

# The Parable of the Two Trains

## Part II

by Mark Webb

In our last issue, I sought to illustrate the differences between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism by the use of trains and train tracks. Let me quickly review (You might want to reread the previous issue to get up to speed.)

later, Jesus. The passengers on this train can be called “*Israel*” or “*the Church*” interchangeably. (See “Two Trains” on page 2 )



*Covenant Theology* was described as one train on one track but with two engineers. Originally, Moses was the engineer as it chugged its way through the Old Testament times. Then, at the juncture of the Old and New ages, Christ replaces Moses as the new engineer. This model seeks to emphasize the continuity of Covenant Theology. There's only one covenant (one track) but two administrators (two engineers)—first, Moses, and,

### In This Issue

The Parable of the Two Trains	page 1
Sermon Snips	page 3
Conferences	page 5
From the Church Office	page 8

# Two Trains

Continued from page 1

**Dispensationalism**, on the other hand, was depicted as two separate trains on two separate tracks. One train has Moses as its engineer and runs on the Old Covenant track. Its passengers are called “*Israel*”.



The other train has Jesus as its engineer and runs on the track of the New Covenant. Its passengers are called “*the Church*”. Only one of these trains is active at a given time. First, Moses’ train ran until Israel rejected Christ, but now it’s been side-tracked. Then Jesus’ train began to operate and will continue to do so until the Church is taken to Heaven. Finally, we are told, the train of Moses will once again begin running and will bring its passengers to Heaven as well. Notice the discontinuity—two completely separate covenants with two completely separate peoples.

## The Three ‘Ts’

At the conclusion of that article, I asked whether or not there was any other alternative. Is there no other model retaining the strengths of Covenant Theology—one people of God saved only one way (by faith) in all ages—yet recognizing the distinc-

tiveness of the new age that dawned with the coming of the Messiah? In other words, is it possible to construct a covenantal model that would reflect the Biblical data at hand, rather than constraining that data to fit a model which leaves all sorts of loose ends hanging?

Obviously I do, or I wouldn’t have asked the question! But what, exactly, would such a Bible-based, covenantal model look like? I believe any

such model, if it’s Biblical, must exhibit three features lacking in both Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism. Those characteristics are *transition*, *transference*, and *transcendence*. In this issue, I’ll deal with the first of these.

## Transition

Several years ago, Pastor Jim Gables of Birmingham, Alabama remarked to me that any covenantal system must be able to handle the transition of the saints from the Old Testament age into the New Testament age. That statement stuck in my mind. As time went by, I began to understand the importance of it.

Suppose you were an observer in Israel at the beginning of Christ’s earthly ministry. Consider the condition of those He would encounter in His walk on this earth. Would they not fall into one of three classes?

First, if we believe that there was always a believing “*remnant*” in Israel (*Rom. 11:5*), then we must believe that such a remnant was already present when Christ appeared. These were Old Testament saints, justified by a faith that looked ahead to the coming Messiah. Simeon and Anna (*Luke 2:25-38*) appear to be a sampling of this believing remnant at (See “Two Trains” on page 4)

# Sermon Snips



## *Humility & Discouragement*

When a man is humbled, truly humbled, the object of his grief or sorrow or trouble is sin itself, as a dishonour done unto God. The object of discouragement is a man's own condition, or sin producing that condition, the ultimate object of discouragement being a man's own condition. When a man is discouraged, you will always find that his trouble is all about his own condition. Oh, says a discouraged person, I have sinned; I have thus and thus sinned, and therefore my condition is bad, and if my condition be bad now, it will never be better; Lord, what will become of my soul? His trouble is always about his own condition. But when a man is grieved and truly humbled for sin, his trouble is about sin itself, as a dishonour done unto God. To clear this by Scripture: you know Cain was discouraged, but Cain was not humbled. How may that appear? Cain was troubled about his condition. Ah, says he, my punishment is greater than I can bear. On the other side, the poor prodigal was humbled, but not discouraged. How may that appear? His trouble was about his sin, and not about his condition: "I will return unto my Father (says he), and I will say unto him, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." David was sometimes both discouraged and humbled, and then you find his repentance and humiliation to be very brackish; but if you look into the 51st Psalm, you will find David humbled but not discouraged, for it is a penitential Psalm. He was humbled but not discouraged, for he still kept his assurance; verse 14, "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation." But what was his repentance, his trouble, about? It was about his sin, and not about his condition. Read verses 2 and 3, and so on: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin, for I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: . . . behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." All the time, you see, his eye is upon his sin, and not upon his condition only. So that I say, when a man is truly humbled and grieved for sin, the object of his grief is sin as a dishonour done unto God: when a man is discouraged and not humbled, then his trouble is all about his condition, and what will become of him.

From "A Lifting Up for the Downcast"

## *Sin Killer*

To live in Christ Jesus you must become a killer. You say, "a natural born killer?" No, a supernatural born killer. You must become a vicious killer, a merciless killer, a pitiless killer. You say, "You mean I get to go out here and shoot a bunch of lost folks." No, no, no! What you are killing and what we are to mortify is what Paul says, "we are to mortify, to put to death, the deeds of the body." Notice it is not mortify the body. I'm not to take a hatchet to my arm and chop off my hand. It is the deeds of the flesh, the activity of the flesh. The body is used by sin as its instrument to manifest itself. Its tool. I mean once upon a time, sin said, "that fellow over there needs cussing out." You said, "I'll do it. I'll do it. You can use my tongue. I got a tongue. You can use it. I'll do it." "That guy over there, somebody needs to clean his plow. Somebody needs to whack him upside of the head." You said, "You can use my hand. Here am I. Send me." Sin used your body to exhibit itself, to manifest itself. Now Paul says every time sin tries to use your body to manifest one of its deeds shoot it right through the head. Kill it! Is this radical or what? Kill it! He wants you to be a serial killer. Because you see, sin won't just manifest itself once, it will manifest itself over and over again. And every time you see it, kill it. Every time it raises its head hit it again. Whack it again. Every time it wiggles, every time it squirms, give it another thrust with the sword. Put it to death. That is the duty of the Christian. It is a continual process. That's why you are to be a serial killer. And may I say, it's a terminal process because what Paul is writing here — and I want the force of this to hit you like a sledge hammer right between the eyes — is either you will mortify sin or sin will mortify you. One or the other. Folks, let's not tip-toe through the tulips here. This is a life or death issue. You will overcome sin or sin will over come you. You will kill it or it will kill you.

From "Walking in the Spirit"

# Two Trains

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the time of Christ's birth, and surely there were others in this class at the beginning of Christ's public ministry. This may explain why it is so difficult to pinpoint the conversion of many who followed Christ in that day. It's difficult to tell in some cases whether we are looking at those already justified by faith during the Old Testament age or at those who are newly justified.

Secondly, the largest body of Jews are those operating within the framework of the Mosaic system. Although these are circumcised and members of the covenant community of Israel, they remain unbelievers and unjustified (*note that a believing remnant requires a non-believing majority.*) Their hope of salvation lies either in 1) having personally met the moral requirements of the Mosaic Covenant (*e.g. the Rich, Young Ruler in Matt. 19:20, the pre-conversion Paul in Phil. 3:4-6*); or 2) if they've not met such requirements, they've availed themselves of the remedies available under the law to regain and maintain their covenantal status. These are trusting in the Law itself for salvation instead of in God's promised Messiah, to which the Law itself pointed—an eternally fatal error of which Paul refers in Rom. 10:1-4.

Thirdly, there are the "lost"—not in the *soteriological* sense in which we so frequently employ the word, but in a *covenantal* sense. In Christ's day, these were the publicans, harlots, and "sinners". These weren't ordinary sinners, but sinners to the extent that they had disenfranchised themselves from any hope of blessing under the Mosaic Covenant. To understand this, consider the difference between those in our day who commit a misdemeanor and those who commit a felony. Those in the class described above would admit to having committed sins corresponding to a misdemeanor. These simply pay their fine—*i.e. render the pre-*



*scribed sacrifice or offering*—and are reinstated back into the privileges of citizenship in Israel. The "lost", on the other hand, have committed sins corresponding to a felony. These have sinned away any hope of reinstatement to covenantal privileges. They are "outside the camp" of Israel.

When Christ appears, what should these three groups do? Let's take them in reverse order.

Clearly those in the third class need to come to Christ in repentance and faith. The Law held out no hope whatsoever to such. It cut them off utterly. Yet, Christ is able to save to "the uttermost". He freely receives sinners and offers them blessing and life in Himself that the Law can not give.

What about those in the second class? They too needed to turn from their hope in legal obedience and put their trust in God's Messiah. All too often this group was scandalized by the free reception "sinners" received at the hand of Christ. Note both the occasion of and the content of the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. It addresses the criticism of the Pharisees and Scribes (*i.e. those in our second class, and represented in the parable by the elder brother*) being leveled at Christ's attitude of receptiveness towards publicans and sinners (*i.e. those in our third class, represented in the parable by the younger son.*) The parable is designed to show that both groups need to come into the fellowship of Christ by faith. Both groups need to move — away from where they are, and come to Christ.

Now what about the first group, those already justified by faith when Christ appears? Are not (See "Two Trains" on page 6)

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# Conferences

## **The 9th Annual Ladies Retreat in Grand Rapids, Michigan**

March 19-20, 1999

Speakers: Peter and Melanie Ryttersgaard

Hosted by Thornwood Baptist Ladies Ministry

For more information contact Gloria Lambright at 616-669-3749

## **15th Annual John Bunyan Conference**

April 19-22, 1999

Blue Mountain Christian Retreat, New Ringgold, PA

For more information call 717-386-2154

## **Spring Sovereign Grace Bible Conference**

April 20-22, 1999

Speakers may include Kyle White, George McGuinness, Dean Olive, Gene Breed, Tommy Anderson, Terry Worthan, Mark Webb, E. W. Johnson, David King, Ron Staley,

Don McKinney, and Conrad Murrell

Hosted by Bible Baptist Church, 3150 Sutton Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63143

For more information contact Pastor Holmes Moore at 314-645-4248

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## **Spring Annual Mid-South Sovereign Grace Bible Conference**

April 23-25, 1999

Speaker: Jerry Bridges

Hosted by Grace Bible Church, Olive Branch, MS

For more information call 601-895-1190 or e-mail: [gbc@vantek.net](mailto:gbc@vantek.net)

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## **The 21st Annual Doctrines of Grace Bible Conference of the Midlands**

May 4-6, 1999

Host Church: Union Baptist Church, 528 N. Main St., Union, Ohio

For more information contact Bruce Branson at 712-728-2473 or

e-mail: [bbranson@rconnect.com](mailto:bbranson@rconnect.com)

## **Mid-America Family Conference**

June 14-18, 1999

Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, IN

For more information call 765-642-8206

## **Sovereign Grace Bible Conference**

**Date:** June 23-25, 1998

Hosted by Calvary Baptist Church, Pine Bluff, AR

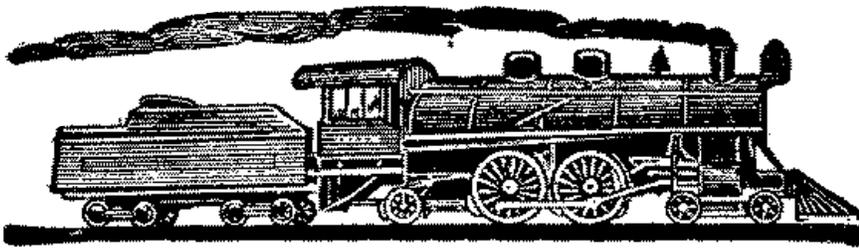
For more information contact Pastor E. W. Johnson at 501-534-9125

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# Two Trains

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these already where they need to be? I don't think so! These too must make a transition—not from unbelief to faith, but from shadow to substance. Although these are trusting in God's promised Messiah, until He appears, they are kept under the Law, demonstrating that faith by adhering to its shadowy rituals. Once the fulfillment has come, however, they must lay aside the pictures for the reality. A failure to do so would raise serious doubts about their "faith"!



Notice that all three groups must make a move from where they are to come unto Christ—and this is what I mean by "transition". Spiritually, from wherever they are, they must now enter this Kingdom being revealed in its substance and reality—*e.g. Matt. 5:20; 7:13; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23-24; Mark 10:15; 10:23-25; Luke 11:52; 13:24; 16:16; 18:17; 18:24-25; John 3:5*. In Christ's day, a migration of individuals is underway out of the one system into another.

If we are anywhere near the mark in this, the shortcomings of both Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism should be clear! Neither of those

systems address a transition of individuals from one system to another! Under Covenant Theology, the only transition seen is that of the engineers, *i.e.* the administrators of the one covenant. There's no movement required of the passengers in going from one age to the next. They simply sit tight. Even less transition is seen in Dispensationalism. The passengers are simply seated on one train in the old age and on a new train in the new age. There's never even a hint that men are to leave one and go to the other. The transition from one age to the next is entirely ignored and obscured!



## *A New Model*

Now let's return to our trains. How do we depict the above situation? Well, we'd show this as two tracks, representing two distinct covenants, and two trains, representing the people belonging to each of these covenantal systems. Furthermore, Moses is the engineer of a train containing Israel, whereas Christ is the engineer of a train containing the Church. So far, this sounds much like Dispensationalism. But, rather than the train of Moses bringing men **up** to God, as in Dispensationalism, (See "Two Trains" on page 7) it brings men **over** to Christ (*This is Paul's point in*

# Two Trains

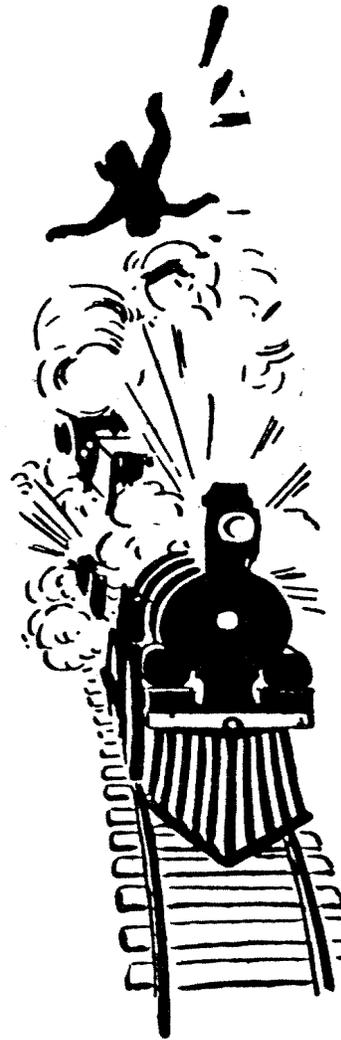
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*Gal. 3:19-25*). The tracks are not parallel, but are at right angles, intersecting at the point of Christ's appearance in history.

Suppose we are riding on Moses' train through the Old Testament age. The passengers are a mixed lot—some “*know the Lord*”, and some do not. Further, the train looks like one of those sometimes seen in third world countries. There are the first-class seats, reserved for the most worthy. These are very expensive seats, and only Scribes, Pharisees, and a few select others can afford them. Then there are second and third class seats for those less worthy. But, at least these are **inside** the train. I say this, because a number of folks, the riff-raff, “*sinners*”, are riding **outside** the train —some on the roof, some hanging on to the sides. Suddenly we pull into a station. A conductor named John comes aboard and announces that everyone is to get off the train of Moses and to get on that other train over there called “*Jesus*”. On that train, no ticket price is required, everyone is welcome, and there's first-class accommodations for all—but it's a free-for-all, so you'd better squeeze on board while you can (*see Luke 16:16*)! The Scribes and Pharisees, remaining in their seats and watching publicans and harlots scurry aboard the train “*Jesus*”, are scandalized! “How dare anyone make them the equal of us!”, they cry (*see Matt. 20:12*), and they decide they'll just sit tight and remain on the train of Moses—not knowing that this train will soon derail (in 70 AD)!

So there you have it. The train of Jesus is not the same train that came up through the Old Testament age, nor does it run on the same track. It's a new train, running on a new track, signifying that this is a “*new way*” founded upon a “*new Covenant*”. There are certain similarities between

these trains, but they are not identical, for this is a “*better*” train running on “*better*” track! Further, on board the train “*Jesus*” are the faithful of Israel from throughout the Old Testament age—including both those who died in faith, having only seen Christ afar off, and those alive at His appearance in history who made the transition described above. We, by faith, have now boarded the train “*Jesus*” in our day. We, who were never on Moses' train, take our place right alongside the faithful of Israel. We comprise one people saved in only one way — by faith in Christ. Those who fail to make that spiritual transition, like those who remained on the train of Moses, are not heading to Heaven some other way — they are headed for destruction!



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## From the Church Office:

Dear Readers,

Please accept our apology for the late issue. However, we need your help. We had an unusually high number of *Messengers* returned after the last mailing in October. Some of these came back to us marked *no such number* or *undeliverable*. If you look below on the mailing section of your issue, you will see that we request address corrections. Usually, the Post Office returns the newsletter with a corrected address label if you relocate. If they are returned to us without a corrected address, we drop the recipient from our mailing list. We must do this to comply with Postal Regulations. Please check your address label and make sure that the complete address is correct. If not, please send us your correct address. The Post Office will return these if one number is wrong and often does not provide the correction, even if in the past they have delivered it to you. Also, many addresses have been changed due to 911 restructuring. Please keep this in mind as yours may change in the future. These often come back with no corrected label. We need your help to keep your address current.

For those who have asked, there was not an issue in November/December. We opted to spend the money on software that should allow us to post the *Messenger* on our web site as you see it now instead of just posting the main article void of illustrations. We should have more details about that in a future issue.

Thanks be to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Who has seen fit to use this publication for the edification of His people. We covet your prayers as we seek to honor and glorify Him in all that we do.

In Christ,  
Janet Crawford  
Secretary

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