

# The Argument for Infant Baptism Examined

**By John Stock**

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This argument, as stated by its ablest advocate, the celebrated John M. Mason D.D., may here be concisely expressed as follows: God's covenant with Abraham is perpetual; the new as well as the old dispensation is founded on it. Under the old dispensation, the natural descendants of Abraham, with their natural offspring, were embraced in the covenant and were entitled to circumcision. It follows, therefore, that under the new dispensation, believers, who are the spiritual children of Abraham, with their natural offspring, are included in the covenant and are entitled to baptism, unless the New Testament forbids. But the New Testament does not forbid; the children of believers are, therefore, within

the covenant and are entitled to baptism, On this John Stock, minister of Chatham, offers the following remarks:

Suppose we were to grant that baptism came in the room of circumcision, we have one question to ask the Paedo-baptists; To which seed of Abraham is the new ordinance of baptism to be administered? His natural or his spiritual seed? Now let our opponents think well before they reply. They must choose one of the two alternatives. Do they answer 'To Abraham's natural seed?' then they must baptize none but Jews, for they only are Abraham's natural seed. But if they choose the other alternative, their cause is equally defeated; for then they must confine baptism to believers; for they only are Abraham's spiritual seed.

Abraham was a spiritual father exclusively 'to those who believe', to 'those who obtain like precious faith with himself'. Hence our Redeemer justly charged the unbelieving Jews, with not being Abraham's children. They were his natural but not his spiritual seed. Let our Paedo-baptist brethren, then, take which horn of this dilemma they please; their argument from the Abrahamic covenant is ground to powder and scattered to the winds of heaven. In fact, we have turned their weapon upon themselves, and made it pierce the very vitals of their theory. Either they must baptize none but Jews, or none but believers. The children of believers are neither Abraham's natural nor his spiritual seed; and therefore no argument can be drawn from the Abrahamic covenant in favour of their baptism. If the argument is of any force, it tells against instead of for infant baptism!

The New Testament Church is widely different in its members, ordinances, and nature, from the Old Testament Church. The Old Testament Church consisted of the whole body of the Jewish people; and its members were entitled to admission by birth and by circumcision. Its ordinances, its worship, and its sacrifices, were all typical of 'better things to come'. No change of heart, and no faith in God's promises were required in order to admission within its pale. Every Jew was ipso facto, a member. Now infant circumcision was a

very proper ordinance of initiation into such a church as this. A national initiatory ordinance, well became a national church. A Hebrew infant was as truly a son of Abraham, as the full grown man, and therefore, equally entitled to the ordinance of circumcision. But the Church of Christ is a society of entirely a different character. Members are admitted within her pale, not by a carnal but by a spiritual birth. 'Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God'. The New Testament Church is a spiritual society, and if at any time carnal members creep into her bosom, she is unhesitatingly to eject them. She is compared to 'a chaste virgin, espoused unto Christ'. Her ordinances are spiritual, and such as only renewed characters can lawfully celebrate. The new birth gives a right to baptism, and the new birth and baptism united, give a title to admission into the church. Carnal descent from Abraham, and circumcision, occupied the same place under the Old Testament, as the new birth and baptism do under the New. An infant is incapable of membership with the Christian church, and therefore has no right to the ordinance which initiates into that sacred society. Prove that an infant belongs to the spiritual seed of Abraham, and that he is capable of fellowship with the church of God, and then you will prove his right to baptism. But does it follow that because infants were admitted into the Jewish church, therefore they should be admitted into the Christian?

The Jewish church consisting of all the carnal posterity of Abraham, was a type of that church the members of which are 'a royal generation, a holy priesthood, and a peculiar people'. Infants might be admitted into the former, but they are incapable of membership with the latter.

We shall now be better prepared to consider the true nature and tenor of the Abrahamic covenant. We apprehend that the right explanation of the Abrahamic covenant has been hit upon by those who consider it, as having a literal and spiritual signification.

For the accomplishment of the grand promise, that all nations should be blessed in Abraham, three promises were given to him. First, a numerous posterity, which was fulfilled in the letter, in the nation of Israel. It was fulfilled in the spirit, by the divine constitution, that makes all believers the children of Abraham. The unbelieving Jews were Abraham's children as to the flesh, yet there is a sense in which Jesus denies that they were the children of Abraham. The second promise was to be a God to him and his seed, which was fulfilled in the letter, by his protection of Israel in Egypt, - his delivering of them from bondage, - his taking them into covenant at Sinai, - and all his subsequent dealings with them in their generations, till they were cast off by their rejection of Christ. This promise is fulfilled in the spirit, by God's being a God to all believers, and to

them alone, in a higher sense than he was to Israel (Rom 4:11,12).

The third promise was of the land of Canaan, fulfilled in the letter to Israel, and in the spirit fulfilled to the true Israel, in the possession of the heavenly inheritance (Jer 31:33). In accordance with this double sense of the promises of this covenant, the kingdom of God in Israel, with its officers, laws, worship, etc., is a visible model of the invisible kingdom of Christ.

Hence, it appears, that the promises of the Abrahamic covenant, had a twofold application. They guaranteed to Abraham's natural seed, the enjoyment of many temporal blessings; and they secured to his spiritual seed, that their faith should be counted to them for righteousness. But the Abrahamic covenant contains no promise to the natural seed of Abraham's spiritual seed. It is true God promised to be a God to Abraham's seed after him; and this promise has ever been fulfilled. God was a God to the Jews, Abraham's natural seed, until they were cast off, for crucifying the Lord Jesus; and he has ever been a God in a higher and more important sense to Abraham's spiritual seed, to all who have obtained like precious faith, with their illustrious head. But no promise was made in that covenant to the natural seed of believers. 'That covenant constitutes all believers Abraham's seed, and secures to them an inheritance as such; but of their seed it says nothing'. No argument

therefore, can be drawn from the promises made in that covenant to believers, to favour the baptism of the children of believers.

The reader is requested to turn to (Jeremiah 31:31-34), and to (Hebrews 8:10-13), for a full description of the new covenant, or the covenant of grace. All interested in this covenant are said to 'have the laws of God written upon their heart, by God himself'; to 'know the Lord from the least of them unto the greatest'; and 'to have their sins forgiven, and their iniquities remembered no more'. Now, clearly, the infants of believers are not included in this covenant. Can they be said to know the Lord, and to have the law of God written upon their hearts? Do they not need instruction when they grow up, as much as other children? How absurd to apply passages like these to infants! They can only be fulfilled in Abraham's spiritual seed.