

REVEALED TO BABIES!

Jesus on saving faith in pre-baptized covenantal babies



"Jesus...said: 'I thank You, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to babies!'" Matthew 11:25.

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(Jesus on saving faith in pre-baptized covenantal babies)

by Rev. Professor-Emeritus Dr. Francis Nigel Lee (Ph.D., Th.D.)

"Babies cannot believe!" Thus say many Arminian Baptist Christians. However, they forget that covenantal children are said to be holy from their very conception onward. Indeed, thus says the Lord! First Corinthians 7:14.

This is why Paul reminds Timothy, the son of a Bible-reading and God-fearing mother and grandmother: "Continue in the things you have learned and have been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them! From fetushood (*apo brephous*), you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to keep on making you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Second Timothy 1:5 & 3:14-15.

This agrees with Isaiah 59:21. There, we read: "'This is My Covenant with them,' says the Lord. 'My Spirit Who is upon you, and My words which I have put into your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth nor out of the mouth of your seed nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed,' says the Lord, 'from henceforth and for ever!'"

The inspired David definitively declares: "You are He Who took me out of the womb! You made me hope, when I was upon my mother's breasts! I was dependent upon You from the womb! You are my God from my mother's uterus!... You covered me in my mother's womb! I will praise You!.... My substance was not hidden from You, when I was being made in secret!.... Your eyes saw my substance which was still unfinished! And in Your book, all of my body-parts were written down -- while they were being fashioned continually when not one of them yet existed!" Psalms 22:9-10 & 139:13-15.

"Ah," retort the Baptists. "But doesn't Jesus say in Mark 16:16 that we must first profess our faith, before we may be baptized? And nobody is able to profess faith, until he or she is old enough to talk!"

No, that is not what Christ here teaches! What Jesus actually states there, is this: "He who keeps on believing, and who has been baptized, shall be saved; but he who does not keep on believing, shall be damned." This means that also babies, as babies, need to believe in Him, with a babylike faith -- or otherwise face damnation for the sin they inherit from Adam and also for the sins they themselves commit before their birth.

Far too many Freewill Baptists and other Arminians deny Mark 16:16 applies also to infants. They misunderstand it, as if it were saying: 'He who says he believes and who is then baptized, shall be saved; but he who does not say so, shall be damned.' But the text really teaches that all who truly believe, whether prenataly or postnataly, shall be saved; but all who do not believe, whether prenataly or postnataly, shall be damned.

Note the context! "Go into all the World, and preach the Gospel to everyone! He who keeps on believing, having been baptized, shall be saved; but he who does not keep on believing, shall be damned!" Mark 16:16-16.

Jesus Himself has been the Son of God from all eternity past, and will remain so unto all eternity future. However, when He became the Son of man, He was first a zygote or *gennoomenon*. Luke 1:35. Then He became an embryo or *karpos*. Luke 1:42. And soon thereafter He became a what we now call a *foetus*. Cf. Luke 2:5's *engkuooi*.

Throughout, though in an ever-increasing way, He was not only in His divine nature from all eternity past but now precisely also in His human nature aware of His heavenly Father in Whom He trusted from the womb to the tomb -- nay more, from His conception onward, unendingly! Naturally, His human trust always grew commensurate to His age.

After His Own birth, Jesus was first a newborn baby or *brephos* still dependent upon His mother for nourishment. Cf. Luke 2:16. Later He became a two-year-old little child or *paidion*. Matthew 2:16-18. Then He grew into a twelve-year-old child or *pais*. See Luke 2:40-42. Next. He became an adolescent. Cf. Luke 2:52's *prosekothen*. And finally, He became a fully-grown man or *aneer*. John 1:30.

As the A.D. 185 Church Father Irenaeus remarks about Jesus: "He did not despise...any condition of humanity.... But He sanctified every age, by that period corresponding to it which belonged to Himself. For He came to save all...who are 'born again' to God -- infants, and children, and boys, and youths.... He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age..., and thus sanctifying them for the Lord." *Against Heresies*, II:22:4.

States Matthew 1:18 -- "Now thus was the conception (*genneesis*) of Jesus Christ. His mother Mary...was discovered to be pregnant." He had been conceived within her, by the Holy Spirit. For the virgin Mary had conceived in her womb, when the Holy Spirit had come upon her and overshadowed her -- so that the Holy One she had conceived, would be called the Son of God. Luke 1:31-35.

Immediately after conceiving that Holy One (nine months before giving birth to Him), Mary hastily went to her cousin Elizabeth. The latter was herself six months pregnant. Luke 1:36-40. As soon as Mary greeted her cousin, Elizabeth's own baby (*brephos*) leaped up for joy, within her womb -- and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Luke 1:41-44.

Thus, still three months before his own birth, John not only **recognized** and **joyously trusted** in but even **acknowledged** His just-conceived Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke 1:35-44. For John himself was "filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb." Luke 1:15.

Clearly regenerate! If he had died right then, the covenanted sinner John would have gone straight to Heaven. For "elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit. Luke 18:15-16; Acts 2:38-39; John 3:3-5; First John 5:12; Romans 8:9." Thus the *Westminster Confession of Faith* 10:3.

Perhaps Elizabeth's baby had leaped up because he himself -- John the Baptizer -- had just been filled with the Holy Spirit, from his mother's womb, three months before he was born. Alternatively, he did so as a previously Spirit-filled fetus who then once again

recognized His Saviour within His Own human mother as she approached John within his own mother Elizabeth. Luke 1:15,41.

Either way, John was prenatally filled with the Spirit -- at least once -- long before he was born and thereafter circumcised. So his Circumcision (like the Baptism which later replaced it), did not initiate the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within John -- but it sealed and strengthened that prior indwelling. Genesis 17:1-27; Romans 4:11; Colossians 2:11-13.

Indeed, this particular Spirit-infilling of John -- as His just-conceived Saviour was brought near to him -- seems to have triggered off his righteous mother Elizabeth herself getting (re)filled with the Holy Spirit. Luke 1:5,6,15,41.

Then Elizabeth said to Mary, "You have been blessed among women, and the Fruit of your womb has also been blessed!" Luke 1:42. Now, "the mother of my Lord has come to me." Luke 1:43. "For look, as soon as the sound of your greeting was heard in my ears -- the baby (*brephos*) leaped up in my womb with joy." Luke 1:44. For God **revealed** Jesus to the prenatal baby John! Cf. Matthew 11:25.

Then Mary replied: "My soul magnifies the Lord; and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour!" Luke 1:45. Thus, Mary's Saviour, the divine Jesus, Who had only just then been conceived within her according to His human nature, was already her Saviour even at His conception some nine months before He was born.

Indeed, Mary said Christ had been conceived and would soon be born in fulfilment of the promise spoken "to our fathers" -- namely "to Abraham and to his seed forever." Luke 1:54-55. Thus, Christ would not save the herds of 'goats' who are not His people. But He would save His chosen flock of sheep and their little lambs. John 10:26-28 & 17:9-20.

He would be called 'Jehovah-saves' -- alias 'Jesus.' "For He shall save His people" -- both tiny pre-natals and tall post-natals all and alike -- "from their sins." Matthew 1:21.

Also on the very day of Jesus' birth, He was already called Saviour and Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11. Even then and thereafter, He brought and always will bring "peace on earth toward men of goodwill" or *eudokia* -- toward those He had chosen before the foundation of the World, out of His Own good pleasure or *eudokia*. Luke 2:14 cf. Ephesians 1:4-5.

Eight days after His birth, Mary's baby was circumcised and named 'Jesus' -- previously so called by the angel before He had been conceived in the womb. Luke 2:22 cf. 1:31. Then, on the thirty-third day after His circumcision, Jesus -- as the firstborn male Who had opened His mother's womb -- was proclaimed to be 'holy unto the Lord.' Luke 2:23 cf. Leviticus 12:3-8 and First Corinthians 7:14.

On that day, the aged and Spirit-anointed Simeon embraced Jesus and blessed God saying, "Lord, now allow Your servant to depart in peace according to Your Word; for my eyes have seen Your Salvation Whom You have prepared before the face of all people as a Light to illuminate the Gentiles, and as the Glory of Your people Israel! Luke 2:25-32.

Similarly, the aged prophetess Anna then "likewise gave thanks to the Lord. And she "spoke about Him to all of those who were looking for redemption." Luke 2:36-38.

Again, some time after Jesus had been born, and when He was about two years old, the wise men from the East came to worship the little Child as the promised Messiah. Matthew 1:21 (*gennethentos*); 2:4,8,11 (*paidion*); 2:16 (two years old).

After that, "the little Child grew and became strong; kept on being filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." Luke 2:40, *paidion...pleeroumenon*. "So Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man." Luke 2:52.

Now in spite of Jesus' unique sinlessness, His prenatal and postnatal growth shows many similarities in holiness with another exemplary (though not sinless) child of the Covenant -- namely Samuel the son of Hannah. Just compare Hannah's *Magnificat* with Mary's. First Samuel 2:1-10 *cf.* Luke 1:46-55. Compare too the 'Jesus texts' in this and our previous paragraphs with First Samuel 1:11-23 & 2:11-26 & 3:1-21!

In his commentary on Luke, Rev. Dr. Alfred Plummer rightly says of Jesus: "His was a perfect humanity developing perfectly.... For the first time, a human infant was realizing the ideal of humanity" -- namely sinless perfection. Hebrews 5:8 too says of Jesus: "Though He was a Son, He nevertheless learned obedience."

Likewise, Rev. Dr. B.F. Westcott rightly comments on this: "The Lord's manhood was (negatively) sinless and (positively) perfect; that is, perfect relatively at every stage. And therefore He truly advanced by learning, while the powers of His human nature grew step by step in a perfect union with the divine in His one Person."

When thirty years old -- the age at which Hebrew priests were anointed to commence their ministry to God's people -- Jesus too was officially anointed in baptism for His ministry to His people (alias all true believers everywhere regardless of their age). Jesus was baptized by John, who had himself been filled with the Holy Spirit even from his own mother's womb. Luke 1:15-17,36,44,67,76-80.

At the sinless Christ's Own baptism, there, was, of course, no regeneration. Yet the Holy Spirit then again strengthened Him. Luke 3:21-23 *cf.* Numbers 4:33*f* and Exodus 29:20*f*). After that -- "Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert." Luke 4:1.

Preaching in the power of the Spirit, Jesus then told the religious leader Nicodemus that only those who had been "born again" from water and Spirit, can enter into or even see the Kingdom of God. Yet those who do, enter indeed -- by seeing Jesus lifted up for them on the cross, and by trusting Him to give them everlasting life. John 3:3-8 & 3:14-16.

Jesus then instructed His Apostles to baptize people in His Name, as a sign of their need of purification. John 3:23-25 & 4:1-2 *cf.* 1:25. The Spirit-filled John then declared that Jesus always had been and always would be filled with the Spirit, without measure. Matthew 3:11 and John 1:30-33 & 3:22-34. Indeed, even then, Jesus was still on the "increase" in the

power of the Spirit Whom God the Father still kept supplying to Him without measure. Cf John 3:30-34 with the earlier Luke 2:40 & 2:52.

"Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee." Luke 4:14. There, in the synagogue of Nazareth "where He had been brought up," He said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel!"

At about this time, Jesus encountered in Cana a certain official from Capernaum. There his son was dying. John 4:46-47. When the man pleaded with Jesus to come and heal his little boy (*paidion*), the Lord Christ said: "Go on your way; your son is alive!" And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken to him. John 4:47-50.

The next day, even before the man reached his home, his servants met him and told him his son was alive -- from the very same moment Jesus had told him so on the previous day! John 5:51-52. "So the father knew it.... And he himself believed; and so too did his entire household." John 4:53.

This "entire household" which believed, obviously included even the "little child" that had been dying. Hence, it follows that even a "dying little child" can be expected himself to "believe" in Christ -- the very instant his own parent trusts the Word of God and believes in Jesus as the Lord and Saviour of his household.

Leaving Galilee, Jesus then spent some time in Judaea, commissioning His Apostles to go forth and baptize those households which would follow Him. Matthew 10:1-13. Cf. too the previous events referred to in John 1:25 & 3:3-16 & 3:22-25 & 4:1-2.

Jesus Christ had taken over the ministry fully -- from John the Baptizer. That was the ministry of the Kingdom of God, for which both of them had been set apart previously -- even while both were still in the womb. Matthew 11:1-24 cf. Luke 1:15-17 & 1:76-80 cf. Malachi 3:1-4 & 4:4-6.

Then Jesus said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to speechless infants [*neepiois*, from *nee-epos* or 'no-word']. Yes, Father, for thus it was good in Your sight (*eudokia*). All things have been handed over to Me by My Father. And nobody knows the Son, except the Father. Neither does anybody know the Father, except the Son -- and him to whomsoever the Son wants to reveal it." Matthew 11:25-27.

Note that the verb "reveal" is in the past tense in verse 25, and in the present tense in verse 27 (which latter Irenaeus renders even in the future tense)! Such verses state: "You have revealed them [these things] to speechless infants.... And nobody knows the Son..., neither the Father -- except the Son and him to whomsoever the Son will reveal it."

Here, the thought seems to be that the Son has revealed the Father to elect speechless infants before they can talk. And not only that. But, in addition, the Son wants to reveal (or alternatively will continue to reveal) the Father to those elect covenantal children even after they learn to talk.

Indeed, the further thought seems to be that the Son has always been revealing the Father to elect covenantal children both before and after they learn to speak. Yes, always -- even from Genesis 4:1f onward, and not just since Christ's incarnation.

As Irenaeus again remarks about this passage: "The knowledge of the Son...has been revealed through the Son. And this was the reason why the Lord declared: 'No man knows the Son but the Father; nor the Father, save the Son and those to whomsoever the Son shall reveal Him' [Matthew 11:27 & Luke 10:22].

"For 'shall reveal' was said not with reference to the future alone, as if the Word had begun to manifest the Father only when He was born of Mary. But it applies indifferently throughout all time. For the Son, being present with His Own handiwork from the beginning, reveals the Father to all -- to whom He wills, and when He wills, and as the Father wills..., to all who believe in Him." *Against Heresies*, IV:6:7.

Thus these 'speechless infants' in Matthew 11:25-27, and Irenaeus's comments thereon. Similar is the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (10:3): "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, Who worketh when and where, and how He pleaseth (John 3:8)."

Also the Lutheran Rev. Professor Dr. Joachim Jeremias in his books *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* and his *The Origins of Infant Baptism* (S.C.M. 1960 & 1963) states this reading of Matthew 11:26f "strikes an original note of Jesus' joy over the revelation granted" by Him. Namely, His Self-revelation to His speechless infants or *neepioi*.

Continues Jeremias: "As only a father knows his son, so only a son knows his father." This means that even speechless infants (among the covenantal people of Israel alias the Christian Church) are 'sons' who 'know' their heavenly Father (also before their baptism).

After Christ's transfiguration on the mountain, a father who believed in Jesus brought His afflicted child to the Saviour. And Jesus, because of the faith of the father, drove an unclean spirit out of the child. Matthew 17:9-18 cf. Mark 9:17-26a and Luke 9:37-48.

Then, while travelling through Galilee with His Apostles, the latter started disputing with one another as to which of them was to be the greatest and to rule over the others like Gentile or pagan kings rule over their lords. Matthew 18:1f and Mark 9:20-36f cf. 10:38-45 and Luke 9:46f cf. 22:24-32.

Soon they arrived in Capernaum, where Jesus had done many mighty works and preached in its synagogue. Matthew 4:12-23 & 8:5-12 & 11:23 & 17:24 to 18:1f cf. Mark 1:21-28 & 2:1f and Luke 4:16-23 & 4:31f & 6:1-6f and John 4:46-53 cf. 6:59.

Then, once again back in the 'covenantal city' of Capernaum, Jesus asked His Apostles what they had been disputing about on the way there. Mark 9:33-34 cf. Matthew 17:24f cf. 18:1f. So Jesus right there and then called a little child and put him down in the midst of His Disciples, explaining that each of them needed to become like that child if they themselves were to keep on entering into the Kingdom of Heaven and become a 'great one' there!

Matthew 18:1-14 gives us a graphic account of this very important incident. There -- either explicitly or implicitly -- we learn the following.

First. The child concerned was a covenantal child of Capernaum, and not a pagan child Matthew 18:11 *cf.* 17:24*f.* Even the Non-Reformed Evangelical Scholar John Inchley concedes this point. For he too observes: "Undoubtedly, it was a Jewish child." J. Inchley: *All About Children*, Coverdale, London, 1976, p. 39.

Second. The child was a little child or *paidion*. Matthew 18:1-5. He or she was one of many other similar small children there, alias "these little ones" or *mikroon*. Matthew 18:6 & 18:10.

Third. Though conceived and born in the Covenant, the child was still "lost" before Jesus "found" him or her. Matthew 18:11 & 18:13.

Fourth. The covenantal child had apparently been brought to Jesus, physically, by a believing parent. Matthew 18:1 *cf.* 17:15-16 and Mark 9:17,36 and Luke 9:38,48.

Fifth. Though the little covenantal child had been lost since the imputation of Adam's sin at his or her conception (*cf.* Psalm 51:5) -- he or she had been a lost "sheep" and not a lost goat. Matthew 18:12-14.

Sixth. Though a covenantal child, he or she needed saving. And, indeed, Christ had "come to save" him or her who was lost. Matthew 18:11*f.*

Seventh. Christ had now found that child. Indeed, He had also "called" him or her -- unto Himself. Matthew 18:2a.

Eighth. Jesus not only called him or her. Thereafter, He had picked up that little child in His arms. Matthew 18:2b..

Ninth. The little child concerned was now, right then, already a true Christian believer. For that child had been "called" by Jesus (Matthew 18:2) -- and indeed even "converted" (Matthew 18:3a). Observe that this child was: inside the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:3b); already "humbled" (Matthew 18:4a); "a great one" in the heavenly Kingdom (Matthew 18:4b); "offendable" by unthinking Apostles (Matthew 18:6a); one of those who "**believe**" in Jesus (Matthew 18:6b) -- and, apparently, as yet still unbaptized!.

Tenth. Christ told His already-converted yet still squabbling adult Apostles to keep on being converted -- just like that converted particular little child was keeping on being converted. For Christ told them: "Unless you keep on being converted and keep on becoming like little children, you shall not keep on entering into the Kingdom of Heaven!" Thus, "whoever shall keep on humbling himself like this little child [is now humbling himself or herself], is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven." Matthew 13:3-4 *cf.* Luke 22:26,32.

Eleventh. Jesus never said all children are converted -- or, alternatively, do not need converting. Yet He did say those particular converted adult Disciples of His, needed to keep

on being converted to Christ -- just like that particular converted and continually converting covenantal child then in their very midst. Matthew 18:1-6 *cf.* Luke 22:31-34 and Acts 1:15f & 2:14-21 & 2:38-39.

Twelfth. That particular converted covenantal child had become a believer in Jesus. Indeed, he or she was now associated with all those who believe (whether infants or adults) .

Thirteenth. That believing little child was no longer one of that other group of little children and adults who do not believe and who are therefore still "lost." Matthew 18:11. [The Non-Reformed Evangelical Scholar John Inghley (*op. cit.* p. 42) here ignores this verse (in the *Textus Receptus* and *D* and other Greek manuscript copies), and assumes that this verse is but an "interpolation" from Luke 19:10; but here he overlooks Matthew 9:13 & 10:6 & 15:34, while inadvertently disclosing his own inadequate hamartiology and soteriology at this particular point.]

Fourteenth. That particular believing child was one of "these" little children (of the Covenant in Capernaum) who "keep on believing" in Jesus. Such "keep on believing" -- because He first found and called them and picked them up. Matthew 18:12b & 18:10.

Fifteenth. All people should in Christ's Name receive "one such little child" -- alias all such covenantal children who "believe" in Jesus. Matthew 18:5. Christ's adult Disciples and His Ministers in particular should "receive" such covenantal children. Indeed, to "receive" them thus -- has also 'baptismal' implications. For such believing children are clearly baptizable. Matthew 18:1-5 & 28:19 *cf.* Mark 9:35-37 and 10:38-45 & 16:16.

Sixteenth. Whoever offends even "one of these little ones which believe" in Jesus -- offends them by not "receiving" them? -- "it were better for him, that a heavy stone were hanged around his neck and that he were drowned in the deep sea." Matthew 18:6.

Seventeenth. Christ's adult Disciples and especially His Ministers are therefore not to look down on even "one of these little ones" who "believe" in Jesus and whose guardian "angels always keep on looking to Christ's heavenly Father" on behalf of His believing little ones. Matthew 18:6-10 *cf.* Psalms 34:7 & 91:11.

Eighteenth. It is not the will of the adult Disciples' Father in Heaven "that one of these little ones" who "believe" in Jesus -- and who were therefore obviously already 'born again' -- "should perish." Matthew 18:14 *cf.* John 3:3-8 & 3:16.

Nineteenth. Here we should carefully note that Christ's command to "receive" in His "Name" all "such little child[ren]" as "these little ones who believe" in Him -- has massive implications for infant baptism. Matthew 18:5-6 & 28:19 *cf.* Mark 9:34-37 & 10:38-45 and John 3:3-8 & 3:16 & 3:23f. Such implications disprove both neo-romish 'Federal Vision' and neo-anabaptistic Baptist theologies.

Twentieth. Jesus does not here promise His Kingdom to all children because they are 'innocent' (*sic*)! Nor because they all 'participate' in a 'general atonement' (*sic*!) at least for all children. No!

Instead, Jesus here promises His Kingdom to all those adults and all those infants and little children who have been "called" by Jesus and 'born again.' As a result of that call, such have "humbled themselves" like that little child of the Covenant -- and "believe" in Christ.

Thus they have come to Christ or been "brought" to Him and been "received in His Name." Consequently, they are now no longer the "lost" lambs or sheep they were, but rather "saved" lambs or sheep whom Christ Himself has "found." Matthew 18:1-6 & 18:12-14.

All who would be saved, must receive the Kingdom of God in the way such a believing little child receives it. Matthew 18:6 *cf.* Mark 10:15. Thus the Holy Spirit Himself, within the hearts of such little believing children, sometimes even from conception onward cries out: 'Abba Father!' Galatians 4:4-6 *cf.* Luke 1:35 and Romans 5:5 & 8:14-16 and Ephesians 1:5 and John 1:12 & 3:3-16.

Yet not all little children, but only believing little children, know God as their Father. Matthew 6:7-9 *cf.* Romans 9:10-13. Note that no farmer turns wolves or goats or pigs into sheep; nor turn piglets into lambs! So too, the true Shepherd of the flock again and again goes off after each of His adult sheep and each of His lambs who have "gone astray" from His flock -- until "He finds it" and brings it back to His flock, both before and after baptismally 'branding' it in His Own Name. Matthew 18:5-6 & 18:12-14 *cf.* Mark 9:34-36 & 10:38-45.

Even more interesting is Mark 9:33-42's account of the same event in the covenantal city of Capernaum. Jesus had just previously healed the child of the believing father who brought him to the Saviour. Mark 9:17-24*f.* Right after that, Christ's twelve Apostles had started disputing with one another as to which of them was the greatest. Mark 9:28-32. So, as soon as Jesus arrived with His Apostles in Capernaum, He rebuked the twelve for thus disputing. Mark 9:33-34.

"He sat down and called the twelve and said to them, 'If anyone desires to be first -- he must be last of all, and servant of all.'" Mark 9:35. Christ spoke in Aramaic; and in that language the same word *talya* means both "servant" or *diakonos* and "little child" or *paidion*. Compare Mark 9:35-36 with 5:5*lf* and Second Kings 5:2 and Luke 22:23-27!

Accordingly, Jesus then "took a little child (*paidion*), and placed him in the midst of them" (*viz.* in the midst of Christ's adult twelve Apostles). Mark 9:35-36. Then, "when He had embraced him in His arms, He said to them [His Apostles]: 'Whosoever shall receive one of such children in My Name, receives Me! And whosoever shall receive Me, receives not [only] Me but [also] Him Who sent Me.... But whosoever shall offend one of these little ones who believe [plural!] in Me -- it is better for him that a heavy stone were hanged around his neck and he were thrown into the sea!'" Mark 9:36-37 & 9:42.

This, then, is Mark's account of that event. Here, we should very carefully note the following points.

First. The child whom Jesus "took" and "embraced" was just a "little child" or *paidion*. Indeed, he was, at that, only a "little one" or *mikros*. Mark 9:36-42.

Second. That "little one" or *mikros* was one of Capernaum's covenantal children or "one of these little ones who keep on believing in Me" or *hena ton mikroon toon pisteuontoon eis Eme*. Mark 9:42.

Third. That believing little child of the Covenant had apparently been brought to Jesus by his quite-obviously believing parent(s) into that house in Capernaum. Mark 9:33-36 *cf.* 9:17 & 9:19f & 9:24 & 9:28f.

Fourth. Jesus received that believing little child by picking him or her up and embracing him or her. Indeed, He urged His Apostles likewise to receive "such children" alias little believers born into the Covenant. Mark 9:36-37a.

Fifth. Jesus assured His Apostles that those who thus receive little covenantal believers "in My Name" -- receive Jesus Himself. Mark 9:37b.

Sixth. Jesus warned His Apostles that those who on the contrary "offend" even "one of these little ones who believe in Me" -- would be rejected. Mark 9:42.

And seventh. Jesus at that very same time urged that "water" be given "in My Name" to those who "belong to Christ." Indeed, this does seem to have at least some bearing on the baptism of covenantal infants alias "one of these little ones who believe in Me." Mark 9:41 & 10:39-45 *cf.* Matthew 10:42.

Now -- some erroneously regard this "little child" as an adult servant of the Apostles whom Christ merely figuratively called "a little child" and "a little one." Mark 9:37 & 9:42. Yet this ignores the fact that Jesus had just recently healed another "little child" or *paidion* of a believing father. Mark 9:17 & 9:24. Indeed, it also ignores the fact that Jesus now picked up or "took" this second child in Capernaum -- and then "embraced him in His arms."

Yet others again erroneously say that Jesus equally blesses all children. However, the inspired Mark states that Jesus blessed one "child" specifically (*cf.* Luke 9:48) -- a child who was "one of these little ones who believe in Me." Mark 9:36-42.

Indeed, Jesus does not here tell His Apostles to receive all children and to bless or to baptize them all indiscriminately. No! Jesus here tells His Apostles to receive in His Name "such children" as that particular child was -- namely a believing child or one of "such" children as trust in Jesus, alias "one of these little ones who believe in Me." Mark 9:36,37,42.

For, as H.B. Swete comments, that particular child was "the representative of its class, or rather of the class of Disciples it symbolizes."

Significantly, some have suggested that the believing Apostle Peter was the father of that particular child. *Cf.* Mark 9:33-36 with 1:28-31. Or alternatively that the child himself was Ignatius, the later Bishop of Antioch nicknamed *Theophoros* or "the one carried by God" (= Christ) in Mark 9:36. Be that as it may, from the account in Luke 9:47-48 *cf.* 9:38, it is significant that "this child" whom Jesus "picked up" and later "put down" next "to Himself" -- is mentioned right after the healing of the faithful Christian father's "only little child."

We now consider another different yet similar case of Jesus blessing other covenantal children. This new event took place not in Capernaum's province of Galilee, but in the territories of the province of Judaea. Matthew 19:1-15, *per contra* 17:24-18:1f.

On this subsequent occasion, the Pharisees had been trying to trick Jesus into making an assailable statement on divorce. Yet Jesus instead reasserted the integrity of marriage -- and, by implication, the (re)production there of faithful covenantal children, as a creation ordinance of God Himself. Matthew 19:4-6 *cf.* Genesis 1:26-28 & 2:24 & 4:1f.

Many of God's faithful adult believers marry, and (re)produce 'godly covenantal infants from the womb.' Some of those covenantal infants, godly from the womb, will themselves establish godly marriages after they themselves grow up. Matthew 19:6 *cf.* Genesis 2:24.

However, others of those godly infants will never marry when they grow up. Instead, they remain as it were 'godly eunuchs' -- having been "so born from their mothers' wombs" -- or having later become such 'eunuchs' either by circumstance or choice. Matthew 19:12.

"Then little children [*paidia*] were brought to Him, so that He could put His hands on them and pray. But the Disciples rebuked them [the *autois* who brought those *paidia*]. Yet Jesus said, 'Permit the little children, and do not forbid them [*auta*] to come to Me! For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.' So He laid His hands on them, and went away from there." Matthew 19:13-15.

Luke's account makes it clear that the little children then brought to Jesus, included even "the infants" alias the *brephee* or sucklings of those who brought them. Jesus says that the Kingdom of God consisted of those infants too. Indeed, He adds that "whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God like [such] a little child, shall never enter into it!" Luke 18:15-17.

Mark 10:13-16 adds that Jesus was "much displeased when His Apostles rebuked those who brought these little children. He took them up in His arms; and He blessed them. Indeed, Mark 10:35-39 even adds (just seventeen to twenty-two verses later) that the sons of Zebedee would indeed be baptized with the baptism with which Jesus Himself was baptized.

These are all extremely important passages! Indeed, here we should very carefully note their following teachings.

First. Those who brought the little children to Jesus for Him to touch them, were covenanted people from Judaea. They were not Pagans. Mark 10:1 & 10:13a.

Second. The covenantal adults brought their little children and even their unweaned babies alias speechless infants to Jesus. So too should we. Luke 18:15f.

Third. These little children were apparently already in touch with Jesus, by virtue of their prior Membership in the Covenant. Hence their parents desired to bring them into even closer touch with the Saviour. *Idem.*

Fourth. Atheistic and Buddhist and Hindu and Islamic and Judaistic and Pagan parents then and now do not desire to bring their children to Jesus. Unlike the godly Ancient Hebrews, the ancient pagan parents (just like their modern counterparts) often even deliberately aborted their own fetuses and/or intentionally killed their own infants postnatally. Thus such pagan children stayed away from Jesus' closest touch. Cf. First Corinthians 7:14.

Fifth. The Saviour's closest touch in Mark 10:13 is apparently a sign pointing to His atonement even for such little children. Rev. Professor Dr. Joachim Jeremias rightly says this "depicts an incident from the time of Jesus' ministry on the eve of the Day of Atonement, when children were brought to the Hebrew Elders for them to 'bless them, strengthen them, and pray for them'" (*Sopherim* 18:5).

Sixth. Covenant parents had brought their children "from their mothers' wombs" to Jesus for Him to "pray" for them. Matthew 19:12-13. This shows they knew the covenantal blessings for their children were not automatic, but required their own "bringing" of their children to the Saviour for Him to "pray" for their children. Cf. Hebrews 7:25.

Seventh. When Christ's overzealous and 'temporarily antipaedobaptistic' Disciples wrongly rebuked the covenantal parents for bringing their little covenantal children to Jesus, the Saviour was "much displeased." He then told them not to "forbid" these covenantal children being brought to Him. Mark 10:14.

Eighth. This Markian expression "forbid them not" -- *mee kooluete* -- has distinct reference to the household baptism passages in Acts 10:44-47f & 11:14-17. Rev. Professor Dr. Oscar Cullmann has demonstrated this, in his book *Baptism in the New Testament* (London, S.C.M. 1950).

Ninth. Christ's words in Mark 10:14 ("Permit the little children to come to Me!"), are very similar to His Matthew 11:25-28 call to all burdened sinners. There, among the latter, Christ includes even the "babies" to whom the Father has "revealed" these things.

Tenth. Jesus now makes some very crucial remarks in respect of these "little children" of the Covenant. Says He: "Permit the little children to come to Me! Do not forbid them! For of such is the Kingdom of God." *Aphete ta paidia erchesthai pros Me! Mee kooluete auta! Toon gar toioutoon estin he Basileia tou Theou.* Mark 10:14.

Now this expression "of such" -- *toon toioutoon* -- is a correlative demonstrative pronoun of quality. Arndt and Gingrich say *toioutos* means "'such a person' -- either in such a way that a definite individual with his special characteristics is thought of; or that any bearer of certain definite qualities is meant."

Elsewhere, the word *toioutos* is used to indicate that not humanity in general but only a definite individual or individuals is or are in mind. Cf. Acts 22:23; Romans 16:18; First Corinthians 5:5 & 7:28 & 16:16; Second Corinthians 10:11a; Galatians 6:1; and Titus 3:11.

The immediate context of Mark 10:14's "of such" -- namely Mark 10:15's words "receive the Kingdom of God as a little child!" -- makes it clear that the Kingdom of God

belongs to such adults and children as receive the Kingdom of God as that particular believing child of the Covenant received it. Indeed, the latter received it by being brought to Jesus by his or her covenantal parent(s) -- and by then sovereignly being blessed by Him. Mark 10:13-16, compare 9:36-42 *etc.*

The genitive *toon toioutoon* is not qualitative but possessive. Indeed, the accompanying word *estin* must be rendered: "belongs." So the phrase 'of such is the Kingdom of God' -- does not mean 'the Kingdom of God is of a childlike nature.' It rather means, 'the Kingdom of God is that of such children as possess it.' It belongs to them!

This, however, does not mean the Kingdom belongs to all children -- nor to all adults! For Jesus does not say that the Kingdom belongs to all. Nor does He say the Kingdom belongs to all such as are childlike.

To the contrary, Jesus says the Kingdom belongs to such as **receive** the Kingdom in the way those particular children then did. Indeed, Mark 10:15 makes it quite clear that the only people who inherit the Kingdom -- whether as adults or as children -- are those who actually "receive" it. And those who "receive" it, means those and only those -- whether adults or children -- who truly "believe" in Jesus. Cf. Matthew 18:6 and Mark 9:42.

Hence, Jesus made it very clear to the Greek woman from pagan Syrophenicia that the Israelitic "children" must first be offered food -- before their bread be taken and offered to the unclean "dogs." Mark 7:26-27 cf. First Corinthians 7:14. But Jesus also made it clear that the faithless among the covenantal 'children of the Kingdom' -- alias the apostate nation of Israel -- would be cast out into outer darkness. Then, many believing Gentiles would come from the east and the west, like the faithful Roman centurion -- and sit down together with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 8:8-13 cf. Romans 11:16f.

Again, in Mark 9:37, Jesus had said: "Whoever shall receive one of such [believing] children in My Name, receives Me." And in the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46, it is clear that only the sheep are the "brethren" of the King. Matthew 25:40. Whereas those who did not help the sheep and the lambs -- are branded as 'goats' and as kindred of the devil. Matthew 25:41.

We now look back at Mark 10:15. Here, we again see that even covenantal children need to "receive" the Kingdom of God. For "receive" (*dechesthai*) generally refers to the 'reception' of a person or a message or a gift. Mark 9:37 & 8:13 and Second Corinthians 6:1 & 11:4.

So also tiny covenantal children need to "enter" into the Kingdom. For unless a person is born again, he cannot even see and much less "enter" into the Kingdom of God. John 3:3,5,8,16.

The Kingdom is to be received by its recipients -- whether adults or children -- in the same way or 'just as' a believing little child who receives it, embraces it "as a little child" (*hoos paidion*). This is clearly nominative -- not accusative.

For Mark 10:15 does not mean "Whoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as one receives a child, shall not enter it." Thus -- quite wrongly! -- Clarke and Shilling.

To the contrary, it clearly means "Whoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God in the way a little child receives it [if and when a child might receive God's Kingdom], shall not enter it." Thus most expositors.

For Mark 10:15's expression "as a little child" immediately follows and clearly refers to the way a believing covenantal child, like the one Jesus here blessed, "receive[s] the Kingdom of God." That is in the same way in which "whosoever" would "enter" the Kingdom, must himself "receive" it.

Mark 10:14 makes it clear that "the little children" concerned, actually "come" to Jesus. And Mark 10:13 makes it clear that these "little children" -- were actually "brought" to Jesus by "those that brought them."

Indeed, Matthew 18:4 means -- every adult and child and baby or 'whosoever keeps on humbling himself like this little child' who is right now humbling himself, is "the great one" in the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 18:5 means that 'he who receives in Christ's Name such a little child who believes in Jesus, receives the Lord Himself.' And Matthew 18:6 means that 'whosoever keeps on offending one of these little ones who keep on believing in Christ' -- is obviously not himself a true believer like such a believing child is.

So *hoos paidion* or "as a little child" in Mark 10:15, is just as nominative and just as non-accusative -- as *hoos kleptees* is in First Thessalonians 5:4. There, the meaning is not: 'the day shall overtake you in the way it overtakes a thief.' But there, the meaning is, 'the day shall not overtake you in the way a thief overtakes you.'

Hence in Mark 10:15, the meaning is not -- 'Receive the Kingdom of God in the way you receive a little child!' But the meaning is 'Receive the Kingdom of God in the way a little child receives it!' -- namely, in the way this particular little believing covenantal child is receiving it. For only 'such' children really do receive God's Kingdom. Namely by 'believing' and 'entering' into it -- by God's grace, and through their own God-given faith.

We now look at Mark 10:16. Covenant parents from Judaea had "brought young children to Him, so that He should touch them." Mark 10:13. So now, Jesus "took them up in His arms and put His hands upon them and blessed them." Mark 10:16.

First. Jesus "took them up in His arms." Mark 10:16. These covenantal children were Christ's Own lambs. For Isaiah had predicted that "He shall gather the lambs in His arm" -- the little lambs; but not little goats. Isaiah 40:11. Indeed, the Hebrew word for 'lambs' (*tela'im*), is cognate with the Aramaic for a boy or a girl of the Covenant (*talia* and *talitha*). Cf. Mark 5:22f,36,41.

Second. Christ's embrace (*enangkalisamenos*) here denotes His warm acceptance of these covenantal children. It shows they belong to Him -- and that His Kingdom belongs to such as they. Mark 10:16b.

Third. Jesus "put His hands upon them." Mark 10:16b. This describes the Hebrew way of "placing" hands upon covenantal children in order to bless them. Here one needs to look at Jacob's blessing of his tiny grandchildren Ephraim and Manasseh in Genesis 48:8-20.

Fourth. Jesus "blessed them" (*kateulogei*). This means He fervently spoke God's Word (*kata + logei*) to them -- as the vehicle by which He warmly blessed them.

The connection here between this action and the 'visible Word' of the Sacrament of Infant Baptism for covenantal children, should be obvious. So we shall not here belabour it.

Finally, we need to look at Christ's Great Commission. Just before He gave it, covenantal children (*paidas*) had been praising Jesus. He Himself had then insisted that God had perfected praise even out of the mouth of speechless infants (*neepioon*) and unweaned babies (*theelazontoon*). Matthew 21:16 *cf.* Psalm 8:3.

Soon after that, Jesus obviously included such infants and babies too -- among the God-praisers in the "nations" to be baptized under His Great Commission. Matthew 28:19. For "so shall He sprinkle many nations," and "He shall see His seed." Isaiah 52:15 & 53:10.

Indeed, even as far as infant seed is concerned, the implied teaching is abundantly clear. It is first, **belief**; and only then, **baptism**.

Hence, declares Jesus, "he who believes, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he who does not believe, shall be damned." Mark 16:16.

Jesus commanded His Apostles "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations" (each of which contains babies). Then He further promised them: "I am sending the promise of My Father upon you. But remain in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high!" Luke 24:47-49.

Here, the word 'endued' translates Luke's verb *enduseesthe*. It anticipates Paul's statement that "as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ" -- and also his other statement that "if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed." Galatians 3:27-29's *endusas the*.

Indeed, Luke anticipates also his own later verse recording Christ's statement that the Apostles would "be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days" thereafter. Acts 1:5. When that occurred, it would fulfil Joel's prediction that God would pour out His "rain" even upon covenantal "sucklings" or unweaned infants. Joel 2:16,23,32.

Christ's inspired Apostle Peter himself said so! He urged his Pentecost converts to "be baptized." Indeed, in the very same breath, he also reminded them that the promise was even for "your children." Acts 2:1-4 & 2:14-21 & 2:36-39.

Later still, in First Peter 1:2,3,23 & 2:2 & 3:1 & 3:18-21, Christ's same Apostle again inspiredly reminded Christian families that they had been "born again" and "sprinkled" even "as newborn babies" -- just like the 'baptism' of Noah's entire household inside the Ark, by

the sprinkling of the rainwater, separated them unto God from the ungodly households outside that Ark of the Covenant.

Too, God says to married Covenanters who themselves believe in Jesus that they should come together in the marriage act -- and that their resulting "children **are** holy" (even before their birth). First Corinthians 7:3-14.

As such, holy children qualify for holy baptism. "Be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ!... For the promise is unto you, and to your children." Acts 2:28-39 *cf.* 16:15 & 16:33 & 18:8 and First Corinthians 1:16 & 7:14 . See too Ephesians 1:1 & 4:4-6 & 6:4 -- "train them in [not bring them from the outside **into**] the nurture...of the Lord!"

Fallen and Fallible Freewill Baptists seem to believe: 'Only he who says he believes, shall be saved -- provided he keeps on saying so.' Thereagainst, the unfallen and infallible Lord Christ clearly teaches: "Not everyone who says 'Lord' shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven!" Matthew 7:21.

For belief in Jesus is not of man, nor of man's sayings. True belief in Christ, like the grace that produces it, is a gift of God. Ephesians 2:8. Jesus says: "He who believes, shall be saved" -- even if, like an infant, he cannot even say so. Mark 16:16.

For Jesus teaches in Matthew 11:25 (*cf.* 17:20) that saving faith in Christ is revealed to babies. So elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit Who works when and where and how He pleases. Luke 18:15-16; Acts 2:38-39; John 3:3-5; First John 5:12; Romans 8:9. And such infants need, and are given, a God-donated embryonic trust in Jesus -- even if initially no bigger than a grain of mustard seed.

As Jesus Christ Himself prayed in thanksgiving: "I thank You, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent -- and have revealed them to babies! Even so, Father! For thus it seemed good in Your sight!"

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During World War II, the Royal Navy appointed Nigel's father Chief Radar Officer (South Atlantic). So the family then moved to South Africa. There, Nigel became a Calvinist; had the privilege of leading both parents to Christ; and then became a Minister of God's Word in the Dutch Reformed Church.

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He lives in Australia, where for 20 years he was Professor of Systematic Theology and Caldwell-Morrow Lecturer in Church History at the Queensland Presbyterian Theological College. He and his wife Nellie retired in 2000. Their two covenantal children were raised in Christ the Lord from their conceptions onward. Lee, almost 72, is the same person he was seventy-one years ago as shown on the front cover.

