all believers are united and thus form the new Israel, the new spiritual nation, temple or house of God. All is changed. Believers are new men (2 Cor. 5:17) belonging to a new age. Yes, there will be 'new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (2 Pet. 3:13), but in a very real sense believers experience this even now. The ultimate is set out in the final chapter of Revelation. For the believer it is now, but it is yet to be:

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

And he who was seated on the throne said: 'Behold, I am making all things new'. Also he said: 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true'. And he said to me: 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end' (Rev. 21:3-6).

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Does this sound staggering? It should do! Any view of the upper room which does not move to amazement must be wrong, falling short of what Christ was doing and saying in that final Passover remembrance. Any theology that minimises this – not matter however hoary, or ‘sanctified’ by tradition or ‘big-name’ advocate – is woefully mistaken. As I keep saying, the occasion was epoch-changing.