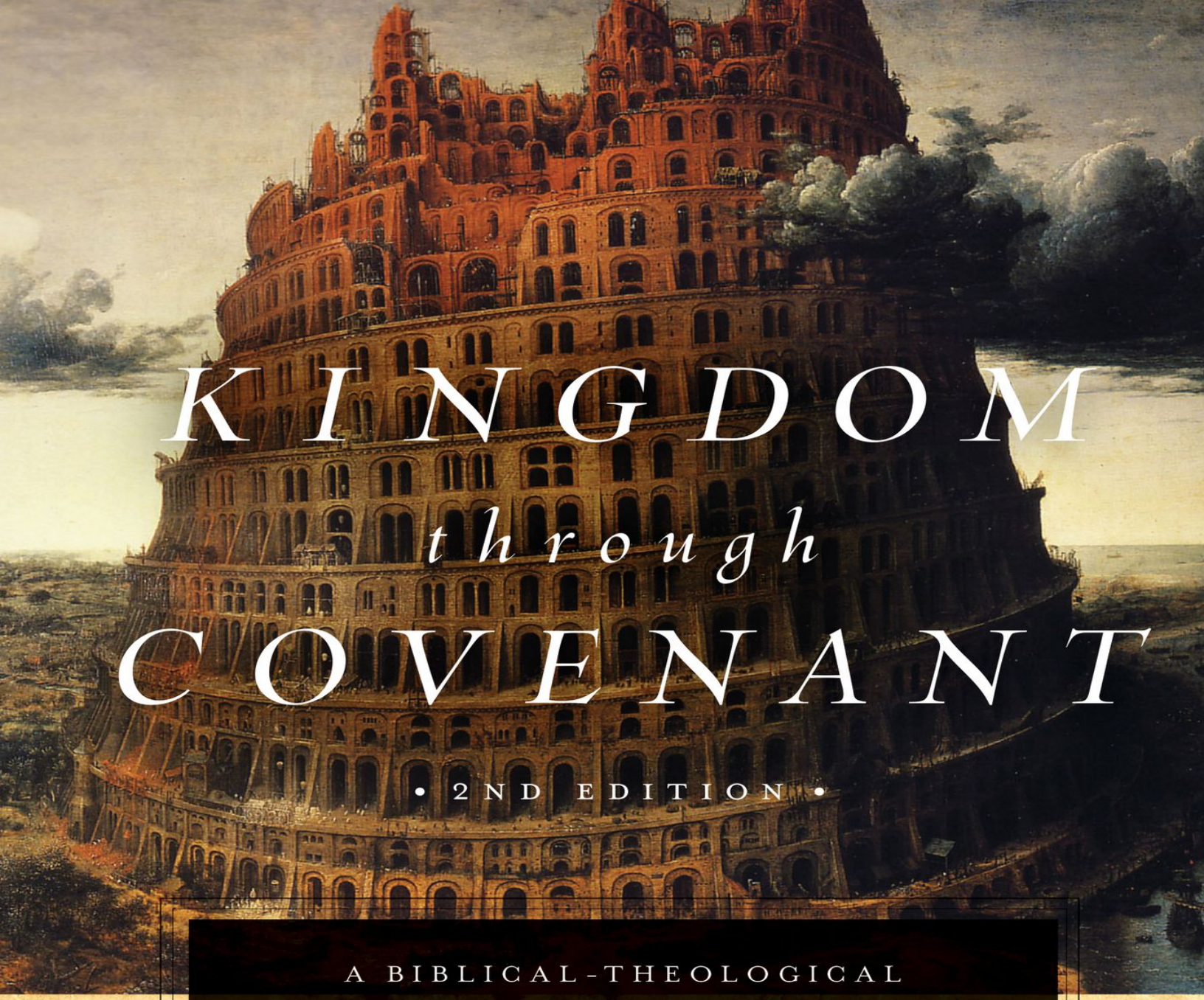


KINGDOM through COVENANT

• 2ND EDITION •

A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING *of the* COVENANTS

PETER J. GENTRY

STEPHEN J. WELLUM



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Jonathan Leeman, Editorial Director, 9Marks; author, *The Rule of Love*

“Gentry and Wellum have provided a welcome addition to the current number of books on biblical theology. What makes their contribution unique is the marriage of historical exegesis, biblical theology, and systematic theology. *Kingdom through Covenant* brims with exegetical insights, biblical theological drama, and sound systematic theological conclusions. Particularly important is the viable alternative they offer to the covenantal and dispensational hermeneutical frameworks. I enthusiastically recommend this book!”

Stephen G. Dempster, Professor of Religious Studies, Crandall University

“The relationship between the covenants of Scripture is rightly considered to be central to the interpretation of the Bible. That there is some degree of continuity is obvious for it is the same God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as well as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—who has revealed himself and his will in the covenants. That there is, however, also significant discontinuity

also seems patent since Scripture itself talks about a new covenant and the old one passing away. What has changed, and what has not? Utterly vital questions to which this book by Gentry and Wellum give satisfying and sound answers. Because of the importance of this subject and the exegetical and theological skill of the authors, their answers deserve a wide hearing. Highly recommended!"

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"*Kingdom through Covenant* has helped me better understand the Bible as a continuous narrative. This book reveals the structure that supports the revelation of God's message throughout time. The study of the covenants provides a framework for understanding and applying the message of the Bible to life in the new covenant community. This book has helped put the Bible together for me and has been enriching to my ministry."

Joseph Lumbrix, Pastor, Mount Olivet Baptist Church, Willisburg, Kentucky

"This impressive volume makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the nature of the biblical covenants. Meticulously researched, clearly written, and boldly argued, the *progressive covenantalism* thesis—a *via media* between dispensational and covenantal theology—combines exegetical depth with theological rigor in the service of covenant faithfulness. The result is penetrating reflections on Christology, the Christian life, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Even at points of disagreement, all who teach the Scriptures to others will find here a rich treasure trove of whole-Bible theological thinking and an invaluable resource to return to again and again."

David Gibson, Minister, Trinity Church, Aberdeen, Scotland; coeditor, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*

Kingdom
through
Covenant

Kingdom *through* Covenant

A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants
SECOND EDITION

Peter J. Gentry
Stephen J. Wellum

Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants (Second Edition)

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A Legacy
for
My Children
Stewart John,
Laura and Stephen,
Joseph Daniel, Emma Grace, and Sophie Rose
— Peter Gentry

• • •

He established a testimony in Jacob
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our fathers
to teach to their children,
that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,
and arise and tell them to their children,
so that they should set their hope in God
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments.
Psalm 78:5–7 ESV

With Gratitude to Our Triune Covenant Lord
for
My Parents
Colin and Joan Wellum
— Stephen Wellum

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Preface to the Second Edition

We are extremely grateful to Justin Taylor and the entire Crossway team for an opportunity to present a revised edition of *Kingdom through Covenant*. Although we are delighted in the reception that the first edition (2012) has received and are thankful for how it has stimulated discussion regarding how our triune God's eternal plan is disclosed to us through the Bible's covenantal unfolding, we wanted to update parts and clarify others in light of some of the reviews and helpful feedback we have received. In this new edition, we have attempted to read and critically reflect on all the reviews of the first edition of *Kingdom through Covenant* known to us. Since the book's publication, we have realized that some matters required correction and other matters clarification, given some of the reviewers' misunderstandings of our overall proposal. In addition, we have also grown in our understanding of Scripture and further wrestled with issues that did not appear to us when we began this journey. In what follows, we would like to explain what has been updated in each of our respective parts and also how close cooperation and work together have helped us to improve the other's part and the whole.

Note from Peter Gentry

Serious reflection on all known reviews led me to reconsider my exegesis in a few areas. The one reviewer who noted genuine problems in the exegesis was Doug Moo. He highlighted that the explanation given of "affirm/uphold a covenant" (*hēqîm bĕrît*) in Ezekiel 16 was unsatisfactory. Nor did I explain properly why "cut a covenant" (*kārat bĕrît*) was used of Deuteronomy, since the covenant at Moab appears to be a reaffirmation of the covenant at Sinai. I am grateful for the opportunity to acknowledge my errors and am especially thankful for his review.

Several months of study on Ezekiel 16 led me to a different explanation, which I published in the abridgment of this volume, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants* (Crossway, 2015). Further research on the literary structure of Deuteronomy, which covered chapters 1–33 and not just 1–28, led me to what I believe is a more satisfactory treatment of the relationship between the covenant at Sinai and the covenant at Moab and to not only why the expression *kārat bĕrît* was necessary for the latter but also why the expression *hēqîm bĕrît* was inappropriate there.

The chapter on Daniel 9 has been completely rewritten. The basic position taken is much the same, but many exegetical issues are reconsidered that make the presentation more satisfactory in dealing with unanswered questions.

Much of the material on the new covenant in the Prophets was reworked. In the first edition, the contribution of each prophet was analyzed within the plot structure of their individual works. At the time, this approach was an advance on previous books on the topic since they did not treat the covenants in this manner. However, what I did not adequately do was consider the chronological development in the Prophets as each prophet meditated on what earlier prophets had spoken and written, thus demonstrating better innerbiblical and intertextual relationships. Thus, Jeremiah clarifies the discussion in Isaiah, and Ezekiel further explains questions unanswered in Jeremiah. In addition, in my discussion of the Prophets' treatment of the new covenant, I incorporated more material from the New Testament to satisfy some of our critics who did not think we dealt adequately with how the Old Testament's teaching of kingdom through covenant is fulfilled in the New.

When the first edition of our book went to press, we did not have sufficient time to evaluate *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Purposes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), by Scott W. Hahn. The comment in the first edition that Hahn is not quite up to date on the ancient Near Eastern cultural setting necessary for the best exegesis remains true. Yet Hahn's book is full of helpful insights, and we would certainly agree that the covenant at Sinai, in

particular, establishes kinship between Yahweh and Israel. The same is true of the Davidic and new covenants.

In 2015, *Covenant in the Persian Period: From Genesis to Chronicles* appeared, edited by Richard J. Bautch and Gary N. Knoppers (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns). This is a collection of twenty-two essays by an international spectrum of scholars. The advertisement on the back cover claims that the "essays in this new and comprehensive study explore how notions of covenant, especially the Sinaitic covenant, flourished during the Neo-Babylonian, Persian, and early Hellenistic periods." With no mention of our work and no mention of the three-volume work of over 1,600 pages by Kenneth Kitchen and Paul Lawrence dealing with every covenant, law treatise, and treaty in the ancient Near East from the third millennium to the Hasmonean period,[1] it is difficult to consider this work a disinterested and honest treatment of the subject. The title itself, *Covenant in the Persian Period*, reveals a major bias about the origin of the documents of the Old Testament, which we seek to counter in our volume. In the end, the treatment of the covenants presented is neither comprehensive nor new.

Finally, in 2017, *Biblical Theology: Covenants and the Kingdom of God in Redemption History*, by Jeong Koo Jeon, was published (Eugene: OR, Wipf & Stock). This is a work by a systematic theologian committed to classical covenant theology. Strangely, all the book does is explain and reaffirm the framework of the system and then cite passages of Scripture *within this framework* as though the evidence is obvious, without any sense that it is ultimately the overall metanarrative that is at debate. One can only show that one's metanarrative is correct when it encompasses more data than other competing metanarratives and has better explanatory power in dealing with the details. The view of the whole must account for the parts, and the understanding of the parts must reshape the view of the whole. Overall, there is little exegesis in the book by Jeon, and when the author takes issue with our work in four or five places, he does not offer any exegetical evidence for his rejection of our positions. There is also a simple repeating of the analysis provided so many years ago by Meredith Kline for dealing with the biblical text. Ironically, contrary to the review by Jonathan Brack and Jared Oliphint, who questioned our appeal to the cultural setting

in our interpretation of Scripture,[2] covenant theologians, as represented by Jeon and Kline, do that very thing.

Note from Stephen Wellum

Given the opportunity to write a revised edition, I carefully edited and rewrote parts 1 and 3. I sought to update, clarify, and remove anything that was not necessary to our overall argument and biblical-theological proposal. Some of the reviews of the first edition illegitimately picked up on material in footnotes and then pitted those discussions against other sections of the book. Or other reviews jumped on a word or phrase—*replacement* or *via media*—and then attributed positions to us that we did not intend. In light of this, I was careful to remove material or restate it to achieve maximal clarity. It is our hope that readers will read our new edition by first seeking to do justice to our argument on its own terms before offering a critique of a view that we do not endorse. But as we learned in writing the first edition, no matter how carefully one states one's position—especially when it centers on key differences between theological systems—it is difficult to hear exactly what the other person is saying. It is our prayer that this revised edition will continue to foster discussion among Christians who agree on so much but still differ on important details, especially in terms of how the Bible's overall plotline works. For this reason, I have sought to clarify our view and state other theological positions in a more precise and accurate manner.

In part 1, I sought to describe with greater precision the nature of biblical and systematic theology, the theological systems of dispensational and covenant theology, and some of the hermeneutical differences between our proposal and the dominant theological systems within evangelical theology. My description and exposition of these matters did not change substantially, but I have updated the footnotes and, I believe, nuanced the discussion better.

In part 3, I thoroughly reworked chapter 16, which summarizes our overall viewpoint, trying to discuss with more clarity our proposal of progressive covenantalism. We added chapter 17, on the New Testament, with the aim of discussing how the progression of the biblical covenants

reaches its fulfillment in Christ and his people, the church. One of the main criticisms of the first edition is that it did not adequately discuss the New Testament data. We sought to respond to this criticism by Peter adding more New Testament material in his exposition of the covenants and by me adding this new chapter. Obviously, the New Testament data could be discussed in a number of ways, but we thought it best to demonstrate how our Lord Jesus Christ brings to fulfillment the previous covenants in himself as the head and mediator of the new covenant and how the church, as God's new covenant community, is the recipient of all God's promises in Christ alone. Discussing it in this way allows us to see better how our Lord Jesus is the one who brings all God's promises to fulfillment *and* how the church is a transformed, new community (contra covenant theology) yet a community that lasts as a covenant people forever and not merely a present-day illustration of what believing nations will be like in the future (contra dispensational theology).

Finally, in chapters 18–19, some of the theological entailments of our position are delineated with some previous material removed and new material added. The decision for what to include or omit was based on which material would contribute best to demonstrating key *differences* between the theological systems of dispensational and covenant theology and our proposal of progressive covenantalism. As we have repeatedly stated, although we as Christians agree on more than we disagree on, our focus in this book is on areas that still divide us. This needs to be kept in mind as the book is read so that readers do not think that Christians disagree on essential truths of the gospel. What we are trying to do is to wrestle with some of the differences among us to attain a greater unity as we sit under the truth of God's Word.

One note about my dedication of the book to my parents, Dr. Colin and Joan Wellum. In the midst of finishing this work, on October 11, 2017, my dear father passed from this life into the presence of his Lord and Savior. I am so thankful for the legacy he left me and his entire family. As stated in the first edition, we all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us—men and women who were faithful in their generation, who stood firm on God's Word, and who passed it on to the next generation.

This truth is more real to me now than it was before the passing of my father, and I am pleased to rededicate this second edition to the memory of him and the continued life and influence of my mother. I cannot imagine where I would be today without faithful, godly parents who loved me and my brothers so much to sacrifice their lives to train their children in the truths of God's Word, to proclaim the glories of Christ Jesus, and to place their children under the faithful exposition of God's Word by William E. Payne at Trinity Baptist Church, Burlington, Ontario, Canada. I thank our gracious God for the precious gift of my parents.

In addition to the people to whom the first edition was dedicated, the administration and trustees of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (where we have the privilege of teaching), and the colleagues we thanked in the first edition, we would like to thank those who have worked with us on making progressive covenantalism known and defended as a theological position. Specifically, we are thankful for the contributors to *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), who are both colleagues and students and who played an important role in the revision of this new edition.

It is our prayer that this new edition will bring us back to Scripture to wrestle with all that God has revealed to us of his glorious plan centered on Christ Jesus. Moreover, it is our prayer that this work will promote further biblical and theological discussion in the church for her life and health and for God's glory.

Peter J. Gentry
Stephen J. Wellum

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1. Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012).

2. Jonathan M. Brack and Jared S. Oliphint, "Questioning the Progress in Progressive Covenantalism: A Review of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom through Covenant*," *WTJ* 76, no. 1 (2014): 189–217.

Preface to the First Edition

The design for *Kingdom through Covenant* is based on the conviction that biblical theology and systematic theology go hand in hand. To be specific, systematic theology must be based upon biblical theology, and biblical theology in turn must be founded upon exegesis that attends meticulously to the cultural-historical setting, linguistic data, literary devices/techniques, and especially the narrative plot structure, namely, the larger story that the text as a unitary whole entails and by which it is informed. The converse is also true: exegesis and biblical theology are not ends in themselves but are means to the larger end of doing systematic theology, which simply attempts to bring all our thought and life captive to Scripture and thus under the lordship of Christ.

In this work, the disciplines of biblical and systematic theology have joined forces to investigate anew the biblical covenants and the implications of such a study for conclusions in systematic theology. Such a work has demanded a book written by a biblical scholar and a systematic theologian.

Peter Gentry has served as the biblical scholar, who has expounded at length the biblical covenants across redemptive history in part 2, which comprises chapters 4–15. He has also written the appendix on "covenant" at the end of the book. In these chapters, a detailed exegesis is undertaken of the crucial covenantal texts *plus* those biblical passages that are essential for putting the biblical covenants into a larger story—a story that comes from the Bible and not from our own imagination or worldview, be they present or past. Care has been taken to let the Scripture speak for itself as the biblical covenants are progressively unfolded in God's plan, reaching their culmination in the new covenant inaugurated by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Stephen Wellum has served as the systematic theologian, who has written part 1, comprising chapters 1–3, and part 3, comprising chapters 16–17. In part 1, he provides the framework for the discussion of the biblical

covenants in terms of covenantal discussion within systematic theology. Specifically, he sets the backdrop for Gentry's discussion over against the two dominant theological viewpoints today, namely, dispensationalism and covenant theology. After discussing how each biblical-theological system understands the biblical covenants, he lays out crucial hermeneutical issues that underlie the entire discussion and the way forward if arbitration between the two viewpoints is to be achieved. In part 3, he provides a "big picture" summary of our *via media* proposal of *Kingdom through Covenant* and begins to draw out some of the implications of the study for systematic theology, especially in the areas of theology proper, Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.

After the time of writing and before final publication, a number of major works have appeared on the same topic. Only comments of a limited nature are possible concerning these works. One is by Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Purposes* (Yale University Press, 2009). Although Hahn is now a confessing Roman Catholic, he was trained at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and was given a good background in biblical theology. His work is focused more on the New Testament, while our work is focused more on the Old Testament and how the New Testament is a direct line from Old Testament thought. Hahn's exegesis dealing with the covenants in the Old Testament follows the ancient Near Eastern categories of royal grant versus suzerain-vassal treaty more rigidly than exegesis of the text of Scripture permits.

Another is by James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Crossway, 2010). Hamilton correctly emphasizes the unity of the biblical texts and claims a center for biblical theology, namely, that the idea or theme of "salvation through judgment" is *the* theme that unites the entirety of Scripture and that the parts or individual texts of Scripture cannot be understood without reference to it. We agree with the former, but we do not argue for the latter. We do not deny that "salvation through judgment" is *a* theme of Scripture, even a major one, but we will not defend the assertion that it is *the* theme to the neglect of other themes. In addition, Hamilton unfortunately does not give much

attention to the biblical covenants, their unfolding, progressive nature, and how the biblical covenants provide the entire substructure to the plotline of Scripture. Yet it is our contention that apart from thinking through the relationships between the biblical covenants, one does not fully grasp the Bible's own intrasystematic categories and thus how the parts are related to the whole in the overall plan of God. Before one argues for *the* overarching *theme* of Scripture, one must first wrestle with the unfolding nature of the biblical covenants and their fulfillment and consummation in Christ.

A third is that of Greg Nichols, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed and Baptistic Perspective on God's Covenants* (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2011). This work assumes much of the standard exegesis found in classic covenant theology and seeks to modify it in a way that is consistent with Baptist theology. Yet research during the last fifty years provides information on culture, language, and literary structures that both makes possible and necessitates exegesis *de novo*.

A fourth is a guide to the Old Testament for laypeople by Sandra Richter entitled *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (InterVarsity Press, 2008). She uses Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David as key figures both for covenants and for periods of history. Thus she argues, as we do, that the covenants are the key to the plot structure of the Old Testament. The scope of her work is more limited than ours, and differences in exegesis cannot be defended in her work as they are here.

Finally, in November 2011, a magisterial volume entitled *A New Testament Biblical Theology,* by G. K. Beale, appeared (Baker, 2011). Comparison of Beale's work and ours would require more than we can do in this preface, but one difference between his approach and ours centers on how he unpacks the storyline of Scripture. Beale argues that the "thought" and "themes" of Genesis 1–3 and the later patterns based on them form the storyline of Scripture. His metanarrative turns out to be essentially creation, judgment, and new creation. He summarizes as follows:

> The Old Testament is the story of God, who progressively reestablishes his new-creational kingdom out of chaos over a sinful people by his word and Spirit through promise, covenant, and redemption, resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to

> advance this kingdom and judgment (defeat or exile) for the unfaithful, unto his glory.[1]

We are the first to acknowledge that there is much that is good and right in Beale's work. It is filled with rich insights and is worth careful reflection. Beale does rightly acknowledge a covenant in Genesis 1–3, and he speaks of the commission of Adam as inherited by Noah, Abraham, and Israel. Nonetheless, he does not provide a detailed unpacking of the biblical covenants. Instead, he treats creation and new creation as the main themes of Scripture, but in our view, creation and new creation only serve as the bookends of the plot structure and not the structure itself. Beale fails to use the covenants to develop adequately and properly the plot structure *between* creation and new creation. It is not the case that the canon merely provides a repetition of the patterns and themes in Genesis 1–3 as we progress through redemptive history. Instead, the covenants provide the structure and unfold the developing plotline of Scripture, and thus a detailed investigation of those covenants is necessary to understand God's eternal plan of salvation centered on Christ. Each covenant must first be placed in its own historical-textual context and then viewed intertextually and canonically if we are truly going to grasp something of the whole counsel of God, especially the glory of the new covenant that our Lord has inaugurated. It is for this reason that we are convinced that Beale's otherwise full treatment of subjects goes awry. When he comes to the end of his work, he does not provide a detailed treatment of the covenantal unfolding that reaches its climax in Christ and the new covenant. In our view, he wrongly identifies Sunday as a Christian Sabbath when the former is a sign of the new creation and the latter is a sign of the first creation and (now obsolete) old covenant. He also argues for infant baptism, thus confusing the sign of the new covenant with circumcision, which is the sign for the Abrahamic covenant. These are distinct and separate as covenants and covenant signs. Thus Sabbath and baptism are not sufficiently discussed in their covenantal contexts and fulfillment in Christ. In the end, Beale leaves us with a sophisticated treatment of covenant theology that we are convinced needs to be modified in light of the Bible's own unfolding of the biblical covenants.

In a work of this magnitude we have received help from our colleagues, family, and students. We would like to thank our colleagues Daniel Block, Stephen Dempster, Stephen Kempf, Tom Schreiner, Charles Halton, Miles van Pelt, and Gregg Allison for their many helpful comments as the entire manuscript or parts of it were read and valuable feedback was given to us. In addition, various family members and students also helped in a variety of ways, and we want to thank specifically Barbara Gentry, Laura Musick, John Meade, Jason Parry, Brent Parker, Andrew Case, Brian Davidson, Joseph Lumbrix, Chip Hardy, Richard Lucas, Oren Martin, Matt Dickie, Uche Anizor, and Andrew McClurg. We would also like to thank Paul Roberts and the library staff at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for help in digging up materials necessary for our research.

One final note in regard to the dedication of this work. Peter dedicates this work to his children and grandchildren. His Göttingen edition of Ecclesiastes will be dedicated to his parents, Norm and Marg Gentry, who inspired a love for diligent study of the Word of God. In the passage from Psalm 78, "testimony" (*ʿēdût*) and "law" (*tôrâ*) are synonyms for "covenant" in the Old Testament. God has entrusted the transmission of covenant instruction to a covenant community: the family. We have a great heritage that must be passed on.

Stephen dedicates this work to his parents. We all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us—men and women who were faithful in their generation and who stood firm on God's Word and who passed it on to the next generation. In my case, I (Stephen) owe much to my parents, Colin and Joan Wellum, who did precisely this in their lives and ministry to their children. It is due to my parents' faithfulness to the Lord, exhibited in their teaching their children to love God's Word; to their sacrificial love in so many ways; to their conviction to place their children under the sound teaching of God's Word in a local church committed to expounding "the whole counsel of God"; and to their living out in the home what they taught, that I stand where I stand today. I give our triune covenant God thanks for my parents as ongoing evidence of God's grace in my life.

It is our prayer that this work will not only enable us to think through the biblical covenants better but will also lead us to know, love, and serve our

great covenant God as his holy people—those who are completely devoted and faithful to him.

Peter J. Gentry
Stephen J. Wellum
Written on the cloud between Göttingen, Louisville, and Toronto

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1. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 87.

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AKM	Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ApOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
ASTI	*Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*
AuOr	*Aula Orientalis*
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BBRSup	*Bulletin for Biblical Research, Supplements*
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
Bijdr	*Bijdragen: Tijdschrift voor filosofie en theologie*
BJRL	*Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
ConBNT	Coniectanea Neotestamentica (or Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series)
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series

ConcC	Concordia Commentary
CTJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
CTR	*Criswell Theological Review*
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
EGGNT	Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament
ErIsr	*Eretz-Israel*
EV	English version
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, rev. A. E. Cowley, 2nd English ed. (Oxford, 1910)
GTJ	*Grace Theological Journal*
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, et al., trans. M. E. J. Richardson, study edition, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001)
HdO	Handbuch der Orientalistik (or Handbook of Oriental Studies)
HS	*Hebrew Studies*
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
ITC	International Theological Commentary
Int	*Interpretation*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JESOT	*Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JHebS	*The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JOTT	*Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics*
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism

JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
JSSEA	*Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities*
JTI	*Journal of Theological Interpretation*
JTISup	Journal for Theological Interpretation, Supplements
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies
MAJT	*Mid-America Journal of Theology*
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations
MNTS	McMaster New Testament Studies
MRS	Mission de Ras Shamra
MSJ	*The Master's Seminary Journal*
MT	Masoretic Text
NABU	*Nouvelles assyriologiques bréves et utilitaires*
NAC	New American Commentary
NDBT	*New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000)
NIBCOT	New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OTS	Old Testament Studies
par.	parallel
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
RB	*Revue Biblique*
RevQ	*Revue de Qumran*

RTR	*Reformed Theological Review*
SBET	*Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*
SBJT	*The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SCS	Septuagint and Cognate Studies
Sem	*Semitica*
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SJTOP	Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers
SOTBT	Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology
SR	*Studies in Religion*
SSBT	Short Studies in Biblical Theology
StPohl	Studia Pohl
STR	*Southeastern Theological Review*
s.v.	sub verbo (listed alphabetically under that word)
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, 15 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986–2015)
ThSt	Theologische Studiën
TJ	*Trinity Journal*
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TS	*Theological Studies*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Part 1

PROLEGOMENA

1

The Importance of Covenants in Biblical and Systematic Theology

> The idea of covenant is fundamental to the Bible's story. At its most basic, covenant presents God's desire to enter into relationship with men and women created in his image. This is reflected in the repeated covenant refrain, "I will be your God and you will be my people" (Exodus 6:6–8; Leviticus 26:12 etc.). Covenant is all about relationship between the Creator and his creation. The idea may seem simple; however, the implications of covenant and covenant relationship between God and humankind are vast.[1]

The purpose of this book is to demonstrate two claims. We want to establish, first, how central and foundational the concept of *covenant* is to the Bible's narrative plot structure and, second, how a number of crucial theological differences within Christian theology, and the resolution of those differences, are directly tied to one's understanding of how the biblical covenants unfold and relate to each other. Regarding the first claim, we are *not* asserting that the biblical covenants are the center of biblical theology or merely a unifying theme of Scripture. Instead, we assert that *the progression of the covenants* forms the backbone of Scripture's metanarrative, the relational reality that moves history forward according to God's design and final plan for humanity and all creation, and unless we "put together" the covenants correctly, we will not discern accurately "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).[2] Michael Horton nicely captures the

significance of “covenant” to Scripture and theology when he writes that the biblical covenants are

> the architectural structure that we believe the Scriptures themselves to yield. . . . It is not simply the concept of the covenant, but the concrete existence of God’s covenantal dealings in our history that provides the context within which we recognize the unity of Scripture amid its remarkable variety.[3]

If this is so, and we contend that it is, then apart from properly understanding the nature of the biblical covenants and how they relate to each other, one will not correctly discern the message of the Bible and hence God’s self-disclosure, which centers on and culminates in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our claim is not a new insight, especially for those in the Reformed tradition who have written at length about the importance of covenants and have structured their theology around the concept of *covenant*.[4] In fact, most varieties of Christian theology readily admit that the biblical covenants establish a central framework that holds the storyline of Scripture together. From the time of Christ’s coming and the ongoing theological debates in the early church to our present time, Christians have wrestled with the relationships between the covenants, particularly the old and new covenants. It is almost impossible to discern many of the early church’s struggles apart from viewing them as covenantal debates. For example, think of how important the Jew-Gentile relationship is in the New Testament (Matt. 22:1–14 par.; Acts 10–11; Romans 9–11; Eph. 2:11–22; 3:1–13), and consider the claim of the Judaizers, which centers on covenantal disputes (Galatians 2–3); the reason why the Jerusalem Council was called (Acts 15); the wrestling with the strong and weak within the church (Romans 14–15); and the implications for the church on how to live vis-à-vis the law-covenant now that Christ has come (Matthew 5–7; 15:1–20 par.; Acts 7; Romans 4; Hebrews 7–10). In truth, all these issues and struggles within the church are simply God’s people wrestling with the nature of fulfillment that has occurred in the covenantal shifts from the old

to the new due to the coming of Christ, his work, and the inauguration of the new creation.

Throughout church history, Christians have differed on their understanding of the relationship between the biblical covenants—hence one of the reasons why different theological systems have developed. Today, this is best illustrated by ongoing debates between dispensational and covenant theology, although it is certainly not limited to these two theological systems. Adherents of these views agree on the main issues central to "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), and it is important not to exaggerate our differences at the expense of our unified gospel convictions.[5] Yet significant disagreements remain that require resolution, and if the systems are probed deeply, many of these differences center on disputes in our understanding of the biblical covenants and how the covenants are fulfilled in Christ. Thus, while we share basic agreement that the Bible's storyline moves from Adam to Abraham to Sinai, which ultimately issues in a promise of a new covenant, whose advent is tied to Jesus's cross work (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:23–26), beyond this there are larger disagreements on how to "put together" the biblical covenants. These disagreements inevitably spill over to other issues, such as debates on the *newness* of what our Lord has achieved; how the law in its moral demands applies today, as reflected in debates regarding the Decalogue and the Sabbath / Lord's Day observance; and how previous Old Testament promises are now fulfilled in Christ and the church, which is tied to the larger relationship of Israel and the church and the role of national Israel in God's plan. When these differences surface, we discover that despite our agreement on aspects of mere Protestant theology, there are still significant disagreements among us that demand resolution.[6]

For this reason, putting together the biblical covenants is central to the doing of biblical *and* systematic theology and to the theological conclusions we draw from Scripture in many doctrinal areas. If we are going to make progress in resolving disagreements within evangelical theology, especially between covenant theology and dispensationalism, we must face head-on how we understand the nature of the covenants, their interrelationships, and their fulfillment in Christ and must *not* simply assume this or leave it

unargued. It is our conviction that the present ways of viewing the covenants and their fulfillment in Christ, as represented by the two dominant theological systems (and their varieties), are not quite right. That is why we are offering a slightly different reading, which seeks to rethink and mediate these two theological traditions in such a way that we learn from both of them but which also constitutes an alternative proposal, a kind of *via media*.[7] We are convinced that there is a more accurate way to understand the relationship of the covenants, which better accounts for the overall presentation of Scripture and which, in the end, will help us resolve some of our theological differences. If, as church history warns, our goal is too ambitious, minimally our aim is to help us become more epistemologically self-conscious in how we put together Scripture. Our hope in presenting our view is to foster more discussion regarding where precisely we differ, with the goal of arriving at a greater unity in truth and doctrine, centered on Christ Jesus.

Kingdom through covenant is our overall proposal for what is central to the Bible's narrative plot structure. Central to our proposal is that God's *saving* kingdom comes to this world *through* the covenants in a twofold way. First, it comes *through* the covenant relationship God establishes with his image bearers, that is, his priest-kings. Through this relationship, God's rule is extended in his people *and* to the creation, and we learn what it means to love our triune God and our neighbor. Yet, sadly, humans have failed in their calling due to sin. Second, God's *saving* rule and reign—his kingdom—comes *through* biblical covenants *over time*. Following the loss of Eden, redemption is linked to a promised human (Gen. 3:15) and is given greater clarity and definition *through* Noah, Abraham, Israel, and the Davidic kings. Through the progression of the covenants, our triune God, step-by-step, reveals how his image bearers ought to live *and* how *he* will establish his saving reign / kingdom and restore creation through a promised, obedient Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

If a label is to be applied to our view, especially over against the labels of dispensational and covenant theology, our view is best captured by the term *progressive covenantalism*.[8] Previously, we identified our view as a species of "*new covenant*" *theology*, yet given significant differences within *new*

covenant theology, *progressive covenantalism* better describes our overall viewpoint.[9] Let us briefly outline our view before we develop it at length in subsequent chapters.

Progressive covenantalism argues that the Bible presents a *plurality* of covenants that *progressively* reveal our triune God's *one* redemptive plan for his *one* people, which reaches its fulfillment and terminus in Christ and the new covenant. Each biblical covenant, then, contributes to God's unified plan, and to comprehend "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), we must understand each covenant in its own context by locating that covenant in relation to what precedes *and* follows it. *Through the progression of the covenants*, we come to know God's glorious plan, how *all* God's promises are fulfilled in Christ *and* applied to the church as God's new covenant and new creation people (Heb. 1:1–3; cf. Eph. 1:9–10, 22–23; 3:10–11) and how we are to live as God's people today.

To reiterate, in accentuating kingdom through *covenant*, we view the covenants as *theologically* significant and as the backbone to Scripture's entire storyline, similar to covenant theology. However, unlike most advocates of covenant theology, the biblical covenants are not divided into two categories: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Rather, God's *one, eternal plan* unfolds in history through a *plurality* of interrelated covenants, starting with Adam and creation and culminating in Christ and the new covenant. The creation covenant serves as the foundation that continues in *all* the covenants, and it, along with all the covenants, is fulfilled in Christ and his obedient work. As God's eternal plan is enacted on the stage of human history, it moves from creation in Adam to consummation in Christ.

Concerning the Israel-church relationship, we argue two important points. First, God has *one* people, yet there is an Israel-church distinction due to their respective covenants. The church is *new* in a redemptive-historical sense precisely because she is the community of the *new* covenant. Second, we must think of the Israel-church relationship *Christologically*. The church is not *directly* the "new Israel" or her replacement. Rather, in Christ Jesus, the church is God's new creation, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, *because Jesus* is the last Adam

and true Israel, the faithful seed of Abraham who inherits the promises by his work. Thus, in union with Christ, the church is God's *new* covenant people, in continuity with the elect in all ages but *different* from Israel in its nature and structure.

This way of viewing the Israel-Christ-church relationship differs from dispensational and covenant theology in at least two areas. First, against dispensationalism, Jesus is the antitypical fulfillment of Israel and Adam, and in him, *all* God's promises are fulfilled for his people, the church, including the land promise fully realized and consummated in the new creation (Rom. 4:13; Eph. 6:3; Heb. 11:10, 16; cf. Matt. 5:5). Second, against covenant theology, Jesus's *new* covenant people are different from Israel under the old covenant. Under the old covenant, Israel, in its nature and structure, was a *mixed* community of believers and unbelievers (Rom. 9:6). Yet the church is constituted by people who are united to Christ by faith and partakers now of the blessings of the new covenant, which minimally includes the forgiveness of sin, the gift of the Spirit, and heart circumcision. Thus, in contrast to Israel, the church—as God's new covenant–new creation people—is constituted now as a believing, regenerate people, although we await the fullness of what Christ inaugurated at his glorious return. For this reason, baptism, the sign of the new covenant, is applied only to those who profess faith and give credible evidence that they are no longer in Adam but in Christ, and circumcision and baptism do *not* signify the same realities, due to their respective covenantal differences. In fact, to think that circumcision and baptism signify the same truths is a covenantal-category mistake.

In a nutshell, this is our basic proposal, and what follows is our exposition and defense of this third way of understanding the nature of the biblical covenants and their relationship to the new covenant in Christ. How will we proceed? We will begin by establishing the importance of covenants for biblical and systematic theology. We could demonstrate this point in numerous ways but will do so by setting our discussion of the covenants in the context of the two dominant theological systems within evangelical theology. Dispensationalism and covenant theology (along with their varieties) largely frame how evangelicals "put together" their Bibles. Each

view attempts to serve as an interpretive grid for how to understand the metanarrative of Scripture. In this way, both systems function as examples of biblical theologies, or "whole-Bible theologies," which then lead to various systematic-theological conclusions. Yet it is well known that each system draws different conclusions on significant theological matters (if not so much on primary gospel issues). Specifically, unique theological differences surface in ecclesiology and eschatology, but it is not limited to these areas, as we will demonstrate. Thus, it is helpful to establish the importance of covenants by doing so through the lens of these two theological systems, discerning where they differ from each other especially in their understanding of the biblical covenants. In this way, our proposal is viewed against the backdrop of current theological discussion within evangelical theology.

Before we turn to that task, we will conclude this chapter by discussing how we conceive of the nature of biblical theology and its relation to systematic theology. Since we are viewing dispensational and covenant theology as examples of biblical *and* systematic theologies, it is important to describe our use of these terms, given that scholars do not unanimously agree on their definition and use.

Chapter 2 will describe the basic tenets of dispensational and covenant theology, noting variations and debates within each system. As one would expect, neither view is monolithic; however, in describing these biblical-systematic theologies, we attend particularly to their respective understandings of the biblical covenants and to how each approach differs, given the way they relate the biblical covenants to each other.

Building on this description of the two theological systems, chapter 3 will conclude the prolegomena, or introductory, section of part 1 in two ways. First, we will describe some basic hermeneutical assumptions we employ in our reading of Scripture and thus disclose something of our theological method. Second, we will resume our discussion of dispensational and covenant theology by outlining both some of the hermeneutical similarities between them and some of the hermeneutical differences that require resolution, with the goal of adjudicating these two systems and thus arguing for a *via media* as a better option.

Part 2, chapters 4–15, will serve as the exposition of the Old Testament covenants as they are unfolded and point forward to Christ. As the covenants are expounded, so our proposal of *kingdom through covenant* is described in detail; each biblical covenant is treated in its own redemptive-historical context and then in its relationship to the dawning of the new covenant.

Part 3 will begin by summarizing the results of part 2 in an overall presentation of *kingdom through covenant* in the Old Testament in chapter 16 before we turn to how the New Testament announces that *all* that the Old Testament anticipated and predicted is now coming to fulfillment in Christ Jesus. As we turn to the New Testament, in chapter 17, we will think about the *fulfillment* of God's covenant promises in three steps: first, in how Christ fulfills the previous covenants in himself; second, in the nature of new covenant fulfillment in terms of inaugurated eschatology; and third, in how the church is *new* and receives *all* God's covenant promises *in and through Christ*. After this, in chapters 18–19, we will draw some systematic-theological entailments of our proposal in sample areas, including Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.

Let us now turn to a brief discussion of our understanding of the nature of biblical theology and its relation to systematic theology. This will allow us to describe how we are using these terms and to explain why we view dispensational and covenant theology as examples of biblical *and* systematic theologies, even though we disagree with various aspects of each view.

The Nature of Biblical Theology

The task of exegeting and expounding the progression of the biblical covenants across the canon and then thinking through how each covenant is fulfilled in Christ is an exercise in *biblical theology*. It is also the first step in drawing legitimate theological conclusions from Scripture and thus applying *all* of Scripture to our lives, which is broadly the task of *systematic theology*. But given the fact that people mean different things by *biblical* and *systematic* theology, let us explain how we are using these terms and how we conceive of the relationship between them.

At a popular level, when most Christians hear the term *biblical theology*, it is heard as expressing the desire to be "biblical" or "faithful to Scripture" in our teaching and theology. To be "biblical" in this sense is what all Christians ought to desire and strive for, but this is *not* how we are using the term. In fact, throughout church history, *biblical theology* has been understood in a number of ways.[10]

Generally speaking, before the last two or three centuries, biblical theology was often identified with systematic theology, although many in church history practiced what we currently call "biblical theology," that is, an attempt to unpack the redemptive-historical unfolding of Scripture and to put together the entire canon.[11] One can think of many examples, such as Irenaeus (ca. 115–ca. 202), John Calvin (1509–1564), and Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669). In this sense, then, biblical theology is *not* entirely new, since the church has always wrestled with how to put together the whole canon, especially in light of the coming of Christ. Any view, then, that seeks to think through the unity of God's plan as unfolded across the canon is doing "biblical theology" in some sense. Granting this point, it is still important to note that, in the past, there was a tendency to treat Scripture in more logical and atemporal categories rather than to think carefully through the Bible's developing storyline as it was forged across time. Even in the post-Reformation era, when there was a renewed emphasis on doing a "whole-Bible theology," biblical theology was usually identified with systematic theology, and systematic theology was identified more with "dogmatic" concerns.[12]

With the rise of the Enlightenment, biblical theology began to emerge as a distinct discipline. Some have argued that this is tied to the Enlightenment's "historical consciousness."[13] However, one must carefully distinguish the emergence of biblical theology in the Enlightenment era along two different paths: one path serving as an illustration of an illegitimate approach to biblical theology tied to the Enlightenment's *Zeitgeist*, and the other path a legitimate one seeking to develop previous insights in church history but now in a more precise, detailed, and historically conscious manner, dependent upon the Bible's own internal presentation. Let us first think about the illegitimate development of biblical

theology associated with the Enlightenment and classic liberal theology before we discuss what we believe is the legitimate view of biblical theology consistent with historic Christian theology.

During the period of the Enlightenment, there was a growing tendency to approach Scripture *critically* and thus uncoupled from historic Christian theology.[14] This resulted in approaching the Bible "as any other book,"[15] rooted in history but, unfortunately, also open to historical-critical methods. This meant that the Bible was not approached *on its own terms*, that is, as God's Word written. Instead, the idea that Scripture is God-breathed through human authors—a text that authoritatively and accurately unfolds God's redemptive plan centered on Christ—was rejected as the starting point of biblical theology (and systematic theology).

The person first associated with this path of biblical theology was Johann Philipp Gabler, often viewed as "the father of biblical theology." In his inaugural lecture at the University of Altdorf on March 30, 1787—"An Oration on the Proper Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each"—he defined biblical theology as an inductive, historical, and descriptive discipline, in contrast to systematic theology, which he viewed as a deductive, ahistorical, and normative discipline. It is crucial to note that Gabler used the term "historical" more in a historical-*critical* sense. He did *not* use the term in the sense that we ought to read Scripture as God's authoritative, trustworthy Word, rooted in history, nor that we ought to read it along its redemptive-historical axis. In its *critical* use, he meant that we ought to read Scripture in light of Enlightenment rationalist presuppositions, which minimally assumed the following points: (1) in doing biblical theology we do *not* need to assume the Scripture's inspiration; (2) biblical theology involves the work of carefully collecting the ideas and concepts of individual biblical writers, and this task is accomplished by means of historical, literary, and philosophical criticism (tied to an Enlightenment rationalist epistemology); and (3) as a historical discipline, biblical theology must distinguish between the several periods of the old and new religion, which, for Gabler, is basically following the "history of religions" approach to Scripture, thus assuming from the outset that Scripture is *not* authoritatively and accurately

given in its totality. In Gabler's understanding of "biblical theology," then, his overall goal was to uncouple the study of Scripture from dogmatic or doctrinal aims and to study Scripture according to historical *criticism* to distinguish what was legitimately true from what was not. In so doing, he continued the drift of a rejection of a high view of Scripture that resulted in an increasingly atomistic reading of Scripture, given the fact that he did not believe that Scripture was ultimately God given and unified.[16]

As this path of biblical theology developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, practitioners increasingly made use of the historical-critical method, which for the most part assumed a *methodological* naturalism.[17] Over time, the end result of such an approach was the fragmentation of Scripture, and biblical theology as a discipline became merely a "descriptive" discipline, governed by *critical* methodologies and worldview assumptions foreign to historic Christian theology. As a result, this approach to biblical theology emphasized more diversity than unity in Scripture, and ultimately, as a discipline that sought to unpack the unified plan of God, it came to an end.[18] In the twentieth century, there were some attempts to overcome the Enlightenment straightjacket on Scripture. In theology, the work of Karl Barth is notable. He is often seen as the forerunner of narrative theology and the postliberal school, a school that broadly attempts to read Scripture as a unified canon but that, when all is said and done, does not operate with a traditional view of the authority and accuracy of Scripture and thus renders the theological task problematic. In biblical studies there was also the "biblical theology movement."[19] Its goal was to overcome the more negative results of the historical-critical method and allow the biblical text to speak to the contemporary church, although, sadly, it did not return to the assumptions of historic, orthodox Christianity.[20] In Old Testament theology, for example, Walther Eichrodt, who was part of this movement, wrote an Old Testament biblical theology centered on the notion of the covenant. Others in the movement wrote biblical theologies centered on different corpora or themes. None of these, however, wrote or attempted to write a "whole-Bible theology" because, given their view of Scripture and their theological commitments, very few of them believed that there was a unified message

in the whole canon.[21] As a result, just as Geerhardus Vos, the evangelical pioneer of a legitimate approach to biblical theology, had predicted at the beginning of the twentieth century, the biblical theology movement failed. Vos had warned that "biblical theology" on the grand scale cannot be done if one denies the full authority of Scripture and dismisses the historic Christian theology that grounds it.[22]

Today in nonevangelical theology there are a variety of options that attempt to read Scripture as a unified whole, but most of them are weak on Scripture and do not operate under consistent Christian presuppositions.[23] This is why for most nonevangelicals biblical theology, in the sense of doing a "whole-Bible theology," is viewed as impossible. Given their rejection of the unity of Scripture as a divine revelation and the naturalistic assumptions of the historical-critical method, which questions the integrity of the narrative of biblical history, Scripture is viewed, more often than not, simply as an anthology of religious writings put together by the religious communities of Israel and the church.[24]

We contend that this is *not* the proper way to *view*, let alone to *do*, biblical theology. Already this approach to biblical theology stands in antithesis to historic Christian theological convictions, especially in regard to theology proper, the entire God-world relation, and the doctrine of Scripture. In the history of the church, and particularly in the post-Reformation and post-Enlightenment eras, another path was taken that provides a legitimate way to view and do biblical theology. This path also emphasized a renewed attempt to root the Bible in history by stressing the "literal sense" (*sensus literalis*), tied to the intention(s) of the divine and human author(s), and by seeking to discern how God had disclosed himself through the biblical authors across redemptive history, grounded in a larger Christian theology and worldview. We have already mentioned Johannes Cocceius, who sought to read Scripture with a focus on "covenant" throughout redemptive history and who operated self-consciously within Christian theological presuppositions. This was also true of John Calvin before him and of the post-Reformation Reformed Protestant scholastics after him.[25]

Probably the best-known twentieth-century pioneer of biblical theology who sought to follow the path distinct from that of the Enlightenment was Geerhardus Vos, who developed biblical theology at Princeton Seminary.[26] Vos, who was birthed out of the Dutch Calvinistic tradition, along with such figures as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, sought to do biblical theology with a firm commitment to the authority of Scripture.[27] Vos defined biblical theology as "that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible."[28] In contrast to Gabler, Vos argued that biblical theology, as an exegetical discipline, must not only begin with the biblical text but must also view Scripture as God's own self-attesting Word, fully authoritative and reliable. Furthermore, as one exegetes Scripture, Vos argued, biblical theology seeks to trace out the Bible's unity and multiformity and find its consummation in Christ's coming and the inauguration of the new covenant era. Biblical theology must follow a method that reads the Bible on its own terms, following the Bible's own internal contours and shape, in order to discover God's unified plan as it is disclosed to us over time. The path that Vos blazed was foundational for much of the resurgence of biblical theology within evangelicalism, in the twentieth and now the twenty-first century.[29]

We reject the former view despite its label of "biblical theology" and adopt the latter view. Accordingly, in light of this history, we define *biblical theology* by employing Brian Rosner's helpful definition: "Biblical theology" is "theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyze and synthesize the Bible's teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus."[30] In this definition, Rosner emphasizes some important points crucial to the nature and task of biblical theology. Biblical theology is concerned with the overall message of *the whole Bible*. It seeks to understand *the parts in relation to the whole*. As an exegetical method, it is sensitive to literary, historical, and theological dimensions of various corpora, as well as to the interrelationships *between earlier and later texts in Scripture*. Furthermore, biblical theology is interested not merely in

words and word studies but also in concepts and themes, as it traces out the Bible's own storyline *on the Bible's own terms*, following the plotline to its culmination in Christ. In a similar way, D. A. Carson speaks of biblical theology as an inductive, exegetical discipline that works from biblical texts, in all their literary diversity, to the entire canon—hence the notion of *intertextual*, or better, *innerbiblical*. In making connections between texts, biblical theology also attempts to let the biblical text set the agenda. This is what we mean by saying that we are to read Scripture *on its own terms*, that is, *intratextually*. Scripture is to be interpreted in light of its own categories and presentation since Scripture comes to us as divinely given, coherent, and unified.[31] In other words, all theologizing starts with the Bible's own presentation of itself as we seek to live under its authority and teaching and not over it.[32]

With these basic ideas in mind, let us now summarize what we believe biblical theology to be. Simply stated, it is the discipline that seeks to do justice to what Scripture claims to be and to what it actually is. In terms of its claim, Scripture is *God's* Word written, and as such, it is a unified revelation of his gracious plan of redemption. In terms of what Scripture actually is, it is a *progressive* unfolding of God's plan, rooted in history, and unfolded along a specific redemptive-historical plotline demarcated by the biblical covenants. Biblical theology as a discipline attempts to exegete texts in their own context and then, in light of the entire canon, to examine the unfolding nature of God's plan and carefully think through the relationship between *before* and *after* in that plan, which culminates in Christ.[33] As such, biblical theology provides the basis for understanding how texts in one part of the Bible relate to all other texts, so that they will be read correctly, according to God's intention, which is discovered through the individual human authors *and fully* at the canonical level. In the end, biblical theology is the attempt to understand "the whole counsel of God" and "to think God's thoughts after him," and it provides the basis and underpinning for our theological conclusions since it allows us to see what the entire canon of Scripture teaches. Yet biblical theology is *not* presuppositionless since it approaches Scripture according to its own claim and presupposes the central truths of historic Christian theology, hence its

intertwined relationship with systematic theology.[34] With this understanding of biblical theology in place, let us now briefly reflect on what systematic theology is before we think through the relationship between the two disciplines.

The Nature of Systematic Theology

As with *biblical theology*, there are various understandings of what *systematic theology* is. In this book, it is not necessary to delve into all these diverse views; rather, we simply want to state how we conceive of the discipline of systematic theology.[35] As with biblical theology, one's construal of systematic theology is tied to one's larger theological, worldview commitments, and any differences between various definitions can be traced back to this. For our purposes, we will enlist as our basic definition the one given by John Frame: systematic theology is "the application of God's Word by persons to all areas of life."[36] No doubt many points could be developed from this definition, but we will develop it by emphasizing two concepts in order to describe the nature and task of systematic theology as a discipline.

Systematic theology involves an intertwined twofold task. First, in order to *apply* Scripture properly, we must interpret Scripture correctly. This requires the doing of biblical theology, namely, as related above, unpacking the biblical storyline and letting the Bible, on its own terms, describe for us how God's plan unfolds, centered on Christ. This is why biblical theology provides the basis for all theologizing and doctrine, since we are not drawing proper theological conclusions unless we first correctly understand *all* that the Bible teaches *in the way the Bible presents it*. Yet our reading of Scripture presupposes theological commitments consistent with Scripture and orthodox theology. Second, systematic theology is more than just the mere repeating of Scripture or the doing of biblical theology since it involves the *application* of Scripture *to all areas of life*. Systematic theology inevitably entails theological construction and doctrinal formulation, which is grounded in biblical theology and done in light of historical theology but which also includes interacting with all areas of life —history, science, psychology, ethics, and so on.[37] Systematic theology,

then, leads to worldview formation as we seek to set the biblical-theological framework of Scripture over against all other worldviews and learn "to think God's thoughts after him," even in areas that the Bible does not directly address. In this important way, systematic theology presents a well-thought-out worldview, over against all its competitors, as it seeks to apply biblical truth to every domain of our existence.

Systematic theology, then, is based on the conclusions of biblical theology, but it goes further. As an exercise in "faith seeking understanding," it seeks to account for all that Scripture teaches in the way the Bible teaches it, in a coherent way, and in light of the church's tradition and contemporary questions.[38] It seeks to make sense of the ontological presuppositions of the Bible's storyline and to draw out theological judgments for today, consistent with the Bible's worldview and teaching across the entire canon. In this way, systematic theology applies Scripture to new contexts, sometimes using different terms and concepts, while always remaining true to the Bible's own "biblical-canonical judgments."[39] So, for example, in Christology, the church, in responding to Arianism, employed the extrabiblical language of *homoousios*, "of the same substance," to express "the same judgment about the relationship of Father and Son as Paul's 'equality with God' (*isa theō*) in Philippians 2:6."[40] The church did so in order to proclaim the Jesus of the Bible correctly in a new context and to defend the biblical teaching against the Arian heresy. The nature of systematic theology is to move from canon (biblical theology) to concept (theological construction) so that God's people will know rightly how to handle the Word of truth and apply it faithfully to their lives.

Furthermore, as a discipline, systematic theology is also *critical* in seeking to evaluate ideas within and outside the church. Outside the church, systematic theology takes on an *apologetic* function as it first sets forth the faith to be believed and defended and then critiques and evaluates views that reject the truth of God's Word. In this sense, apologetics is rightly viewed as a subset of systematic theology. *Within* the church, theology is *critical* by analyzing theological proposals, first, in terms of their fit with Scripture and, second, in terms of the implications of these proposals for other doctrines. In these ways, systematic theology is the discipline that

attempts “to bring our entire thought captive to Christ” (see 2 Cor. 10:1–5) for our good, for the good of the church, and ultimately for God’s glory.

With this basic understanding in mind, what is the best way to think of the relationship between biblical and systematic theology? As presented here, we view them as intimately interrelated and central to the *theological* task of conforming our thinking and lives to God’s Word. It is simply impossible to think of one discipline apart from the other. Yet with that said, we think it best to view biblical theology as the discipline that seeks to grasp the entirety of Scripture *on its own terms* and according to its own presentation, tied to the progression of God’s plan through the unfolding of the biblical covenants.[41] Biblical theology allows us to make sure that the parts are fitting with the whole. This is why our theological judgments must first be true to the exegetical conclusions of biblical theology. Systematic theology builds on the results of biblical theology, but it goes further by making sense of the ontological presuppositions of the Bible’s story, by constructing coherently how the pieces fit with the whole, and by rendering judgments from Scripture for today’s issues and questions. Alongside this task, systematic theology also critiques other theological proposals within the church and false ideas of other worldviews outside the church. By doing all this, systematic theology enables God’s people to live under the lordship of Christ and to live faithfully as the church as we await Christ’s return and the consummation.[42]

How does all this discussion apply to what we are doing in this book? Basically, we are setting forth a *theological* proposal for a better way of discerning the nature of the biblical covenants and how the covenants relate to each other. By doing so, we are doing systematic theology and warranting our conclusions in biblical theology. We are first seeking to grasp how God’s plan unfolds across redemptive history by the progression of the covenants—to trace out the Bible’s own “biblical-canonical judgments”—and on the basis of these judgments, to draw the theological conclusions and judgments that we think follow from the Bible’s own presentation. Our argument is that the traditional ways of putting together the biblical covenants are not quite right—or better, they do not fully do justice to the Bible’s own “biblical-canonical judgments” regarding the

covenants. To make our case, we will describe how others have put the covenants together, discerning the key points of difference between the views, which will then allow us to set our alternative view over against those views. We will argue that to correct the places where other theological conclusions have gone awry in "putting together" the covenants, we must return anew to Scripture and make sure our understanding of the covenants is true to how Scripture unpacks those covenantal relations.

Let us now turn to this task by first setting the context for our proposal. In chapter 2, we will describe the two dominant biblical-theological systems within evangelical theology in order to understand the nature of the biblical covenants and their relations to each other, which will be the subject matter of chapter 3.

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1. Alistair I. Wilson and Jamie A. Grant, "Introduction," in *The God of Covenant: Biblical, Theological, and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Jamie A. Grant and Alistair I. Wilson (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2005), 12.

2. We will not discuss the thorny issue of the center of biblical theology. Many proposals have been given, and they all tend toward reductionism. For example, see the discussion in Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991); and the proposals of G. K. Beale, "The Eschatological Conception of New Testament Theology," in *"The Reader Must Understand": Eschatology in Bible and Theology*, ed. K. E. Brower and M. W. Elliott (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1997), 11–52; cf. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 1–25; and James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010). Our claim is more modest: the biblical covenants form the backbone of the Bible's metanarrative, and apart from understanding each covenant in its immediate context *and* then in relation to its fulfillment in Christ, we will potentially misunderstand the Bible's overall message and misapply Scripture to our lives.

3. Michael S. Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 13.

4. As we will discuss in more detail in chap. 2, Reformed theology, or "covenant theology," has rightly argued that *covenant* is central to the organization of Scripture and thus of all theologizing. In fact, Horton argues, "*Reformed* theology is synonymous with *covenant* theology." *God of Promise*, 11. However, Reformed theology is not the only view to argue this point. Most streams of Christian theology would say that the covenants are important to how the Scriptures unfold God's plan centered on our Lord Jesus Christ, yet specific disagreements remain regarding the conclusions to draw.

5. On our common Protestant unity centered on the Reformation *solas*, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016); cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Daniel J. Treier, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture: A Mere Evangelical Account* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 19–127.

6. Differences of viewpoint regarding the relation of the covenants not only distinguish various Christian theological systems but also distinguish how Christians and Jews in the first century differed from one another, especially in how they viewed the relationship between the Mosaic covenant and the coming of Christ. For first-century Judaism, the law was imperishable, immutable, eternal (e.g., Wis. 18:4; *Ag. Ap*. 2.277; *Mos*. 2.14; Jub. 1:27; 3:31; 6:17). But Paul, for example, interprets the law-covenant differently than a Jew: he relativizes the importance of the law-covenant by arguing from the law's placement in the plotline of the Pentateuch (cf. Gal. 3:15–4:7). The promise to Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed *antedates* Moses and the giving of the law by centuries, and that promise cannot be annulled by the giving of the law (Gal. 3:17), regardless of how much space is given over to the law in the text or how large a role it played in Israel's history. What, then, was the purpose of the law? Ultimately, the entire New Testament argues, its function was to lead us to Christ (cf. Rom. 3:21). This Christian interpretation of the law-covenant is obviously different from a Jewish one. On this point see D. A. Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *NDBT*, 89–104; Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul's Understanding of the Old and the New," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2, *The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 393–436.

7. The phrase *via media* is being used *only* in the sense of offering a different proposal of the progression of the biblical covenants than the dominant theological systems of dispensational and covenant theology. Nothing more is meant by the term, and nothing more should be implied.

8. *Progressive covenantalism* was first suggested to us by Richard Lucas. Later we discovered that it was used previously by Dan Lioy, "Progressive Covenantalism As an Integrating Motif of Scripture," *Conspectus* 1 (2006): 81–107. Our view is not dependent on Lioy, and minimally, in two areas, we differ from him: (1) we do not affirm a covenant of works vs. grace distinction, and (2) we do not maintain that God's promise for national Israel of a future land is still unfulfilled. Instead, our use of *progressive* stresses the unfolding of God's revelation from old to new, similar to how the term functions in *progressive dispensationalism*. *Covenantalism* emphasizes at least two points: first, that *covenants* are theologically significant and the means by which God relates to his creatures and creation and establishes his kingdom, and, second, that God's plan is unfolded *through the covenants*, which are all brought to their fulfillment in Christ. For a development of progressive covenantalism beyond this volume, see Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, eds., *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).

9. There is much diversity among those under the label *new covenant theology*. However, within new covenant theology, some deny a creation covenant, others deny Christ's active obedience, and others are unnuanced in their understanding of God's moral law in relation to the Decalogue. Since we affirm the first two points and nuance the third differently, we have chosen to employ the label of *progressive covenantalism*, despite critics labeling and dismissing us as new covenant theology. For resources on new covenant theology, see Heather A. Kendall, *One Greater than Moses: A History of New Covenant Theology* (Orange, CA: Quoir, 2016); Gary D. Long, *New Covenant Theology: Time for a More Accurate Way* (n.p.: CreateSpace, 2013); A. Blake White, *What Is New Covenant Theology? An Introduction* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2012); White, *The Newness of the New Covenant* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2007); Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2002); Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009); John G. Reisinger, *Abraham's Four Seeds* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 1998); Steven Lehrer, ed., *Journal of New Covenant Theology*.

10. For a helpful overview of the history of biblical theology, see C. H. H. Scobie, "History of Biblical Theology," in *NDBT*, 11–20. See also Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 867–88; Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Salvation Historical Fallacy? Reassessing the History of New Testament Theology* (Leiden: Deo, 2004); H. G. Reventlow, "Theology (Biblical), History of," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 6:483–505; G. E. Ladd, "Biblical Theology, History of," and "Biblical Theology, Nature of," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:498–509. For two helpful discussions of diverse approaches to biblical theology, see Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012); and Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

11. For a fine example of this approach to biblical theology, see Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

12. Carson makes this point in "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 89–104. He notes that the first occurrence of the term *biblical theology* dates to 1607, when W. J. Christmann used it to refer to a compilation of proof texts supporting Protestant systematic theology (90).

13. See Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 89–94.

14. For a description of the Enlightenment era, see W. Andrew Hoffecker, ed., *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 240–80; cf. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996); D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 13–137. This history, with its effects on the doing of Christology, is told in Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 35–77.

15. This is Benjamin Jowett's expression. For a discussion of the Enlightenment's reading of the Bible, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998); cf. Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," in *NDBT*, 52–64.

16. For a more detailed treatment of Gabler's significance, along with his approach to biblical theology, see Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 89–90; Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 53; J. V. Fesko, "On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology," in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 443–77. Fesko nicely summarizes Gabler's approach to Scripture: (1) He viewed Scripture as "inspired" but held that we must still decide what is truly divine versus what is not. All Scripture is not God given. (2) How do we decide what is God given? We ask whether the portion of Scripture we are reading is consistent with "eternal universal religion" or whether it merely reflects the opinion, time, and culture of the biblical author. (3) He denied that Scripture was a unified, organic, historically unfolding divine revelation that in its totality gives us God's authoritative revelation. "On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology," 447–48. For a contrary yet unconvincing view of Gabler, see Michael F. Bird, "Biblical Theology: An Endangered Species in Need of Defence," *Euangelion* (blog), January 18, 2008, http://euangelizomai.blogspot.com/2008/01/biblical-theology-endangered-species-in.html.

17. *Methodological naturalism* is the view that approaches our study of history (including our study of the Bible) and science without considering God's involvement in the world or divine action as represented by divine revelation and miracles.

18. See Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980). In the nineteenth century, biblical theology was eventually identified with classic liberalism, as represented by various schools of thought associated with such people as F. C. Baur, J. Wellhausen, the history of religions school, and so on. On these people and movements, see Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

19. For a survey of this movement, see Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Nature of Biblical Theology: Recent Trends and Issues," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 32, no. 3 (1994): 211–14; and James Barr, "Biblical Theology," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume*, ed. Keith R. Crim (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 104–6.

20. On this point, see Langdon B. Gilkey, "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language," *JR* 41, no. 3 (1961): 194–205.

21. For this assessment, see Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 90. Carson writes, "With more and more emphasis on close study of individual texts, and with less and less emphasis on serious reflection on the relationship of these findings to historic Christian faith, the tendency was toward atomization. . . . [T]he tendency was away from whole-Bible biblical theology, and toward Old Testament theology and New Testament theology. By the 20th century, these works most commonly divided up their subject matter into smaller corpora (Pauline theology; Matthean theology; Q-theology; theology of the major prophets; *etc*.) or into organizing structures (the covenant for Walther Eichrodt; a specialized understanding of salvation history for Gerhard von Rad; a form of existentialism for Rudolf Bultmann; *etc*.)." But what they did not produce were whole-Bible theologies that sought to unpack the unity of God's plan amid its diversity.

22. For a more detailed discussion of these movements, see the articles by Scobie, "History of Biblical Theology," 11–20; Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 52–64; Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 89–104. Also see David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: The Theological Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 42–165. On the contribution of Geerhardus Vos, see Fesko, "On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology," 449–53.

23. One thinks of the recent movement of the theological interpretation of Scripture (TIS). This movement is fairly diverse and encompasses evangelicals and nonevangelicals alike. For the nonevangelicals, generally speaking, their commitment to the Bible's unity is due not to Scripture's self-attestation as God's Word written but to the church's decision to choose these texts as Scripture. For example, in his canonical approach, Brevard Childs chooses to read texts in their final form and canonical shape. However, as Paul Noble has astutely argued, unless Childs grounds his preference for final form and canonical shape in the doctrine of inspiration and divine authorship, it is a view hanging in midair. *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs* (Leiden: Brill Academic, 1995). Vanhoozer makes this same point in "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 60–61. See also a more detailed critique of postliberalism and its view and use of Scripture in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005). For a helpful introduction to TIS, see Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008). As helpful as TIS is in its attempt to recapture the voice of Scripture for the church, given that it is composed of such a diverse number of people with such divergent views of Scripture, one wonders how long it can be sustained without a return to orthodox theological convictions. On this point, see D. A. Carson, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, But . . . ," in *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives*, ed. R. Michael Allen (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 187–207; Stanley E. Porter, "What Is Theological Interpretation of Scripture, and Is It Hermeneutically Robust Enough for the Task to Which It Has Been Appointed?," in *Horizons in Hermeneutics: A Festschrift in Honor of Anthony C. Thiselton*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Matthew R. Malcolm (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 234–67.

24. For example, think of the work of James Barr, who does "biblical theology" within the limits of historical criticism. See Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 43–56.

25. For a detailed treatment of the post-Reformation Protestant scholastics, see Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003). See also how some scholars apply the insights of the Protestant scholastics for biblical and systematic theology in Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002); and Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993).

26. See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1948; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2004); Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1979); Richard B. Gaffin Jr., ed., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001).

27. See Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," *WTJ* 38, no. 3 (1976): 281–99, esp. 286–88 for his discussion of Kuyper, Bavinck, and Vos.

28. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 5.

29. Vos's influence is directly seen at Westminster Theological Seminary in the work of John Murray, Richard Gaffin Jr., Sinclair Ferguson, Vern Poythress, and so on. But it was also felt in the larger evangelical world in Graeme Goldsworthy, G. K. Beale, D. A. Carson, Thomas R. Schreiner, and so on.

30. Brian Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in *NDBT*, 10 (italics removed from original). Similar to Rosner, Jeremy R. Treat offers the following definition of biblical theology: "*Biblical theology is faith seeking understanding of the redemptive-historical and literary unity of the Bible in its own terms, concepts, and contexts*." *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 35.

31. For these points, see Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 89–104.

32. To read the Bible *on its own terms* is central to biblical theology; however, even within evangelical biblical theology, this point is not always followed. For example, some argue that biblical theology is the approach by which redemptive history is divided into various historical epochs, and then the development between those epochs is traced. Or others view biblical theology as merely thinking through the large themes of Scripture. Still others approach the discipline by working through the Bible book by book. All these approaches have their place, but in our view, they fall short. Their fundamental problem is that they do not follow the Bible's own presentation of itself, or, in other words, they do not carefully trace out the Bible's own literary plot structure. If we are going to read the Bible *on its own terms*, we have to ask, how has God given Scripture to us? What are the Bible's own internal structures? And how ought those structures to shape our doing of biblical theology? We are convinced that working through the covenants *is* tracing out the Bible's own internal structure and enabling us to read Scripture as God intended.

33. Two words that describe how biblical theology seeks to interpret texts first in their immediate and then in their canonical context are *synchronic* and *diachronic*. *Synchronic* refers to viewing events occurring at a given time (sometimes referred to as a "crosscut" approach to interpretation). Hence, reading texts synchronically refers to reading them in their immediate context. As we exegete texts, we place them in their immediate context, we interpret them according to the grammatical-historical method, and we inquire about the theology of a particular prophet, book, or corpus. This is called a "crosscut" approach because it involves us cutting across the progressive revelation and taking a look at what is going on at any given point in time. Biblical exegesis begins at this level as it involves an analytical examination of the "parts." But our interpretation of Scripture does not end here. The unity of Scripture drives us to introduce the idea of diachronic. *Diachronic* refers to viewing events over time (sometimes referred to as the "long-cut" approach to interpretation). Texts must be read not only in terms of their immediate context but also in terms of the "whole." Scripture is unified *and* progressive. Thus biblical theology is concerned to read the "parts" in terms of the "whole" and to trace out how God's plan develops *over time*, leading us to its fulfillment in Christ and ultimately to the consummation. On this point, see Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 268–72; and Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 293–310.

34. On this point, see Vern S. Poythress, "Kinds of Biblical Theology," *WTJ* 70, no. 1 (2008): 133–34; cf. Andrew David Naselli, "D. A. Carson's Theological Method," *SBET* 29, no. 2 (2011): 258–68.

35. On the nature of systematic theology and its relation to biblical theology, see Gaffin, "Systematic and Biblical Theology," 281–99; cf. Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Relationship between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology," *TJ* 5, no. 2 (1984): 113–27. For a current discussion of systematic theology, see John Webster, "Principles of Systematic Theology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 1 (2009): 56–71; Webster, "Systematic Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1–18; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Systematic Theology," in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, ed. Martin Davie, Tim Grass, and Stephen R. Holmes, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 885–86; M. B. Yarnell III, "Systematic Theology, History of," in Davie, Grass, and Holmes, *New Dictionary of Theology*, 886–89.

36. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987), 76.

37. Kevin Vanhoozer describes systematic theology as moving from "canon to concept." See "From Canon to Concept: 'Same' and 'Other' in the Relation between Biblical and Systematic Theology," *SBET* 12, no. 2 (1994): 96–124.

38. See Treat, *The Crucified King*, 35.

39. This expression is from Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*, 126, and this paragraph is indebted to how he has described what systematic theology is.

40. Ibid. For a further discussion of this point, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Is the Theology of the New Testament One or Many? Between (the Rock of) Systematic Theology and (the Hard Place of) Historical Occasionalism," in *Reconsidering the Relationship between Biblical and Systematic Theology in the New Testament: Essays by Theologians and New Testament Scholars*, ed. Benjamin E. Reynolds, Brian Lugioyo, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 17–38. On the idea of theological judgments, see David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Stephen E. Fowl (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 87–102.

41. In a similar way, Carson calls biblical theology a "bridge" discipline since it is the bridge "between the texts of Scripture and the larger synthesis of systematic theology," what he calls the culminating discipline. "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 95. This is a helpful way of thinking of the relation between the two disciplines. However, Carson also tends to think of biblical theology as a discipline that works primarily within a temporal framework, i.e., the redemptive-historical unfolding of Scripture, while systematic theology primarily asks of biblical texts more atemporal and logical questions, "thereby eliciting atemporal answers." "New Testament Theology," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 808. We do not completely agree with this way of stating the relationship between the two disciplines. It is better to think of biblical theology as the discipline that allows us to draw

biblical conclusions for systematic theology and that systematic theology, as the *application* of Scripture, must stay true to the Bible's own framework, structure, and categories as she draws theological conclusions and constructs a Christian worldview. In this way, biblical theology is not only foundational to systematic theology but is also a subset of it, and systematic theology does not necessarily have to organize itself in atemporal categories.

42. Goldsworthy says something very similar as he speaks of the interrelationship and interdependence between biblical and systematic theology. He argues that we should not view the direction from text to theological formulation in a straight line, i.e., exegesis → biblical theology → systematic theology. Instead, he views the relationship more in terms of a "hermeneutical spiral." He writes, "From one point of view, biblical theology is what makes dogmatics [systematic theology] necessary. If it were not for the progressive nature of revelation, then all texts would stand in the same general relationship to the believer. Dogmatics is the discipline of saying what the total redemptive and revealing activity of God means for us now. It recognizes that all texts do not stand in the same relationship to us now, but that in view of the unity of revelation they do stand in some identifiable relationship to all other texts and therefore to us. Biblical theology examines the diversity within the unity. . . . The dogmatic basis of biblical theology lies in the fact that no empirical datum of exegesis has independent meaning, and no datum of theology or interpretation has independent meaning." *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 258–72; quotation from 270–71.

2

Covenants in Biblical-Theological Systems

Dispensational and Covenant Theology

Within evangelical theology, dispensational and covenant theology largely frame how people "put together" their Bible, and as such, they function as major theological viewpoints.[1] Each "system" serves as an interpretive matrix for understanding the Bible's overall storyline, and thus they both constitute examples of "whole-Bible theologies" (i.e., biblical theologies) that entail various systematic-theological conclusions. Both views are similar in their attempt to discern the overall unity of God's plan from creation to consummation. And both views, despite their differences, acknowledge some idea of "progressive" revelation, redemptive epochs (or "dispensations"), inaugurated eschatology, the fulfillment of God's plan in Christ, and various changes or discontinuities in the administration of God's plan across redemptive history. They differ, however, over the specifics of God's plan, the kind of changes that result, and especially over the Israel-church relationship and the role of national Israel in the fulfillment and consummation of God's plan. One must be careful *not* to overplay the differences between the views, for when it comes to a basic understanding of the gospel, there is far more agreement than disagreement.[2]

Yet at crucial points, dispensational and covenant theology differ on how to think through "the whole counsel of God," and much of that disagreement centers on their understanding of the nature of the biblical

covenants and their relationships to each other. For this reason, it is helpful to compare and contrast these two views to discover precisely how they relate the biblical covenants one to another and thus where the two views uniquely differ from each other. In addition, thinking through these two views also allows us to set the context for offering our alternative view—*kingdom through covenant*, or *progressive covenantalism*—as a better way of thinking through the Bible's overall storyline and covenantal progression. If we disagree with each other, we need to know where and, more importantly, why. Although our discussion of these theological systems is necessarily brief, our goal is twofold. First, we want to demonstrate how central one's understanding of biblical covenants is to each view. Second, we want to set the stage for a different way of thinking through the Bible's covenantal progression and how all God's plans find their fulfillment in Christ.

Dispensationalism and Its Varieties[3]

Dispensationalism as a movement first took shape in the Brethren movement in early nineteenth-century England.[4] Originally, it was associated in England with such names as John Darby (1800–1882), Benjamin Newton (1807–1899), and George Müller (1805–1898), and in North America with such names as D. L. Moody (1837–1899), J. R. Graves (1820–1893), and C. I. Scofield (1843–1921) and with the *Scofield Reference Bible*, which provided copious notes for its readers on how to interpret Scripture and put together the whole canon through the lens of dispensational theology. Probably the most extensive systematic theology written from a dispensational viewpoint was Lewis Sperry Chafer's (1871–1952) eight-volume *Systematic Theology*.[5]

Over the years, dispensational theology has gone through a number of revisions even though it remains united by a common core, which we will discuss below. As Craig Blaising observes about the movement, "There has been no standard creed freezing its theological development at some arbitrary point in history,"[6] even though it continues to maintain specific doctrinal distinctives.[7] This has made it difficult to classify all the differences among dispensationalists, yet as Blaising notes, we can classify

"three broad forms of dispensational thought,"[8] which are important to distinguish in order to grasp the theological development of the view: "classic" (e.g., John Darby, Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Scofield Reference Bible*), "revised" or "traditional"[9] (e.g., John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost, revised *Scofield Bible*), and "progressive" (e.g., Craig Blaising, Darrell Bock, John Feinberg, Robert Saucy, Bruce Ware).

The term *dispensationalism*, similar to *covenant theology*, can argue for biblical support. "Dispensation" is derived from the Greek word *oikonomia* (see Eph. 1:10; 3:2, 9; Col. 1:25), which means "to manage, regulate, administer, and plan the affairs of a household."[10] Behind this word is the idea of God's plan or administration being accomplished in this world and how God arranges and orders his relationship to human beings. "Dispensation," as Glenn Kreider explains, refers to a "distinguishable period of time during which God administers His plan of redemption differently from other eras or periods. This change happens in history; God brings one economy or administration to an end, and then inaugurates a new one."[11] Unlike covenant theology, however, and our view of progressive covenantalism, most dispensationalists reject the idea that *covenants*, and especially the progression of the covenants, serve as *the* backbone of the Bible's story. Instead, dispensationalists view the covenants more in terms of a major biblical theme but not as *the* central way God's plan unfolds across time. As Kreider states, "This does not mean that dispensationalists deny the importance of covenants in the biblical story but that they believe that covenants are subsidiary to another structural construction."[12]

Dispensationalism is probably best known for its dividing the epochs of redemptive history into a number of distinct "dispensations" and for its claim that during each of these periods of time, God works out a specific phase of his overall plan. However, as Vern Poythress rightly notes, there is a sense in which the word *dispensation* is *not* completely helpful for distinguishing dispensationalism from other theological systems, since

> virtually all ages of the church and all branches of the church have believed that there are distinctive dispensations in God's government of the world, though sometimes the consciousness of such distinctions

> has grown dim. The recognition of distinctions between different epochs is by no means unique to D[ispensational]-theologians.[13]

Most current dispensationalists acknowledge this point. For example, John Feinberg agrees that one's defense of the uniqueness of dispensationalism is *not* tied to the word *dispensation*, or even to the idea behind the word. If this were the case, then all Christians would be "dispensationalists" in this broad sense, since everyone recognizes that God's salvific plan across time involves various "dispensations" and that, as God's plan reaches its fulfillment in Christ, there are various changes that result. Feinberg correctly notes,

> Since both dispensationalists and nondispensationalists use the term and concept of a dispensation, that alone is not distinctive to dispensationalism. It is no more distinctive to dispensationalism than talk of covenants is distinctive to covenant theology. Dispensationalists talk about covenants all the time.[14]

This observation raises an important question: What, then, is unique to dispensational theology, especially given its diversity over the years? What is its *distinctive* feature, or its *sine qua non*? Regarding this question, much debate has occurred, and people propose various "essentials" of dispensational theology.[15] Yet the best answer is that the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism is *the Israel-church distinction*, which is largely tied to its understanding of the biblical covenants and their (inter)relationships. For *all* varieties of dispensationalism, *Israel* refers to an ethnic, national people, and the church is *never* the transformed, restored eschatological Israel in God's plan or the people who fulfills Israel's role. For dispensationalists, the salvation of Gentiles is *not* part of the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel as a nation now realized in the church. Instead, God has promised national Israel, first in the Abrahamic covenant and reaffirmed by the prophets, the possession of the Promised Land under the rule of Christ as the Davidic king, which still requires a future fulfillment in the millennium and consummation. Since the Old Testament promises to national Israel have *not yet* been realized, in the future, Israel, as a nation, will be restored, and only then will she exercise her mediatorial role to the nations in the

Promised Land—although some progressive dispensationalists downplay Israel's future *mediatorial* role.[16]

The church, then, is *never* viewed as the restored, eschatological Israel, who receives *all* God's promises in Christ, including Old Testament promises to Israel.[17] The church is distinctively *new* in God's redemptive purposes, that is, "ontologically" different from Israel. Although in our present "dispensation" the church (comprising believing Jews and Gentiles) finds its origin in Christ and receives the *spiritual* blessings of the Spirit that were promised to Old Testament Israel, this fact does *not* entail that the church fulfills the role of Israel. Instead, these blessings are only an inaugurated spiritual application to the church; they are not "a *replacement* of the specific hopes of Israel. Instead, they are argued as *compatible or complimentary* to the hopes of Israel."[18] In the future, Christ will rule over redeemed *nations*, not the church as another "people group." Believing Jews and Gentiles, who now compose the church, will join the redeemed of national Israel *and* the Gentile nations to live under Christ's rule "according to their different nationalities," and specifically, Israel, *as a nation*, will finally receive all God's outstanding promises made to her. In this present dispensation, then, the church serves as an illustration of what the redeemed *nations* will be like in the future as they experience the transforming work of the Spirit. Yet it is not the church, as a *covenant* people and *theological* reality (and thus *the* end-time, forever people of God), that receives *all* God's promises *equally* and *fully* in Christ. Rather, in the future, the redeemed *nations* will receive God's promises *according to their specific national identities*. In this way, a clear distinction is maintained between Israel as a nation and the church as a people, who at present, in an inaugurated form, illustrate what is still to come.[19]

In addition, dispensationalism also affirms that the church, as a people, began at Pentecost with the gift of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, most argue that the salvation *experience* of the person in the church is *qualitatively* different from the salvation experience of the Israelite under the old covenant.[20] Furthermore, given the Israel-church distinction, dispensationalists see more *discontinuity* from the old to the new covenant vis-à-vis the *nature and structure* of the covenant communities, contra

covenant theology. Not surprisingly, given the Israel-church distinction and its outworking in dispensational theology, the major *theological* differences between dispensational and covenant theology often emerge in ecclesiology and eschatology.

With regard to ecclesiology, since the church is distinctively *new* in the divine dispensations due to the coming of Christ and the *newness* of the Spirit's permanent indwelling in the believer, dispensationalists view the nature of the church, along with its structure and ordinances, as distinct from Israel under the old covenant. For example, regarding the nature of the church, in contrast to covenant theology, dispensational ecclesiology views the church as constituted by a regenerate people, born of and permanently indwelt by the Spirit, and not as a "mixed" community of believers and unbelievers.[21] Furthermore, dispensational ecclesiology also affirms credobaptism, contra paedobaptism, since one cannot equate the sign of the old covenant with the sign of the new, given the fundamental Israel-church distinction and what the sign of baptism signifies for the church. In contrast, covenant theology rejects the Israel-church distinction of dispensational theology and argues for more of a continuity between them, not only in terms of the nature of the covenant community (and thus the similarity of salvation experience) but also in regard to the similarity in meaning of the covenant signs of circumcision and baptism. In these ways, dispensational ecclesiology differs from covenant theology's ecclesiology.

With regard to eschatology, given the Israel-church distinction and God's unchanging promise to Israel of living in the Promised Land ruled by the Davidic king (who we now know is our Lord Jesus), dispensationalism affirms a distinct future for national Israel, tied to her national identity, in a future millennial age and continuing in the consummation. Much of the rationale for their dispensational form of premillennialism is the fact that specific promises to Israel remain unfulfilled from the Old Testament, which God will keep in the future. For progressive dispensationalists, the kingdom is viewed as a multinational order of "redeemed peoples on a renewed earth."[22] Israel, as a redeemed nation, is guaranteed her "national and territorial identity"[23] by God's promise, and redeemed Gentile nations will also live according to their national identities on a new earth.

At the popular level, dispensationalism is often identified with a distinctive eschatology that has been promulgated through books, movies, and other forms of media.[24] By contrast, covenant theology rejects a "dispensational premillennial" eschatology for a variety of reasons but mainly because it views all God's promises reaching their fulfillment in Christ and the dawning of the new creation, which the church, as the restored eschatological Israel, inherits and receives.[25] It is important to note that the differences between dispensational and covenant theology on these points are directly related to their different understanding of the Israel-church relationship, which is tied to the larger issue of the nature of the biblical covenants and their (inter)relationships in redemptive history.

Let us now briefly discuss some of the varieties within dispensational theology as described by the terms *classic*, *revised/traditional*, and *progressive*, and note how each one attempts to understand the relationships between the biblical covenants, especially in light of the Israel-church distinction.[26]

Classic Dispensationalism

Central to classic dispensational theology is a dualistic conception of redemption linked to God's pursuit of two different purposes, one related to heaven and the other to earth, and tied to two different groups of people, a heavenly and an earthly humanity.[27] In terms of God's earthly purpose in redemption, it is God's plan to redeem the creation from its curse and to grant immortality to an earthly humanity that will exist on the earth forever. This immortal earthly humanity first appears in the millennial age. It consists of those who are living on the earth when the Lord returns and reaches its completion in the new creation. They will not experience a final resurrection since they will not experience death but will continue to live on the earth forever. Alongside God's earthly purpose is his heavenly purpose, which is centered on a heavenly humanity. This heavenly people consists of all the redeemed from all dispensations (a transdispensational people) who have died prior to Christ's millennial return. They still await the final resurrection, and when they are resurrected they will experience a "heavenly" inheritance.[28]

Classic dispensationalists, in the early decades of formulating their theology, were also famous for dividing redemptive history into seven dispensations: innocence (Eden), conscience (fall to flood), human government (Noah to Babel), promise (Abraham to Egypt), law (Moses to John the Baptist), grace (church age), and kingdom (millennium).[29] They viewed these dispensations as *different* arrangements under which humanity is tested. As Blaising notes in regard to these different dispensations, "God arranged the relationship of humankind to Himself to test their obedience to him."[30] In the early dispensations, God gave promises regarding earthly life, but we failed, due to our sin, to obtain these promises. The present dispensation of the church is the first dispensation that clearly presents God's "heavenly" purpose, and as a result, the church, unlike people in previous dispensations, is to know that it is a heavenly people destined for an eternal inheritance in heaven. Given this view of the church, classic dispensationalists argued that the church was a *parenthesis* in the history of God's earthly purpose of redemption—an earthly purpose that was revealed in the previous dispensations and covenants.[31] The primary purpose of the church as a heavenly people was to pursue spiritual and not earthly matters and concerns.

How did classic dispensationalists correlate the biblical covenants? Similar to *all* forms of dispensationalism, they argued that the foundational covenant of Scripture is the Abrahamic and not the Adamic (or covenant with creation), since most did not recognize such a covenant.[32] In the Abrahamic covenant, God's earthly purpose was primarily revealed as involving physical descendants who would become a great nation in a specific land, and Israel, as a nation and as the offspring of Abraham, was given the important role of mediating God's blessing to the Gentile nations. Classic dispensationalists did not deny that one could interpret the Abrahamic covenant *spiritually* (which they argued the New Testament does to reveal God's heavenly purpose), but they strongly asserted that in relation to Israel, the Abrahamic covenant was to be interpreted "literally," thus showing God's earthly purpose for an earthly people.[33] The same point was asserted in relation to the other biblical covenants, which were all interpreted as "earthly" covenants (e.g., the Palestinian, or the land promise

to Israel; the Mosaic; and the Davidic covenants). Interestingly, their "literal" hermeneutic, when applied to the "new covenant" of Jeremiah 31, led them to affirm that it applied only to Israel and *not* to the church. As their argument went, Jeremiah 31:31 clearly states that the new covenant is made "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah," and since Israel, as an earthly people, is *not* the church, it *cannot* apply to the church. What about when the New Testament applies the new covenant to the church (e.g., Hebrews 8–10)? They argued that it must refer to an entirely different covenant, which, as critics rightly noted, is a difficult view to sustain given the New Testament teaching on this point.[34] Ultimately, for classic dispensationalists, all the biblical covenants, including the new covenant, find their fulfillment in an earthly people—first in the millennium and then in the final state—but they do *not* apply to the church. The new covenant, then, must not be applied to the church other than in a *spiritual* or *allegorical* sense. In this way, the biblical covenants are tied to God's earthly purpose for his earthly people and not to God's heavenly purpose or people.

This understanding of the biblical covenants was also linked to the dispensationalist view of the kingdom. Classic dispensationalism famously made a distinction between the "kingdom of heaven" (i.e., the fulfillment of the covenant made to David, in which God promised to establish the kingdom of his Son) and the "kingdom of God" (i.e., the moral rule of God in the hearts of his subjects). The kingdom of "heaven" begins to appear with Christ, but since Israel rejected it initially, the parenthesis age of the church was established. Ultimately, the kingdom of "heaven" will culminate in the millennium and the final state, where it will merge with the kingdom of "God" in the hearts of his earthly people.[35] Interestingly, this understanding of "kingdom" was the first thing modified by the next generation of dispensationalists.

Traditional/Revised Dispensationalism

Probably the greatest change that occurred within dispensationalism began in the 1950s with the abandonment of the distinction between the "earthly" and "heavenly" peoples of God. As Blaising notes, revised

dispensationalists "did not believe that there would be an eternal distinction between one humanity in heaven and another on the new earth."[36] In its place, they argued for two peoples of God along more dispensational lines, namely, "Israel" as an ethnic, national people tied to the covenants of the Old Testament and the "church" as a distinct international community. In this way, people belonged to either one or the other but not to both at the same time, and each group was "structured differently, with different dispensational prerogatives and responsibilities."[37] Traditional dispensationalists were also quick to point out that the salvation each group ultimately received was the same (thus avoiding the charge of two plans of salvation), namely, eternal life in a glorified resurrection state, yet they maintained an eternal distinction between the two groups, since "the church is always church, Israel is always Israel."[38]

In addition, traditional dispensationalists simplified their understanding of the number of dispensations across time. Even though most retained the classic understanding of seven dispensations, they primarily distinguished between God's purposes in the dispensations prior to grace (i.e., prior to the church), the dispensation of grace (i.e., the church age), and the kingdom viewed as the millennial reign of Christ on earth. In the era prior to grace, God worked through the nation of Israel to the Gentile nations. Through Israel, God achieved political, national, and spiritual purposes, but now in the church age, God's purpose in and through the church is primarily spiritual. Although Israel and the church's spiritual experiences are similar, they are not the same; the church experiences the qualitatively *new* reality of the baptism, sealing, and permanent indwelling of the Spirit—something not experienced by Israel under the old dispensation. But it is not only in salvation that we see differences between Israel and the church; it is also in terms of the *nature* of the church as a regenerate community in contrast to the mixed composition (i.e., believers and unbelievers) of the people of Israel. In these ways, traditional dispensationalists spoke of the differences between Israel and the church and thus the discontinuity in God's plan of salvation.[39]

Regarding the biblical covenants, there was also another crucial revision that took place, especially in respect to the dispensationalists'

understanding of the new covenant and its relationship to the church.[40] In classic dispensational thought, either the new covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31 (and in Isaiah and Ezekiel) was only for Israel as a national, ethnic people and thus not for the church, or there were two new covenants: one for Israel (e.g., Jeremiah 31) and one for the church (Hebrews 8–10). The problem with this view is that it was impossible to sustain biblically. How does one make sense of our Lord's understanding of his death as a ratification of the new covenant (e.g., Luke 22:20 par.), or the book of Hebrews, which applies Jeremiah 31 to the church? Traditional dispensationalists rejected the idea that the "new covenant" of Jeremiah was not for the church. No doubt, they continued to maintain, along with their classic colleagues, that the Abrahamic covenant was the foundational covenant and that tied to it were the Mosaic, Palestinian (e.g., land promise), and Davidic covenants, along with the new covenant, as earthly, political, and national covenants. However, they now admitted that the church was to be viewed minimally as the "spiritual" seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:26–29) and that the Abrahamic covenant was fulfilled *spiritually* in the church because the church is related to Jesus the Messiah. Yet they strenuously argued that the national, political terms of the Old Testament covenants, particularly associated with the national and territorial identity of Israel, were *not* fulfilled in Christ's first coming but awaited future fulfillment. Only at Christ's return when he establishes his millennial reign will the covenants be fulfilled in a "literal" way—namely, Israel as a nation living in her land under Christ's rule, the Davidic king, in the future millennial age and beyond.

For traditional dispensationalism, then, Old Testament promises and blessings are *spiritually extended* to the church, "but the covenants are not fulfilled in the Church Dispensation."[41] This is uniquely true of the Davidic covenant. Traditional dispensationalism argues that the Davidic covenant is *not* partially fulfilled in Christ's first coming. Instead, its fulfillment awaits Christ's return when he establishes his millennial kingdom on earth and Israel as a nation is in her land. No doubt, Christ is enthroned in heaven now on God's throne, but he is *not* on David's throne, and such texts as

Psalm 110 apply now only to Christ's priestly role, not to his rule as David's greater Son.[42]

The Old Testament covenants, then, remain unfulfilled until Christ returns and establishes his millennial kingdom, and even the new covenant is only *spiritually extended* to the church. Yet given that all the covenants are unconditional and that God himself, in his Messiah, will bring them to pass, it is certain that God will keep all his covenant promises. Yet even though Christ Jesus has come and the church exists and receives *spiritual* blessings now, God must still keep his promises to national Israel in the future. As Elliott Johnson reminds us,

> God does not *replace* Israel in accomplishing her share when Israel rejects Him. . . . Nor does God *reinterpret* Israel's share. . . . Nor does God *expand* those who share in fulfillment of Israel's role temporarily when Israel rejects Him. . . . Rather, God *sets aside* the nation temporarily and incorporates believing Gentiles along with a believing Jewish remnant to continue the ministry of the Servant until He returns as the Son of David and the Son of Abraham for judgment and rule. *That ministry is based on the provisions of the new covenant* received by faith in the provision of Christ. . . . This setting aside of the nation-servant creates the discontinuity in the fulfillment of covenant agreements with Israel.[43]

Blaising captures the traditional view when he states that its proponents viewed the Old Testament covenants as still needing to be fulfilled in the future but that aspects of the new covenant "were being fulfilled *spiritually* in the church today." However, this did not preclude that "Israel would experience the national and political aspects (the earthly features) of the covenant in the future."[44]

This traditional way of thinking about Israel and the church was a significant change that eventually led to progressive dispensationalism, which argued that the church stood "in the line of a *historical* fulfilment of the new covenant promise to Israel"[45] and not merely as a parenthesis in the plan of God.[46] Interestingly, in this change, dispensationalism was moving slightly closer to covenant theology's understanding of the Israel-church relationship, except that dispensationalists maintained that Israel, as a

nation, would still experience God's specific land promises to her, which had not yet been realized in their fullness, and thus would experience God's promises in ways different from redeemed Gentile nations. In this revised trajectory leading to progressive dispensationalism, dispensationalists were now able to speak of the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel in a "literal" way, while simultaneously applying the Abrahamic and new covenants to the church in a "spiritual" way or fulfillment.[47]

At this point, we see one of the sharpest disagreements between dispensational and covenant theology. For dispensationalism, God's promise to Israel as a nation involves outstanding promises that have not yet been fulfilled, specifically the territorial land promise that awaits its fulfillment in the millennial age and consummation. For covenant theology, there is a *continuity* between Israel and the church—namely, that Israel is the church and the church is the transformed, restored eschatological Israel—and thus, promises to Israel, including the land, are fulfilled in Christ and his church. Within covenant theology, these promises are fulfilled either spiritually in terms of our eternal inheritance, or, more commonly today, in Christ and the dawning of the new creation, which is now "already" here but which still awaits the "not yet."

Finally, it is important to mention how traditional dispensationalists modified their understanding of the "kingdom" with respect to the classic view. The classic view had made a sharp distinction between the "kingdom of heaven" (i.e., the earthly kingdom) and the "kingdom of God" (i.e., the spiritual, moral rule in God's people). However, due to the influence of George Ladd, the classic distinction was dropped. Although a number of alternative kingdom views were proposed, most began to talk in terms of the "universal" kingdom (i.e., God's sovereignty over all things) and the "mediatorial" kingdom (i.e., God's rule over the earth through a God-chosen mediator, such as the Davidic kings and ultimately Christ). In terms of the latter kingdom, most argued, as noted above, that since Christ was not currently on earth, the mediatorial kingdom would appear again only when Christ returned, and after the millennial reign we would see the universal and mediatorial kingdoms become one. However, Charles Ryrie and John Walvoord began to speak of a *spiritual* kingdom in this present

dispensation, namely, the rule of Christ over believers today in the church, even though the political, national, and earthly fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom would not be realized until Christ returned.[48] As Blaising notes, this was an important revision, since this allowed dispensationalists to now begin to define "Christ's relation to the church as a kingdom,"[49] something not done by previous dispensationalists. It is this last revision that has paved the way for a further revision within the movement, a view to which we now turn.

Progressive Dispensationalism

In contrast to the dualism of classic dispensational thought and the sharp separation of the church from Israel of revised/traditional thought, progressive dispensational theology argues that the church is more organically related to God's one plan of redemption. The appearance of the church, due to the coming of Christ, does not signal a secondary redemption plan, to be fulfilled either in heaven apart from the new earth or in a class of Jews and Gentiles that is forever distinguished from the rest of redeemed humanity.[50] Instead, the church today is a revelation or illustration of spiritual blessings that all God's people throughout the ages will share while preserving their distinctive ethnic, national differences and roles.

The term *progressive* is used in the sense of progressive revelation; that is, it underscores the unfolding nature of God's kingdom plan and the *successive* (not *different*) arrangements of the various dispensations as they lead to Christ and then the consummation. In this way, progressive dispensationalists stress the *continuity* of God's kingdom plan across redemptive history, and in this regard, they are much closer to how covenant theology understands the unfolding nature of God's plan yet with important differences. Blaising describes it this way:

> The plan of redemption has different aspects to it. One dispensation may emphasize one aspect more than another, for example the emphasis on divinely directed political affairs in the past dispensation and the emphasis on multi-ethnic spiritual identity in Christ in the present dispensation. But all these dispensations point to a future culmination in which God will *both* politically administer Israel and

> the Gentile nations *and* indwell all of them equally (without ethnic distinctions) by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the dispensations *progress* by revealing different aspects of the final unified redemption.[51]

However, progressives are quick to point out, in contrast to much of covenant theology, that as one moves across redemptive history, there is a "*qualitative* progression in the manifestation of grace," which underscores a fundamental *discontinuity* in God's redemptive plan.[52] That is why the dispensations are "not simply different historical expressions of the *same* experience of redemption (as in some forms of covenantalism), although they do lead to and culminate in one redemption plan."[53] This is also why progressives continue to view the church as a *new* entity in God's unfolding plan and hence different from Israel but *not* new as previous dispensationalists thought. Blaising comments,

> Earlier dispensationalists viewed the church as a completely different kind of redemption from that which had been revealed before or would be revealed in the future. The church then had its own future separate from the redemption promised to Jews and Gentiles in the past and future dispensations. Progressive dispensationalists, however, while seeing the church as a new manifestation of grace, believe that this grace is precisely *in keeping with* the promises of the Old Testament, particularly the promises of the new covenant in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The fact that these blessings have been inaugurated in the church distinguishes the church from Jews and Gentiles of the past dispensation. But, only *some* of those blessings have been inaugurated. Consequently, the church should be distinguished from the next dispensation in which *all* of the blessings will not just be inaugurated, but completely fulfilled (which fulfillment will be granted to the saints of all dispensations through the resurrection of the dead).[54]

For progressives, then, the church should be viewed in light of its place in redemptive history. It is *not* the same as Israel prior to Christ; it is something *new*. It is tied to our present dispensation, namely, the coming of Christ, and it comprises redeemed Jews *and* Gentiles. Yet although in this

“new man” (Eph. 2:15)—the church—there is only *one people of God* and no distinction in the salvation blessings they receive, God’s specific territorial promises to national Israel are *not* nullified. The prophetic promises given to Israel and the Gentiles will be realized *according to their national identities*, which will differ slightly from each other. So, for example, a Jewish Christian today, who is a member of the church alongside Gentile believers, does not lose his relationship to Israel’s future promises. Both Jews and Gentiles, now and in the future, share the same salvation blessings, but “the same redeemed Jews and Gentiles will be directed and governed by Jesus Christ according to their different nationalities,” tied to God’s promises to each nationality.[55] In this way, progressives preserve the New Testament emphasis on the one people of God over time and the one plan of redemption in Christ yet also affirm *distinct* roles for national Israel in the future alongside *different* roles for redeemed Gentile nations.[56]

Interestingly, progressives, to warrant these differences from previous dispensational views, began to argue that typology is more than merely a “spiritual” interpretation.[57] Similar to covenant theology, typology was viewed as that which “refers to patterns of resemblance between persons and events in earlier history to persons and events in latter history.”[58] Thus, for example, the Davidic kingdom can serve as a type of the future, eschatological kingdom, or the nation of Israel as a “type” of—or better, “analogous” to—the church. By moving in this direction, progressives were able to avoid such a sharp distinction between dispensations and see much more of the progressive, successive, unified unfolding of God’s redemptive plan.

How do progressives think of the biblical covenants? They take seriously the unfolding, organic nature of the biblical covenants that lead to Christ, but similar to earlier dispensationalists, they argue that the Abrahamic covenant, in all its diverse dimensions, national and spiritual, is *foundational* to *all* the biblical covenants. Yet importantly, most progressives, as in all forms of dispensationalism, *either* reject a creation covenant *or* do not view it as *theologically* significant. Creation serves as the environment for or backdrop to God’s work in the world, but Adam (or

a creation covenant) is *not* viewed as foundational for all future covenants; instead, the Abrahamic covenant serves that role in Scripture.[59] It is through the Abrahamic promise that we learn of God's promise to bless all life on earth, including the nations. Following a fairly standard way of thinking about covenants today, based on ancient Near Eastern covenant patterns, Blaising views the Abrahamic covenant as a royal grant, or unconditional/unilateral covenant, in contrast to a bilateral/conditional covenant.[60] On the one hand, Abraham is required to obey God, his obedience functions "as *the means* by which he experiences God's blessing,"[61] and the commands to Abraham "condition the *how* and the *when* of the blessing."[62] On the other hand, God's promise is guaranteed ("unconditional") in the sense that God has promised to take the initiative unilaterally to bless the nations by resolving the problem of human sin.

Additionally, given the foundational role of the Abrahamic covenant, *all* biblical covenants must be viewed in relation to it, *instead of in relation to Adam and a creation covenant*. God's blessing and the mediation of that blessing are passed to Abraham's descendants as they are chosen by God to inherit the covenant. In the old covenant, which Blaising views as a "bilateral/conditional" covenant, a new dispensation for blessing is established. The descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob are constituted as a nation, a nation that is to function as the means by which God's blessing is mediated to the nations. However, given the bilateral nature of the covenant, it is possible for Israel to break the covenant by her disobedience and come under the covenant's curse, which, unfortunately, is what occurred in history, resulting in the exile. Yet Israel's disobedience did not overturn God's unilateral promise to Abraham to bless the whole world through his seed. As Blaising notes, "The Mosaic covenant is dependent upon it [the Abrahamic covenant]. This means that even though a certain generation (or generations) fails the terms of the Mosaic covenant and experiences the curse instead of the blessing, the opportunity still exists for a renewed offer of blessing to that generation or later descendants of Abraham,"[63] which is precisely what occurs in the later biblical covenants, especially the new covenant.

Under the Davidic covenant, which Blaising views, similarly to the Abrahamic, as a royal-grant covenant,

> the role of mediating blessing was politically restructured as a function of the Davidic king. A covenant was made with David to bless him and his son(s) with rulership over Israel and the rest of the nations, an intimate and blessed relationship with God, and the mediation (even priestly mediation) of *blessing* to Israel and to all peoples and nations.[64]

But given the failure of the Davidic kings, the prophets looked forward to the coming of a new dispensation in which a new covenant would replace the Mosaic and would bring the Abrahamic blessing to its ultimate consummation.

In this new covenant, then, God will bring about the full forgiveness of sin, the giving of the Spirit, and a transformation of the people of God, culminating in resurrection life. It is this new covenant that Jesus has inaugurated in his cross work for us. However, *not* all the promises and blessings of the new covenant are realized in Christ's first coming; its fulfillment involves an "already–not yet" tension. As Blaising notes, "There are features promised in that covenant whose fulfillment has been delayed until the return of Christ (such as the national and territorial promises in Jer. 31:31, 36 and Ezek. 36:28 and 37:14)."[65] But since these latter features, specifically Israel's land promise, go back to the Abrahamic covenant, they still await their fulfillment when Christ returns. In this sense, the new covenant should be viewed as "*the form* in which the Abrahamic covenant has been inaugurated in this dispensation, and will be fulfilled in full in the future."[66] But the present form of the new covenant does not exhaust the Abrahamic promises, which still await their fulfillment in the future, when the specific national promises to Israel are finally realized.[67]

Regarding how progressives understand the kingdom and its relation to the covenants, they share much similarity with covenant theology, as we will note below. For one thing, neither distinguishes between the terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God." Further, as Blaising notes, "Instead of dividing up the different features of redemption into self-

contained 'kingdoms,'" as earlier forms of dispensationalism did, "progressive dispensationalists see one promised eschatological kingdom which has both spiritual and political dimensions."[68] For progressives the stress is on the eternal kingdom for understanding all previous forms of it, including the millennial kingdom. Yet unlike most proponents of covenant theology, progressive dispensationalists view the future consummation of the kingdom, namely, the "not yet" aspect of the kingdom, as bringing about the specific promises to Israel as a nation in regard to her inheritance of the land, first in the millennium and then continuing in the eternal state. It is only when this takes place that the Abrahamic covenant is truly and fully realized and achieved.

What is the church in progressive dispensationalism? As noted above, as in *all* forms of dispensationalism, the church is *not* the restored, eschatological Israel, which receives *all* God's promises in Christ. Instead, the church is a people made up of Jewish and Gentile believers, who in this dispensation "share a relational reality in Jesus" and "an inaugurated form of the salvific and pneumatological blessings that will, in their fullness, characterize the kingdom."[69] The church, then, is an "inaugural form of the kingdom,"[70] which precedes its full establishment of redeemed nations at Christ's return, an illustration of the "spiritual union of all redeemed peoples with Christ and with one another."[71] But once Christ returns, the church as a *covenant* people and *theological* reality—as God's new creation people—gives way to the multinational worldwide kingdom composed of redeemed *nations*, who enjoy the same blessings of salvation but who receive God's promises according to their distinct national identities. In this way, progressives continue to distinguish between Israel as a nation, and the church as a people, thus maintaining the crucial Israel-church distinction unique to dispensationalism.

Summary of Dispensationalism and Its Varieties

Over the years dispensational theology has undergone much development—in our view, for the better. Any theological position that is willing to correct itself by Scripture should receive our appreciation. But with that said, to clarify what is at the heart of *all* varieties of dispensational theology, we

return to where we began, namely, the Israel-church distinction. Hopefully, this is evident not only from our description of the varieties of dispensationalism but also from how dispensationalists themselves summarize what they believe are the distinctive features of their view. Although a number of distinctives are listed, dispensationalists eventually return to the crucial Israel-church distinction, which is foundational to their entire framing of the Bible's storyline.

For example, Craig Blaising lists eight distinctive features of dispensational theology, and John Feinberg and Michael Vlach each list six.[72] However, when these essential features are probed deeper, either they are shown not to be distinctive to dispensational theology alone (e.g., the authority of Scripture, dispensations in redemptive history, the newness of the church, or even premillennialism), or they reduce to the Israel-church distinction.[73] Given this fact, we are safe in asserting that the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism (in all its varieties) is the Israel-church distinction. Furthermore and related to this distinction, there is the dual conviction that (1) Israel, as a national, ethnic people, still awaits outstanding promises that have not yet been fulfilled in Christ and the church, especially national and territorial promises—all of which has theological implications for eschatology; and (2) "God's relationship to the church differs in some significant ways from the dispensation with Israel,"[74] which has theological implications for soteriology and ecclesiology.

At this juncture it is important to ask how dispensationalists hermeneutically ground this crucial Israel-church distinction, which is so central to their view. This question is especially vital in light of how covenant theologians will attempt to argue their view. But before we address some of these crucial hermeneutical-theological differences between the two systems, we will finish the current discussion by describing the alternative biblical-theological view of covenant theology. We do so not only to set it over against dispensational theology but also, more importantly, to set the larger context by which we will argue for a third alternative, namely, *kingdom through covenant*, or *progressive covenantalism*.

Covenant Theology and Its Varieties[75]

Covenant theology, as a biblical-theological system, has its roots in the Reformation (e.g., Ulrich Zwingli [1484–1531], Heinrich Bullinger [1504–1575], John Calvin [1509–1564], Zachary Ursinus [1534–1583]), and in the post-Reformation era, it was systematized by Herman Witsius (1636–1708) and Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669). It has been taught by the English Puritans (e.g., John Owen [1616–1683]), Francis Turretin (1623–1687), Dutch Calvinists (e.g., Herman Bavinck [1854–1921], Geerhardus Vos [1862–1949], Louis Berkhof [1873–1957]), and American Presbyterian theologians as represented by old Princeton (e.g., Charles Hodge [1797–1878], B. B. Warfield [1851–1921]) and the Westminster Theological Seminaries (e.g., John Murray [1898–1975], Meredith Kline [1922–2007]). It is ably represented in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1643–1649), as well as in earlier Reformed confessions, such as the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563).[76] In Baptist theology, the basics of covenant theology are reflected in the Second London Baptist Confession (1689).

As the name suggests, *covenant* theology not only organizes redemptive history in terms of covenants but also contends that *covenant* unites Scripture's diverse themes. Michael Horton, in answering the question "What brings all of the themes of Scripture together?" says it this way:

> What unites them is not itself a central dogma but an architectonic structure of biblical faith and practice. That particular architectural structure that we believe the Scriptures themselves to yield is the covenant. It is not simply the concept of the covenant, but the concrete existence of God's covenantal dealings in our history that provides the context within which we recognize the unity of Scripture amid its remarkable variety.[77]

Continuing to speak of the significance of covenants to theology, Horton writes,

> The covenant is the framework, but it is far from a central dogma. The various covenants are visible and significant, in some "rooms" (i.e., topics) more than others. The covenant of redemption is prominent in

> discussion of the Trinity, Christ as mediator, and election, while the covenant of creation is more obvious when we talk about God's relationship to the world (especially humanity), and the covenant of grace is most visible when we take up the topics of salvation and the church. However, whenever Reformed theologians attempt to explore and explain the riches of Scripture, they are always thinking *covenantally* about every topic they take up.[78]

Historically, covenant theology has maintained that three covenants are central: the pretemporal "covenant of redemption" (*pactum salutis*) between the triune persons of the Godhead; the "covenant of works," or "covenant of nature" (*foederus naturae*), made with Adam before the fall on behalf of the entire human race; and the "covenant of grace" (*foederus gratiae*) made through Christ with all who are to believe (namely, the elect) and administered in history through a series of covenants from Adam to Christ.[79] Although covenant theology readily acknowledges biblical *covenants*, it tends to subsume the plurality of covenants from Adam to Christ under the overarching *theological* category of *the* covenant of grace. Thus, it views the relationships between the biblical covenants in terms of an overall unity or continuity, given their conviction that the biblical *covenants* are an expression of the *one* covenant of grace. Covenant theology acknowledges that throughout redemptive history, *the* covenant of grace is *administered* differently, but overall, each biblical covenant is *substantially* or *essentially* the same. Yet as we will note below, the precise nature of continuity within the covenant of grace varies among covenant theologians, and as Vern Poythress rightly admits, "Covenant theology has always allowed for a diversity of administration of the one covenant of grace. This diversity accounted in large part for the diversity of epochs in biblical history. But the emphasis was undeniably on the unity of *one* covenant of grace."[80]

It is for this reason, contra dispensationalism, that covenant theology has seen more *continuity* in God's plan across time, especially in regard to the Israel-church relationship. In fact, it is at this precise point that we see a major difference between these two theological systems that leads to corresponding differences in how each views aspects of ecclesiology and

eschatology. For example, covenant theology insists that God has *one* redemptive plan and *one* people and that the *similarities* between Israel and the church as covenant communities are significant. Unlike dispensational theology, covenant theology argues that "Israel" and the "church" are *by nature* the same.[81] That is why covenant theology has argued that there is continuity between Israel and the church in at least the following ways: the *nature* of the two communities as comprising believers *and* unbelievers (i.e., a mixed people *within* the covenant community);[82] the meaning of covenant signs (i.e., circumcision signifies the same gospel realities as baptism); and the salvation *experience* of old and new covenant believers, with some modifications made for the perfect and finished nature of Christ's cross work. Within covenant theology, then, Israel and the church are so linked that the only real differences between the two communities are that the New Testament "church" is more racially mixed than predominantly Jewish and that the "church" is a more knowledgeable version of "Israel." But the experience of salvation and the indwelling work of the Spirit is basically the same across the covenants.[83]

With this general introduction in place, let us describe in more detail the basic contours of covenant theology, especially in regard to its understanding of the nature and relationships of the biblical covenants. Given the variety of forms of covenant theology—Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed (and differences within each of these groups, such as Federal Vision), Seventh-day Adventist, and even Reformed Baptist—our main focus is on the view of paedobaptist covenant theology.[84] We will focus on how this position treats three areas: the nature and relationships of the biblical covenants, the nature of the church in relationship to Israel, and the nature of the covenant signs in the old and new covenants. By focusing on these three areas, we will then be in a better position to compare and contrast the differences between dispensational and paedobaptist covenant theology.

Covenant Theology and the Biblical Covenants

For covenant theology, the theme of *covenant* is central to how Scripture fits together, but what exactly is a covenant? *Covenant* has been variously

defined, and it is not necessary to work with one definition, so we will use Michael Horton's definition as a place to start: "a covenant is a relationship of 'oaths and bonds' and involves mutual, though not necessarily equal, commitments."[85] For Horton, the emphasis on "not necessarily equal" commitments is important since he rightly contends that in redemptive history there is a "substantial variety of covenants in Scripture" and that not all the biblical covenants are exactly the same.[86] How, then, should we think of the relationship between the diverse biblical covenants? As noted above, the answer to that question is that covenant theology views the historical *covenants* under two larger theological headings—the *covenant of works* and the *covenant of grace*—both of which are grounded in the eternal *covenant of redemption*.[87] Let us look at each of these covenants in turn.

The Covenant of Redemption

All Christian theology affirms that our triune God has an eternal plan, which he enacts by creation, providence, and redemption, though theologians debate how God plans, how God's choices relate to human choices, and so on. When it comes to God's eternal plan of redemption, covenant theology has spoken of it in "covenant" categories, specifically, as the "covenant of redemption" (*pactum salutis*). J. V. Fesko gives us a helpful definition of this covenant:

> The covenant of redemption is the pre-temporal, intra-trinitarian agreement among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to plan and execute the redemption of the elect. The covenant entails the appointment of the Son as surety of the covenant of grace who accomplishes the redemption of the elect through His incarnation, perfect obedience, suffering, resurrection, and ascension. The covenant of redemption is also the root of the Spirit's role to anoint and equip the Son for His mission as surety and apply His finished work to the elect.[88]

Some have questioned the use of the term *covenant* to refer to the eternal pact between the triune persons since Scripture is silent about such a *covenant* (although Scripture speaks of God's eternal *plan*) *and* since certain definitions of covenant would not apply to intra-Trinitarian relations.[89] However, Horton responds, echoing many advocates of a

pactum salutis, "If we hold simultaneously to the doctrine of the Trinity and unconditional election, it is unclear what objection could be raised in principle to describing this divine decree in terms of the concept of an eternal covenant between the persons of the Godhead."[90]

Historically, this is precisely what covenant theology has argued, and as such, most within covenant theology accept the biblical and theological legitimacy of speaking of God's eternal redemptive plan as the covenant of redemption.[91] As covenant theology has contended, one cannot deny that Scripture teaches that our triune God has an eternal plan (e.g., Ps. 139:16; Isa. 46:9–13; Eph. 1:4–14; 1 Pet. 1:20)—a plan conceived before the foundation of the world, made known on the stage of human history, and involving the work of all three persons of the Godhead. Scripture speaks of this plan in terms of the Father giving a people to the Son (e.g., John 6:39; 10:29; 17:2, 6–10; Eph. 1:4–12), the Son accomplishing that plan by his obedient life and death (John 6:37–40; 10:14–18; Heb. 10:5–18), and the Spirit working to bring those people chosen by the Father to faith union in Christ (Rom. 8:29–30; Eph. 1:11–13; 1 Pet. 1:5).[92] In addition, in that plan, the divine Son, in relation to the Father and Spirit, is appointed as the mediator of his people. And the Son gladly and voluntarily accepts this appointment with its covenant stipulations and promises, which are then worked out in his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. This eternal plan establishes Christ as mediator, defines the nature of his mediation, and assigns specific roles to each person of the Godhead, and this plan is accomplished in history through the covenants of works and grace.

For covenant theology, the covenant of redemption serves as the foundation to the outworking of God's plan, as an "archetype for the historical covenants."[93] It also provides the grounding for our covenantal union with Christ as our mediator and representative substitute in the covenant of grace. Given that Scripture teaches such a *divine plan*, roles, and promises, it is legitimate, covenant theology insists, to think of God's eternal plan in *covenantal* terms.

The Covenant of Works

For covenant theology, the first historical covenant, grounded in the *pactum salutis*, is the *covenant of works*,—sometimes called the *covenant of nature* or the *covenant of life*—made with Adam, as the head and representative of the human race, prior to the fall.[94] To Adam and his entire posterity, eternal life was promised on the condition of perfect obedience to the law of God. However, due to his disobedience, Adam, along with the entire human race, was plunged into a state of sin, death, and condemnation.[95] But God, due to his own free and sovereign grace, was pleased to make another covenant—the covenant of grace—with human beings (specifically, the elect) wherein God freely offered to sinners life and salvation through the last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. Although the covenant of works is an important staple of covenant theology, it has been disputed. Let us first describe some of its essential features and the important role it plays within the larger theological framework of covenant theology before we outline some of the internal debate regarding this covenant.

In thinking about the covenant of works and its importance, four points are significant. First, it is a covenant between God and Adam—Adam acting "not in his individual capacity but as the head and representative of his whole race."[96] In fact, Louis Berkhof argues that Adam is related to God in two ways: first, as a dependent creature, who owes God perfect obedience but in this natural relationship "could not have merited anything,"[97] namely, the reward of eternal life; and second, as an appointed covenant head. It is important to note that it is only in this second relationship, which is *subsequent* to creation and not due to creation itself, that the covenant is established. By God's positive command to Adam in Genesis 2, a covenant is now enacted wherein Adam is not merely God's creature but is now constituted as the legal, representative head of the human race, temporarily put on probation to determine whether he will obey God's law and given the promise of eternal life, as represented by the tree of life, if he obeys perfectly.[98] By this covenant, then, Adam is enabled "to obtain eternal life for himself and for his descendants in the way of obedience."[99]

Second, the promise of the covenant, namely, the receiving of eternal life, is conditional and thus dependent upon Adam's perfect obedience to God's

command. Although Scripture gives no explicit promise of eternal life to Adam, most argue that the threatened penalty of death "clearly implies such a promise."[100] Although Adam was created in a "state of integrity with the ability to render God complete obedience,"[101] Adam's covenant status at creation was not "the highest degree of holiness, nor did he enjoy life in all its fullness."[102] Instead, it was "provisional and temporary and could not remain as it was. It either had to pass on to higher glory or to sin and death."[103] Sadly, Adam, who had the ability to sin, broke God's law and plunged himself and the human race into a state of death and condemnation.

Third, although Adam broke the covenant, in many respects it is still in effect.[104] All humanity is born "in Adam" and is thus under sin and condemnation. Because we are creatures, God continues to demand of us perfect obedience, but we disobey. In theory, the conditional promise of "do this and live" (cf. Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12) is still in force, but there is no human who perfectly obeys and meets God's demand. Yet as a covenant, it is no longer in force; the probationary period is over, and the result of Adam's sin is that the entire human race is now under sin and death.

Fourth, the covenant of works sets the stage for the covenant of grace. Since Adam, as the representative head of the human race, broke the covenant of works, he was driven from Eden, and all humanity is now guilty and corrupt "in him." Thankfully, the triune God has graciously established a second covenant—namely, the covenant of grace—to redeem from fallen humanity his elect. In the covenant of grace, and grounded in the *pactum salutis*, the divine Son is appointed as our mediator, and in his incarnation, life, and cross work, he renders to the Father perfect obedience for us, thus meeting our legal demand before God and paying for the debt of our sin. The covenant of works, then, provides the warrant for our corporate solidarity either in Adam or in Christ, the biblical-theological grounding for Christ's active obedience and his representative-substitutionary work for us, and the law-gospel contrast that runs throughout Scripture and is essential to grasping the nature of Christ's work.

As central as the covenant of works is for covenant theology, proponents disagree about at least three points concerning the precise nature of this

covenant.[105] First, some have challenged whether there is a covenant with Adam since "covenant" terminology does not begin until Genesis 6:18 and since "the word *covenant* in Scripture is always used in a context of redemption."[106] However, this is a minority view within covenant theology, and most would agree with John Frame that minimally a covenant between God and humans is *implicit* and that biblically and theologically a strong case can be made for a covenant with Adam.[107]

Second, some have sought to avoid the idea of *works* to underscore the fact that grace is fundamental to any divine-human relationship, including the relationship with Adam in the original situation.[108] John Frame argues that the terminology of *works* suggests "that eternal life is a kind of commodity, and that if Adam pays the price, 'perfect obedience,' 'works,' or 'merit,' God will turn that commodity over to Adam and his posterity,"[109] which also gives the impression that the works are all Adam's works and that grace is not operative prior to the fall. Frame does not necessarily object to the idea of a covenant of works but is only concerned that it might wrongly convey the idea that Adam "possessed an autonomy that no other creature has ever possessed."[110] Instead, Frame wants to view the covenant with Adam as "a sovereign blessing of God, calling Adam and Eve to respond in obedient faith."[111] O. Palmer Robertson is also concerned that the *works* language is inadequate since it has "tended to concentrate attention on one single element of the creational bond between God and man. . . . Rather than seeing the broader implications of man's responsibility to his Creator, attention has been directed exclusively toward Adam's probation-test."[112] Instead of a "covenant of works," Robertson suggests that we call the covenant with Adam a "covenant of creation," in order to avoid potential misunderstandings surrounding *works* language.[113]

However, despite this objection, the dominant view within covenant theology is to retain a "covenant *of works*" with Adam. This understanding of Adam's role is not only foundational for Reformed orthodoxy's understanding of the active obedience of Christ, who, as the last Adam, obeys God's commands (the law) and thus wins righteousness for us, but is also foundational in establishing the law-gospel pattern of Scripture. *Law* refers to the covenant of works, and *gospel* refers to the covenant of grace.

Instead of speaking of God's grace in the original situation (prior to sin), Horton, following the Westminster Confession, prefers to characterize God's relationship to Adam by "voluntary condescension."[114] It is after the fall that God acts in sovereign grace and mercy toward fallen humanity.

Third, within covenant theology there is also a debate regarding the relationship of the covenant of works with the Mosaic covenant. Some view the Mosaic covenant as a *republication* of the covenant of works, thus casting the Sinai covenant as a mixture of the covenants of works and of grace. In fact, Horton, following Meredith Kline, divides the biblical covenants by means of law and gospel, associating *law* with Adam and Sinai and *gospel* with Abraham, David, and the new covenant in Christ.[115] In this view, the Mosaic covenant is a legal, conditional covenant that shares in the *substance* of the covenant of grace yet features a works principle tied to the covenant of works.[116] Those who argue this position contend that we must not pit law and gospel against each other, even in the original situation. Often the law-gospel contrast is understood in terms of a negative-positive relation. But as Horton explains, this is incorrect: "In creation (and in the institution of the theocracy at Sinai), law as the basis for the divine-human relationship is wholly positive. In fact, this republication of the law is itself *gracious*, even if the principle of the two covenants (works and grace) fundamentally differs."[117] As this is applied to the Sinai covenant, even though it begins with God's act of liberation of Israel from bondage—a gracious and powerful act indeed—Sinai must still be viewed as primarily a law-covenant, following the suzerain-vassal pattern of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. God's way of salvation was always tied to his promises, by grace through faith, but Israel's national status in God's land depended on their obedience to the covenant; apart from that obedience, they came under the curses of the covenant.

Most within covenant theology, however, reject the republication thesis. The Mosaic covenant is viewed as a gracious covenant and *not* the renewal of the covenant of works; the law, then, is subservient to the covenant of grace. Since *the* covenant of grace is *one*, it is incorrect to posit that the Mosaic covenant is a mixture of law/works and gospel. Cornelis Venema states the objection this way: "If what belongs to the substance of the

covenant of works does not belong to the substance of the covenant of grace *in any of its administrations*, it is semantically and theologically problematic to denominate the Mosaic administration as *in any sense* a covenant of works."[118] Also, as Frame points out, the Mosaic covenant begins with God's grace, and similar to all biblical covenants, obedience is demanded but is no more conditional than the Abrahamic covenant was. Furthermore, it is difficult to substantiate that under the Mosaic covenant people were saved by grace

> but that their temporal blessings within the land of Canaan had to be earned by works. . . . The biblical text, further, never says that the spiritual and temporal blessings of Israel come from different sources. The relation between God's grace and human obedience in the Mosaic covenant is the same as that in the other covenants.[119]

Despite these ongoing, internal debates, for the most part covenant theology contends for a covenant of works or a creation covenant prior to the fall. Yet, sadly, Adam, as our covenant head, disobeyed God, and his sin and guilt are now ours. After the fall, apart from God's initiative to redeem, we cannot achieve divine forgiveness by keeping God's commands. Our triune God must act in sovereign grace to redeem us from our sin, which is precisely what he has done in the covenant of grace.

The Covenant of Grace

In history, the *covenant of grace* (i.e., gospel, promise) began immediately after the fall with the promise of grace in Genesis 3:15, although it, like the covenant of works, is grounded in God's eternal plan.[120] This promise was then progressively revealed and fulfilled in history through variously administered covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David. Ultimately, it was brought to fulfillment in the new covenant, which our Lord inaugurated in his victorious cross work on our behalf.

However, it is important to stress that even though Scripture describes a plurality of *covenants*, there is only *one* overarching covenant of grace. That is why, despite the covenantal differences, one must view the relationships between the covenants in terms of an overall unity and

continuity. Randy Booth underscores this point in his comments on the "newness" of the new covenant: "The new covenant is but a new—though more glorious—administration of the same covenant of grace."[121] Thus, under the old covenant, the covenant of grace was administered through various promises, prophecies, sacrifices, rites, and ordinances (e.g., circumcision) that ultimately typified and foreshadowed the coming of Christ. Now, in light of our Lord's coming and work, the covenant of grace is administered through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. But in God's plan there are not two covenants of grace, one in the Old Testament and the other in the New Testament, but one covenant differing in administration yet essentially the same across the ages.

To understand better how the covenant of grace is conceived within covenant theology, three points are important to grasp: the substance/essence and administrations distinction, the conditionality or unconditionality of the covenant of grace, and the parties of the covenant of grace.

THE SUBSTANCE/ESSENCE AND ADMINISTRATIONS DISTINCTION. First, the distinction between the *substance/essence* and the *administrations* of the covenant of grace is the way covenant theology explains how the biblical *covenants* are unified despite their diversity. To speak of the *substance* of the covenant is to account for its unity/continuity, and to speak of its *administrations* or accidental properties is to explain how the same covenant of grace is different over time. No doubt, in Christ the covenant of grace is more fully revealed, but the substance of each prior covenant is the same. Bavinck captures this distinction well when he writes about the covenant of grace throughout history:

> All the grace that is extended to the creation after the fall comes to it from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. The Son appeared immediately after the fall, as Mediator, as the second and final Adam who occupies the place of the first, restores what the latter corrupted, and accomplishes what he failed to do. And the Holy Spirit immediately acted as the Paraclete, the one applying the salvation acquired by Christ. All the change that occurs, all the development and

> progress in insight and knowledge, accordingly, occurs on the side of the creature. . . . The Father is the eternal Father, the Son the eternal Mediator, the Holy Spirit the eternal Paraclete. For that reason the Old Testament is also to be viewed as one in essence and substance with the New Testament. . . . Although Christ completed his work on earth only in the midst of history and although the Holy Spirit was not poured out till the day of Pentecost, God nevertheless was able, already in the days of the Old Testament, to fully distribute the benefits to be acquired by the Son and Spirit. Old Testament believers were saved in no other way than we. There is one faith, one Mediator, one way of salvation, and one covenant of grace.[122]

Given this distinction, how does covenant theology determine the "accidental properties" of each covenant, or what exactly has and has not changed over time? Covenant theology follows this hermeneutical principle: given the underlying unity of the covenant of grace, unless God has specifically abrogated something from the Old Testament, then it is still in force in the New Testament era. Interestingly, as we will note in chapter 3, this hermeneutic is similar to dispensational theology except that each system employs it in different areas. For example, in dispensational theology, Israel's land promise, first given in the Abrahamic covenant, has not been abrogated in the coming of Christ and is still in force, hence the need for its future fulfillment in the millennium and consummation. Covenant theology does *not* argue for the land promise in this way,[123] yet it does argue for the circumcision-baptism relationship in a similar way, linked to the genealogical principle—"to you and your children." Circumcision, as a covenant sign, was given in the Abrahamic covenant, and it carries over, now in baptism, as the new covenant sign, but the *essence* of both signs remains the same. Baptism, as the sign of the new covenant, reflects one of the several administrative changes that have resulted, yet it still signifies the same *spiritual* meaning as circumcision did previously, given the unity of the covenant and that the genealogical principle has not been abrogated in the New Testament. Booth emphasizes this point when he writes, "Under the old administrations of the covenant of grace, circumcision was the sign and seal of covenant admission. Under the

final administration of the covenant of grace (the new covenant), water baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of covenant admission."[124] Although the form of the covenant sign has changed due to different administrations, the *substance* has not, thus the meaning and application of the signs remain the same in all eras.[125]

For covenant theology, given the substance/administrations distinction, what, then, is *new* about the new covenant? What are the differences, if any, between the older and newer administrations of the covenant of grace? The answer to this question is not monolithic. Yet despite various nuances, covenant theology agrees that the main difference is that of "promise-fulfilment," that is, what the older administration promised through types, ceremonies, and sacrifices has now come to fulfillment in Christ.[126] Most covenant theologians view the newness of the new covenant in terms of a *renewal* rather than a replacement or fulfillment that entails discontinuity with the previous covenants, except for those who think of the Mosaic covenant as a republication of the covenant of works.[127] That is why most argue that the new covenant administration simply expands the previous era by broadening its extent and application and bringing with it greater blessing yet leaving intact the *substance* of the covenant of grace. Specifically, but not exhaustively, covenant theology views the newness of the new covenant in the following ways:[128]

1. On the basis of Christ's cross and through the application of it by the Spirit, a greater power to obey is possible in the new covenant, along with a greater consciousness and enjoyment of salvation blessings.
2. The knowledge of God is extended to all nations (the particular to the universal). Under the new covenant more people will know more about the Lord, which fulfills the Abrahamic promise of blessings to the nations.
3. The promise of redemption is now accomplished in Christ with the full payment of sin. The old Levitical administration, along with the ceremonial law, has now been fulfilled. The types and shadows of the old (natural and temporal forms) have reached their fulfillment in what they pointed to (spiritual and eternal realities).

4. The new covenant is the final manifestation of God's redemptive plan. There are no more covenant administrations to be revealed.

Interesting and crucial for highlighting theological differences, especially in the area of ecclesiology, is any discussion of newness in the new covenant in terms of the changes that have occurred in the *nature and structure* of the church as the new covenant community. For those who argue that the church is substantially different from Israel, as do many dispensationalists and those in the believers-church tradition (including Baptists and Reformed Baptists), a crucial feature of the *new* covenant is that *all* those within it are people who, by definition, have now experienced circumcision of the heart by the Spirit and the full forgiveness of sin tied to God's present declaration of justification and thus who *savingly know* God. Jeremiah 31:29–34 certainly seems to point in this direction, and it is here that various understandings of the nature of the church begin to part company. Obviously, this latter view of newness implies a *discontinuity* between the old and new covenant communities, a view that paedobaptist covenant theology rejects given its understanding of the unity of the covenant of grace. That is why covenant theology continues to view the church as it views Israel of old, namely, as a mixed community that includes within it simultaneously the elect (covenant keepers) and the nonelect (covenant breakers). How one sees the *nature and structure* of the new covenant vis-à-vis the previous covenants is a crucial matter that requires resolution to make headway in various ecclesiological debates.

Unconditional or Conditional? Second, to grasp better how covenant theology relates the biblical *covenants* to *the* covenant of grace, we must think through whether the covenant of grace is unconditional or conditional or in some ways both. The majority view is that the covenant of grace is *unconditional*.[129] God acts sovereignly and unilaterally to make the covenant and to keep it. Even as God demands from us to repent, believe, and obey, *he* grants us the power to do so by sovereign grace in Christ and the Spirit. As Cornelis Venema nicely summarizes,

> Not only are the covenant's obligations preceded by God's gracious promise, but these obligations are fulfilled for and in believers by the

> triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in their respective operations. God's demands are born of grace and fulfilled in us by grace. In these respects, the covenant of grace is unconditional, excluding every possible form of merit, whereby the faith and obedience of God's people would be the basis for their obtaining life and salvation.[130]

However, within covenant theology, and related to the discussion on the relationship between the covenants of works and of grace, some have distinguished the biblical covenants further in terms of the unconditional/conditional distinction. For example, as noted above, Michael Horton, following Meredith Kline, argues that the Mosaic covenant is predominately a conditional law-covenant (a republication of the covenant of works), while the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants are unconditional in nature. He argues that the Adamic and Mosaic covenants follow the ancient Near East's suzerain-vassal pattern, while the other covenants are grounded in God's unconditional promise to act unilaterally for his people. For this reason, now that the new covenant has come in Christ, the Sinai covenant is abrogated, while the other covenants remain, given their unconditional nature.[131] It is also for this reason that Horton argues, contra dispensational thought, that the land promise is tied to the Mosaic covenant and is conditional. Israel, then, in disobeying the covenant, forfeited the land, and as such, "its theocratic status was revoked."[132] As noted above, not everyone in covenant theology argues this point, yet all argue that the *substance* of the covenant of grace is unconditional.

Yet covenant theology has also argued that the covenant of grace (including the new covenant) is *conditional* in at least two ways. First, the blessings of the covenant of grace depend completely on Christ, the last Adam, fulfilling the conditions of obedience first set down in the covenant of works as the representative and substitute of his people. Second, the terms of the covenant obligations are conditionally placed on us in order to benefit from the covenant, namely, the requirements of repentance, faith, and obedience. These covenant obligations are not viewed as meritorious grounds for our justification; rather, they are "necessary responses to the

covenant's promises" and thus are "instrumental to the enjoyment of the covenant's blessings."[133] Even Horton, who strongly argues for the unconditionality of the new covenant, contra the bilateral covenant of Sinai, accepts both of these kinds of conditionality within the new covenant.[134]

At this place in the discussion, most covenant theologians contend that the covenant of grace involves a "conditional promise," "*with blessings for those who obey the conditions of the covenant and curses for those who disobey its conditions*."[135] In principle, then, the covenant of grace, which includes the new covenant, is conditional in the second sense described above and is thus *breakable*.[136] At this point, most covenant theologians argue for a "mixed" people within the covenant of grace—that is, the covenant people comprises covenant keepers *and* breakers. That is why the circle of the covenant community, whether in the old (Israel) or new (church) era, is wider and larger than the circle of election.[137] For example, Horton insists on this precise point: the covenant of grace, including the new covenant, "in its *administration* involves conditions," since "it is a covenant made with believers and their children."[138] As Horton and all covenant theologians acknowledge, not everyone in the covenant of grace is elect. Thus, as in Israel, so in the church, people may be *in* the covenant "though not *of* the covenant."[139] Appealing to the often-cited parable of the weeds (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43), Horton, along with other covenant theologians, argues that "not everyone who belongs to the covenant community will persevere to the end. Some are weeds sown among the wheat, seeds that fell on rocky soil or that is [*sic*] choked by the weeds. . . . Not everyone in the covenant of grace is elect."[140] In fact, it is due to this understanding of the covenant of grace that a covenant ecclesiology views the church, by nature, as a mixed community, which also lends support for the practice of paedobaptism. In principle, there is nothing objectionable in viewing unregenerate people as part of the covenant community and in applying to them the covenant sign, contra those in the believers-church tradition (and most within dispensational theology), who contend that baptism ought to apply only to believers—that is, those who profess faith in Christ.[141] At the heart of the difference between these two ecclesiologies is

a larger covenantal debate regarding the similarity and difference between the old and new covenant communities.

THE PARTIES OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE. Third, and related to the last point, to grasp covenant theology's view of the covenant of grace, we must also ask, who are the parties of the covenant of grace? Given the "conditionality" of the covenant of grace and the fact that not everyone *in* the covenant is *of* it, who exactly are the parties of the covenant? Does God covenant with the elect only, or does he covenant with "believers and their children"—children who may or may not believe? It would seem that, given covenant theology's view of conditionality and given the mixed nature of the community, the answer would be the latter. Yet within covenant theology, there has been a significant debate on this question. For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith (7.3) and the Westminster Larger Catechism (question 31) opt for the first option, namely, that God covenants with only the elect in the covenant of grace. Cornelis Venema summarizes the confession's view: "In the strictest sense of the covenant as a saving communion with God, the parties of the covenant of grace are the triune God and his elect people,"[142] and the condition of entering that covenant is repentance and faith. All those who reject the free offer of the gospel stand *outside* the covenant of grace, and, it would seem to imply, they are also outside the covenant community.

If this is so, then why do so many covenant theologians argue that the covenant of grace also embraces "all believers and their children"—children who, over time, do not necessarily believe and who thus show themselves to be the nonelect? The answer centers on a crucial discussion regarding the covenant's "dual aspect." As Venema correctly notes, "These theologians, while acknowledging that the life and salvation promised in the covenant of grace are inherited only by the elect, argue that the covenant promise, together with its accompanying obligation, is extended to Abraham and his seed."[143] How do we make sense of this seemingly contradictory answer? This is not a minor point. Theologically speaking, much of the argument for a covenantal view of the church and ordinances, especially its defense of paedobaptism, centers on this issue. In fact, a standard argument of paedobaptists is the following:

> The children of believers were always included in the covenant of grace under the older covenant administrations. In deference to this established biblical pattern, *we must assume that, apart from explicit biblical warrant to the contrary*, the children of believers are still included in the covenant of grace.[144]

Thus, infants, like their adult believing parents, are to be circumcised and now baptized because they are both members *in* the covenant community.

At this point, regardless of whether this "dual aspect" of the covenant is biblical, especially in regard to the church (an issue to which we will return in part 3), what is instructive is how covenant theology understands the relationship between the biblical *covenants* to the *one* covenant of grace. The only way they can justify the "dual aspect" of the covenant, especially in regard to the church, is by viewing the covenant of grace (an overarching theological category) through the lens of the Abrahamic covenant (a specific historical covenant that includes within it national, typological, and spiritual aspects).[145] That is why the genealogical principle—"to you and your children"—that is given in the Abrahamic covenant and linked to circumcision continues *unchanged* across redemptive history, even with the inauguration of the new covenant era. A common complaint against covenant theology is that it tends to reduce the national and typological aspects of the Abrahamic covenant to the *spiritual* aspects, which, in turn, become the grid by which *all* other biblical covenants are viewed, especially the new covenant. Thus, to speak of the covenant of grace is really to speak of the Abrahamic covenant reduced to its spiritual aspects alone. That is why in the discussion regarding the parties of the covenant, covenant theologians can speak of the "dual aspect" of the covenant, even though "believers and their children" is a genealogical formula specifically tied to the Abrahamic covenant. No doubt, the genealogical principle continues in later covenants, but, as we will argue, it is highly questionable whether there is no change to it with Christ's coming and new covenant inauguration. Also, at this point, covenant theology tends to marginalize the national elements of the Abrahamic covenant and to interpret them mostly in spiritual terms—another point dispensational thought has criticized repeatedly.

In covenant theology, examples of the equation of the covenant of grace with the Abrahamic covenant abound.[146] For example, Louis Berkhof admits that, at least in theory, the Abrahamic covenant has both national and spiritual aspects to it;[147] however, in reality the national aspects of the covenant fall by the wayside in his discussion, and the *spiritual* aspects are treated as primary. That is why he can say that circumcision is "the initiatory sign and seal of *the covenant of grace*" (when in truth it is the sign of the Abrahamic covenant and not of every biblical covenant) and that "this covenant [Abrahamic] is still in force and is *essentially identical* with the 'new covenant' of the present dispensation"[148] with little regard for the redemptive-historical *distinctions* between the biblical covenants. Or, this is why John Murray argues that since "the new covenant is the fulfillment and unfolding of the Abrahamic covenant," and "the covenant made with Abraham included the infant seed, and was signified and sealed by circumcision," and since "that circumcision is the sign of the covenant in its deepest spiritual significance,"[149] we are under divine command, derived from the continuity of the covenant of grace, to baptize our infant children, thus making them full members of the church and members *in* the new covenant. In the end, what Berkhof, Murray, and covenant theology do is strip the Abrahamic covenant of some of its aspects, identify it as a pure gospel covenant, and then equate it, almost in a one-to-one fashion, with the new covenant.

But the crucial question is whether covenant theology's understanding of the relationship between the biblical covenants to the covenant of grace is legitimate. Within covenant theology, this construction explains why there is continuity across redemptive history, foundational to ecclesiology and other doctrinal areas. But can it account for the biblical *distinctions* between the covenants that seem to entail key covenantal *discontinuities, which have major* theological implications, especially in ecclesiology? Before our evaluation, let us first explain covenant theology's view of the nature of the church as it relates to their understanding of the biblical covenants.

Covenant Theology and the Nature of the Church

Covenant theology contends that in the administration of the covenant of grace, there are numerous people who are *in* the covenant, with all the privileges pertaining thereto, yet who are not *of* the covenant, or among the elect. For this reason, covenant theologians teach that the circle of the covenant people is wider than the circle of election.[150] What is crucial to note is how their view of the nature of the church is organically tied to their understanding of the covenant of grace.

Related to the unity of the covenant of grace, then, is the unity/continuity of the people of God across the ages, especially seen in the Israel-church relationship. Instead of viewing the Israel-church relationship in ways that preserve covenantal continuity *and* discontinuity, covenant theology tends to emphasize the element of *continuity* at the expense of the latter, although it must be admitted that there are fine nuances within the system.[151] Randy Booth, for example, asserts that a covenantal understanding of the people of God entails that "God has had one people throughout all the ages. Although this *one church* has developed through various stages, she is still the *same church* from age to age."[152] Or Berkhof states it this way:

> The New Testament Church is essentially one with the Church of the old dispensation. As far as their essential nature is concerned, they both consist of true believers, and of true believers only. And in their external organization both represent a mixture of good and evil. Yet several important changes resulted from the accomplished work of Jesus Christ. The Church was divorced from the national life of Israel and obtained an independent organization. In connection with this the national boundaries of the Church were swept away. What had up to this time been a national Church now assumed a universal character.[153]

In underscoring the unity of God's people across the ages, most covenant theology today views the church as the fulfillment or redefinition of Israel, not as her "replacement." Seeking to avoid any notion of "supersessionism," Horton nicely captures the overall relationship: "The church does not replace Israel; it fulfills the promise God made to Abraham that in him and his seed all the nations would be blessed."[154] In this sense, the church is the true, eschatological Israel, who receives all God's

promises in Christ.[155] For this reason, in contrast to dispensationalism, even if Romans 11 teaches a mass conversion of Jewish people in the future, this does not entail Israel's national-political restoration to receive some promises different from Gentile believers. The church, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, is the one new man who lasts forever *as the church*.

From the way covenant theology understands the unity of both the covenant of grace and God's people, a number of ecclesiological entailments are drawn, but a key one is the theological warrant for paedobaptism. As often argued, if God in the old era included "believers and their children" in the covenant community (Israel), then nothing has changed in the new administration (in the church). Or as Booth states, "*Since God has not changed the terms of church membership, new covenant believers and their children are likewise included in his church*."[156]

This stress on the *continuity* of the people of God across redemptive history reminds us of an earlier observation we noted regarding the *nature* of the church: covenant theology not only views Israel and the church as *one* people but also views the nature/makeup of the new covenant church as reflecting Israel of old—that is, she is a "mixed" people, comprising "baptized believers and baptized unbelievers."[157] Thus, like Israel, the circle of the church is wider than the circle of true believers, who are born of the Spirit, are in faith union with Christ, are justified, and are sanctified.

At this point in the discussion, covenant theology employs the famous "invisible-visible" distinction so important to their ecclesiology. The *invisible* church refers to the church as God sees it, that is, the elect—those from all times and places whom the Lord knows and who are his and his alone, perfectly and infallibly. In this sense, the church, whether under the old or the new covenant, is a spiritual entity, invisible to the natural eye—the one people of God over time. Louis Berkhof states it this way:

> The Church is said to be invisible, because she is essentially spiritual and in her spiritual essence cannot be discerned by the physical eye; and because it is impossible to determine infallibly who do and who do not belong to her. The union with Christ is a mystical union; the Spirit that unites them constitutes an invisible tie; and the blessings of

> salvation, such as regeneration, genuine conversion, true faith, and spiritual communion with Christ, are all invisible to the natural eye—and yet these things constitute the real *forma* (ideal character) of the Church.[158]

However, the invisible church also manifests itself in history in a *visible*, local form. As Murray reminds us, "The church may not be defined as an entity wholly invisible to human perception and observation. The church is the company or society or assembly or congregation or communion of the faithful."[159] The church is a divinely created bond between God and his people and between other humans. It becomes visible in the ministry of the Word, in the practice of the sacraments, and in external organization and government.[160] But as a visible entity, it is a "mixture of regenerate and unregenerate people who are baptized."[161]

How does this view of the nature of the church lead covenant theology to draw the crucial theological entailment of infant baptism? As the argument goes, in the previous covenant administrations, beginning with Abraham, infants of believing households were included in the *visible* church (Abraham's family, Israel) by their circumcision and *prior to a personal profession of faith*, and by that act they were considered full members in the covenant community even though they were not yet regenerate members; since this was true for the old covenant community, the same is true under the new covenant. Hence, the rationale to apply the covenant sign of baptism to the infants of believing parents even though these infants have not yet exercised faith and even though this practice seems to disrupt the biblical order of baptism in the New Testament—namely, first, repentance toward God and faith in Christ, and then, second, a confession of that faith publicly in water baptism.[162]

Covenant theology's view of the *nature* of the church differs substantially from many in the dispensational tradition and from those who identify themselves as part of the believers-church tradition, such as Baptists. In a believers-church view, at least in the one we will defend, although there is only one people of God, there is a redemptive-historical difference, or better, a covenantal difference, between Israel and the church. As God's eternal plan has been brought to fulfillment in Christ, all the promises,

types, and covenants have reached their fulfillment in him. One crucial entailment of Christ's work is that *he*, as the antitype of the previous covenant mediators—and thus far greater than they—not only fulfills what they typified but also inaugurates a new and unbreakable covenant, creating a community that is by nature different from Israel of old. In this unbreakable covenant, *all* those in it, not just some, will *savingly know* God, be justified, and be circumcised of heart. The difference between Israel and the church is that what was true only of a remnant of individuals is now true of the *entire* community in Christ. It is for this reason that baptism, as the sign of the new covenant, is reserved only for those who have savingly entered into the glorious blessings of the new covenant by God's sovereign work of grace in their lives. However, in contrast to this view, covenant theology argues for a mixed view of the church, tied to their understanding of the covenant of grace.

What evidence does covenant theology give for its view of the church? Proponents often cite at least four pieces of biblical and theological evidence.[163]

1. The most foundational evidence is the appeal to the substantial/essential continuity of the covenant of grace across redemptive history. For covenant theology, this entails two truths. First, it entails that there is only *one* people of God over time, which is not unique to their view. But second, it also entails that the *nature* of the covenant community is the same. Thus, what is true about the *makeup* of the covenant people with Abraham and his children and Israel is also true of the new covenant community, the visible church, which is constituted as a mixture of believers and unbelievers.

2. Covenant theologians also appeal to inaugurated eschatology and the "already–not yet" tension to explain that the church, like Israel, is a mixed people. The reason for this appeal is due to the fact that a mixed view of the church seems to conflict with the Old Testament expectation that Messiah's people will be a regenerate people since they will *all* be born/empowered/indwelt by the Spirit, *know* God, and receive *full* forgiveness of sin. Covenant theologians admit that Jeremiah 31:31–34 anticipates such a people, but Richard Pratt, for example, argues that

Jeremiah 31's anticipation of an *entire* people who are *regenerate* is realized only in the *not yet*. *At present*, the church remains a people constituted by true believers *and* sanctified unbelievers.[164] G. K. Beale argues that *at present* the church is different from Israel because she is more "democratized"—namely, there is no categorical distinction between priests and prophets and the rest of God's people. The church *now* remains a "mixed" people; her *nature* as an entire regenerate people awaits the *not yet*.[165]

3. To further support this claim, covenant theologians appeal to the warning passages of Scripture, especially those that speak of the possibility of apostasy (e.g., Heb. 6:4–6; 10:28–30). Why are these warning texts cited as corroborative evidence? Because these texts seem to imply that it is possible for a person to be a member of the new covenant community (i.e., the visible church) but then, sadly, to depart from the faith, thus demonstrating that he or she never was a regenerate, believing person, despite being externally and objectively a member of the covenant community. Thus, whether one thinks of the nature of Israel or the church, they are *essentially* the same. That is why both communities may include the elect and nonelect, baptized believers and unbelievers—that is, those who by receiving the covenant sign (circumcision or baptism) are externally and objectively brought into covenant membership but who may never exercise saving faith. Covenant theology then applies this understanding to infant baptism and contends that there is nothing objectionable in applying the covenant sign of baptism to infants and viewing them as full members of the church apart from explicit faith in Christ.

At this point, someone could dispute this particular interpretation of the warning and apostasy passages. In fact, one could contend that this line of argument leads to the interpretation that it is possible for true, regenerate Christians to lose their salvation. After all, has not Arminian theology repeatedly argued this exact point from these texts?[166] Needless to say, covenant theologians counter by arguing that the Arminian understanding of these texts is unbiblical *as applied to the elect*.[167] The Bible does not teach that true Christians (elect) can lose their salvation. Ironically, however, they agree with the Arminian exegesis and conclusion *as applied*

to full covenant members who are not the elect. Thus, for most covenant theologians, these texts do not imply that it is possible for the elect to lose their salvation; rather, they demonstrate that "unregenerate members of the visible church can be covenant breakers in the new covenant"[168] and that the new covenant is a breakable covenant like the old. In commenting on the implications of the warning texts for understanding the nature of the church, Doug Wilson confidently asserts, "The *elect* and the *covenant members* are not identical sets of people."[169] Hence, accordingly, the warning texts of Scripture corroborate their view that the covenant community across the ages is a mixed community. Wilson nicely summarizes this view when he writes,

> The baptistic assumption [those who reject a mixed view] is that the covenants are *unlike* in this respect. Some Old Covenant members were regenerate, some were not. All New Covenant members are regenerate. The paedobaptist [covenant theology] assumption is that the covenants are *alike* in this respect. Some Old Covenant members were regenerate, some were not. Some New Covenant members are regenerate, some are not. The paedobaptist holds that the *difference* between the covenants is that the promises in the New are much better —meaning that the ratio of believer to unbeliever will drastically change. The history of the New Israel will not be dismal like the Old Israel.[170]

4. Further supporting evidence is found in the promise given in Acts 2:39—"for you and your children"—as well as in the household theme across the canon and in the household baptisms in the New Testament (see Acts 16:15, 32–33; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16). Covenant theologians are not bothered by the fact that there is no unambiguous example of infant baptism in the New Testament; rather, they are convinced that passages such as Acts 2:39, alongside the importance of family relations in Scripture and the recording of household baptisms in the New Testament, provide a strong biblical warrant to ground the practice of infant baptism. Why? Because it is almost unthinkable that infants would not be considered part of the church through the covenantal sign of baptism given the continuity of the covenant of grace and given the importance of households and family

solidarity in the Old Testament. Infants, in the church, especially of Jewish-Christian parents, would naturally be regarded as subjects of baptism, just as they were of circumcision in the Old Testament. Since infants of believers were always included in the covenant under older covenant administrations, then we must assume that, apart from explicit biblical warrant to the contrary, infants of believers are still included in the church today. We do not need a specific command to baptize infants nor do we need an unambiguous example of infant baptism in the New Testament. The principle of continuity leads us to assume that infants are included in the church unless we are explicitly told that they are not. As noted above, ironically, this hermeneutical argument is similar to one that dispensational theology makes, though applied in different areas. Dispensational thought makes it in regard to the land promise, while covenant theology makes it in regard to the genealogical principle, both of which are tied to the Abrahamic covenant![171]

Given what has been stated, it is not surprising that this question bears important implications for how covenant theology views the nature and function of the covenant signs since, given the continuity of the covenant of grace and the covenant community, it is assumed that the covenant signs (circumcision and baptism) signify the same realities. Let us now turn to this last point.

Covenant Theology and Covenant Signs

Given the continuity of the covenant of grace and the covenant community, covenant theology also contends that the covenant signs carry essentially the same meaning. In fact, it is this understanding that constitutes part of the overall defense of paedobaptism, since the relationship between circumcision and baptism is one of *replacement*. No doubt, in replacing circumcision, baptism signifies that the promised era of the Old Testament has come to fulfillment in Christ. In this sense, the new covenant *fulfills* the old. However, the basic *substantial* meaning of circumcision and baptism is the same, namely, the covenant promise of God.[172]

What is the essential meaning of the two covenantal signs? The signs signify entrance into the covenant community and access to all the blessings

pertaining thereto. Thus, for example, covenant theology argues that circumcision was the outward "sign and seal" of entrance into the covenant of grace and the covenant community. It was a "sign" in the sense that it signified something; it was a "seal" in that it confirmed the binding nature of the covenant, grounded in God's promises to his covenant people.[173] Circumcision was administered to all infant male children when they were eight days old. However, circumcision was not effective on its own in any kind of *ex opere operato* way; it always had to be combined with faith. If it was not, one showed himself to be a covenant breaker instead of a covenant keeper. This explains why many Israelites who were circumcised externally proved in the end to be covenant breakers, as they failed to persevere in an obedient faith. Furthermore, it was for this reason that one could legitimately distinguish between the covenant members (those who were externally circumcised) and the spiritual remnant or elect (those who were externally circumcised and internally regenerated) within the covenant community of Israel.

What may be said about circumcision, so the argument goes, is also true of baptism. In the New Testament, baptism *replaces* circumcision as the covenant "sign and seal." In baptism, as with circumcision, we are brought into the *visible* church, identified with Christ, and considered full covenant members. But as with circumcision, baptism does not effect a saving union in and of itself. It is only by God's grace, when God's Spirit makes us alive, grants us faith and repentance, and unites us with Christ, that we experience true salvation—the reality to which baptism points. That is why, parallel to the Old Testament, even if infants are baptized under the new covenant and considered covenant members, they are truly the remnant or part of the *invisible* church only if they exercise saving faith in our Lord and persevere in him.

For our purposes, what is important to observe regarding this discussion of circumcision is that most of the argument attempts to demonstrate the *spiritual* meaning and significance of the rite.[174] Why? Because central to the covenantal argument is the *continuity* of the covenantal signs—a continuity that seeks to point to the *spiritual* realities of such things as regeneration, justification, union with Christ, and ultimately Christ's cross

work. Hence, for baptism to *replace* circumcision, it must be shown that both circumcision and baptism signify the same thing. But to anticipate our argument in chapter 19, no one disputes the fact that baptism signifies *spiritual* realities won by Christ and applied to us as his people. The point of contention is whether circumcision, *in its Old Testament covenantal context*, conveys *the exact same realities* as baptism does in the New Testament. Does not circumcision also convey more—for example, national, typological, and spiritual realities—which minimally demands that circumcision and baptism are similar in meaning but *not* exactly the same? The only way to resolve this issue is to think through the relationships between the biblical covenants. As we do, we must be careful not to read new covenant realities into the old without first grasping the Old Testament rite in its own covenantal context and then carefully thinking through the similarities and differences of the covenantal signs.

In covenant theology the *spiritual* meaning of circumcision is understood in at least three ways—ways that ultimately link it to baptism under the new covenant, so that what may be said about circumcision may also be said about baptism.[175]

1. At the heart of the Abrahamic covenant is the covenantal formula "I will be your God, and you will be my people," which speaks to the blessing of union and communion with the Lord. As a sign of the covenant, circumcision signifies and seals this blessing. Objectively, it makes one a member of the covenant community. The same may be said of baptism, which signifies that the recipient has objectively entered into faith union with Christ in his redemptive work.[176] This is not to deny that the recipient must still exercise faith before covenant blessings may be appropriated. Failure to respond in faith to one's baptism brings covenant curses instead of blessings. But note: like circumcision, baptism is viewed as a sign that promises and anticipates gospel realities; it does *not* affirm or testify that these same gospel realities have already taken place in the recipient.

2. Circumcision, as a physical act, signified the removal of the defilement of sin, the cleansing from sin, and it pointed to the need for a spiritual circumcision of the heart (see Ex. 6:12, 30; Lev. 19:23; 26:41; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 6:10; 9:25). Likewise, baptism is an outward

sign of the inward, spiritual need for the grace of God in the heart of the covenant member—"it points to the necessity of spiritual regeneration";[177] it does *not* testify that regeneration has already taken place.

3. Circumcision was the seal of the righteousness that Abraham had by faith while he was yet uncircumcised (Rom. 4:11). As such, in circumcision, "God signified and sealed the fact that he justifies believers by faith and considers us as righteous through faith."[178] Circumcision is not a guarantee that Abraham has faith, nor even that Abraham (or anyone else, for that matter) has righteousness. Instead, "what circumcision guarantees is the word of God's promise: that *righteousness will be given on the basis of faith*."[179] The same is true of baptism. This is why both circumcision and baptism testify to God's promise to justify the ungodly by faith. This is also why one can circumcise or baptize an infant before faith is present. The covenant sign is simply a promise that righteousness will be given when a person believes the covenant promises of God.

Thus, regarding the significance of circumcision and baptism, covenant theology insists that the two signs signify the same gospel truths, namely, regeneration (Rom. 2:29; Col. 2:11–12), union with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Gal. 3:27–29), and all the blessings related to that union (Acts 2:38). Because the signs signify the same meaning and application, if it is legitimate in the previous covenants to apply the sign to "believers and their children," then the same is true in the new covenant era. This, however, raises an obvious question: If the signs signify the same truth, then why did circumcision end as a covenant sign, especially for the Jewish Christian? Most covenant theologians argue that the change was administrative due to the greater blessings of the new covenant, especially in extending more blessings to more people (e.g., Jew and Gentile). As noted above, as we move from previous covenants to the new covenant, we also move from promise to fulfillment. Now that Christ has come, some of the previous rites are changed to reflect the completed work of Christ. Baptism has replaced the bloody rite of circumcision, just as the Lord's Supper has replaced the bloody Passover lamb.[180]

Here in summary form is the basic viewpoint of covenant theology, especially regarding how it conceives the nature and relationship of the

biblical covenants and the implications this has for its ecclesiology. As with dispensationalism, covenant theology is a biblical-theological viewpoint that seeks to "put together" the canon of Scripture and grasp something of God's glorious plan. Although both views agree on many central truths of the gospel, they also disagree, especially in how they understand the nature of the biblical covenants and their (inter)relationships. In the next chapter, after a brief hermeneutical discussion about how we go about the task of reading and applying Scripture, we will return to these two theological systems by highlighting some of the key issues that need adjudication and why it is that we are convinced that *kingdom through covenant*, or *progressive covenantalism*, explains the overall biblical storyline better than the present two biblical-theological systems. In the remaining chapters we will seek to demonstrate this thesis and how it affects various doctrinal areas in systematic theology.

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1. Parts of chap. 2 are adapted from Stephen J. Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," chap. 4 in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H, 2006). Used by permission of B&H.

2. On this point, see Glenn R. Kreider, "What Is Dispensationalism? A Proposal," in *Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption: A Developing and Diverse Tradition*, ed. D. Jeffrey Bingham and Glenn R. Kreider (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015), 17, who states, "Dispensationalists confess the historic faith of the church, the Trinity, Chalcedonian Christology, the lostness of all humanity, salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, the resurrection of the dead, the bodily return of Christ, etc. Dispensationalists do not have distinctive views of the Godhead, salvation, Christology, or the gospel." The same may be said of covenant theology. We agree on more than we disagree on.

3. For helpful summaries of dispensational theology, see Bingham and Kreider, eds., *Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption*; John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Christ's Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012); Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1993); Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: A Search for Definition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992); Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993); Herbert W. Bateman IV, ed., *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999); Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master, eds., *Issues in Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994); John S. Feinberg, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments; Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson Jr.* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988); Ron J. Bigalke Jr., ed., *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Analysis of the Movement and Defense of Traditional Dispensationalism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005). For a helpful discussion of dispensationalism from a covenant theology perspective, see Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994).

4. On the history and development of dispensationalism, see Michael J. Svigel, "The History of Dispensationalism in Seven Eras," in Bingham and Kreider, *Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption*, 69–100; Craig A. Blaising, "The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," in Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 10–13; Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 69–88; Ron J. Bigalke Jr. and Thomas D. Ice, "History of Dispensationalism," in Bigalke, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, xvi–xlii; cf. Michael Williams, *This World Is Not My Home: The Origins and Development of Dispensationalism* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2003).

5. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (1948; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1993).

6. Blaising, "Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," 22.

7. Blaising lists eight common features of dispensationalism that unite it as a theological tradition: biblical authority, dividing up redemptive history into dispensations, the newness and uniqueness of the church over against Israel, the significance of the

universal church, a literal reading of biblical prophecy, premillennialism, the imminent return of Christ, and a future for national Israel. Ibid., 13–21.

8. Ibid., 22.

9. The "revised" label is from Blaising, but those within this variety of dispensationalism refer to themselves as "traditional" dispensationalists. For example, see Robert L. Thomas, "The Traditional Dispensational View," in *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 87–136.

10. See Kreider, "What Is Dispensationalism?," 20–21; Craig A. Blaising, "Dispensations in Biblical Theology," in Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 106–11; John S. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," in Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 68–69. Technically, the word "dispensation" is the anglicized form of *dispensatio*, the Latin Vulgate rendering of *oikonomia*.

11. Kreider, "What Is Dispensationalism?," 21. Building on this understanding of "dispensations," Ron Bigalke Jr. and Mal Couch define *dispensationalism* as a viewpoint that "views the Word of God as unfolding distinguishable economies in the outworking of the divine purposes for the nation of Israel in a distinct and separate manner from His purpose for the church." "The Relationship between Covenants and Dispensations," in Bigalke, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 18.

12. Kreider, "What Is Dispensationalism?," 20.

13. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 9–10.

14. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 69. Feinberg also notes two other important points: (1) to prove dispensationalism requires more than showing the biblical evidence for "dispensations," and (2) the number of "dispensations" one holds to is not essential to dispensationalism. Ibid., 68–70.

15. See the discussions regarding the "essentials" of dispensationalism in Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 27–55; Craig A. Blaising, "Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition," in Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church*, 13–34; Michael Vlach, "What Is Dispensationalism?," in MacArthur and Mayhue, *Christ's Prophetic Plans*, 19–38.

16. For Israel's future mediatorial role to the nations, see Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 259, 306–23. Not all progressive dispensationalists claim this mediatorial role for Israel. Some speak more in terms of the prominence of Israel or of distinct blessings to Israel, while believing Gentile nations are also viewed as God's one people. See Craig A. Blaising, "God's Plan for History: The Consummation," in Bingham and Kreider, *Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption*, 195–218.

17. See Robert L. Saucy, "Is Christ the Fulfillment of National Israel's Prophecies? Yes and No!" *MSJ* 28, no. 1 (2017): 17–39.

18. Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 267. Of course, "replacement" is a loaded word in today's discussion. Nondispensational theology is often viewed as a "replacement" theology or a form of supersessionism. This is an unhelpful way of describing nondispensational views since covenant theology and our view of progressive covenantalism do *not* affirm such a view. Our recommendation is that such pejorative language be dropped from our polemics since it simply clouds the real debate.

19. On this point, see Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 49–51, 262–83; Blaising, "God's Plan for History: The Consummation," 195–218; Craig A. Blaising, "Biblical Hermeneutics," in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 79–105; cf. Vlach, "What Is Dispensationalism?," 27–33; and the essays in Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser, eds., *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel: Israel and the Jewish People in the Plan of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014).

20. See Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 71–85; and Blaising, "Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," 13–21, who unpack the unique features of dispensational theology primarily in terms of the Israel-church relation.

21. The "mixed" nature of the covenant communities refers to the belief that under both the old and new covenants, the locus of the covenant community and the locus of the elect are distinct. Based on this mixed view of the church, covenant theology affirms the invisible-visible church distinction. Visibly, the church *is constituted* by believers *and* unbelievers, or, as covenant theologians say, "believers and their children"—children who may or may not be among the elect—while the *invisible* church consists of the elect of all ages. Dispensationalism has argued for the unique, new nature of the church as a regenerate people and thus by nature different from Israel.

22. Blaising, "God's Plan for History: The Consummation," 210.

23. Ibid.

24. One has only to think of such books as Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973); Lindsey, *There's a New World Coming* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision, 1974); Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1996); and the entire *Left Behind* series of books and movies.

25. Covenant theology affirms a variety of millennial views, including historic premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism, but dispensationalism affirms a distinctive form of premillennialism tied to its understanding of the Israel-church relationship. For a helpful description of covenant theology's view of the church as the restored, eschatological Israel, which inherits the new creation, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994); cf. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 651–772; Benjamin L. Gladd and Matthew S. Harmon, *Making All Things New: Inaugurated Eschatology for the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 15–35.

26. For a thorough and helpful discussion of differences within dispensationalism, see Brent E. Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern: A Theological Critique of Covenant and Dispensational Theologies" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017).

27. See Blaising, “Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism,” 23; cf. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 19–29.

28. For a more detailed description of this point, see Lewis S. Chafer, “Dispensationalism,” *BSac* 93 (1936): 390–449; cf. Blaising, “Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism,” 23–24.

29. See *Scofield Reference Bible*, note on Gen. 1:28; cf. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 21–22.

30. Blaising, “Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism,” 24.

31. Ibid., 27; cf. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 21–22.

32. A notable exception is Lewis Sperry Chafer, who argues for an Edenic (prelapsarian) and Adamic covenant (which regulates life after the fall). *Systematic Theology*, 1:42. However, later dispensationalists have not emphasized a creation covenant, which either is rejected as not existing or does not play a central role in their overall theological system.

33. Poythress nicely captures classic dispensationalism at this point. He says, “Scofield is a [*sic*] not a pure literalist, but a literalist with respect to what pertains to Israel. The dualism of Israel and the church is, in fact, the deeper dualism determining when and where the hermeneutical dualism of ‘literal’ and ‘spiritual’ is applied.” *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 24.

34. See Blaising, “Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism,” 28–29. One has only to note how Jesus applies the new covenant to his death and thus to the church (Matt. 26:27–28, par.), let alone the book of Hebrews (Hebrews 8–10).

35. For a more detailed treatment of the relationship between the kingdom and the covenants in classic dispensationalism, see Blaising, “Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism,” 30–31.

36. Ibid., 31.

37. Ibid., 32.

38. Ibid. Between revised dispensationalists there was a debate over the precise location of the eternal state. Alvin McClain, Dwight Pentecost, and Herman Hoyt argued for a resurrected, glorified state on earth, while John Walvoord and Charles Ryrie argued for that state in heaven and not on the earth.

39. For a more complete view of the Israel-church relation, see Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 143–57; and Stanley D. Toussaint, “Israel and the Church of a Traditional Dispensationalist,” in Bateman, *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, 227–52.

40. For a helpful discussion of the new covenant within traditional dispensationalism, see Mike Stallard, ed., *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant: Three Views* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2012).

41. Bigalke, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 52.

42. See John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom: A Basic Text in Premillennial Theology* (repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 197–207; Elliott E. Johnson, “Covenants in Traditional Dispensationalism,” in Bateman, *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, 130–31, 144.

43. Johnson, “Covenants in Traditional Dispensationalism,” 155 (emphasis mine).

44. Blaising, “Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism,” 38.

45. Ibid. 38.

46. Traditional dispensationalism still viewed the church as a “parenthesis” in relation to God’s program with Israel (see Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 146–47, 156). Because Israel rejected her Messiah, she was temporarily set aside in the unfolding of God’s plan. The church is the *mystery* in God’s plan and is viewed as “a distinct anthropological group” (Vlach, “What Is Dispensationalism?,” 29), and this approach still entails the affirmation of two peoples of God.

47. On this point, progressive dispensationalists appeal to a “complementary hermeneutic” and to inaugurated eschatology. The former refers to a “literal” reading of Scripture that also includes change and advancement by the New Testament authors. Yet while they introduce change and advancement, their original authorial intent (“literal”) remains, so that God can say more in his promises from the Old Testament to the New but not less. This hermeneutic affects how Old Testament promises to Israel are applied to the church in the New Testament. For example, when Acts applies restoration promises of Israel to the church (e.g., Acts 2), progressives conclude that these are applied *spiritually* to the church but that the *literal* promise to national Israel still remains. This hermeneutic also works in tandem with their understanding of inaugurated eschatology. For example, the New Testament applies Jeremiah 31 to the church, but by use of a complementary hermeneutic, progressives contend that in the *already*, only the *spiritual* aspects are applied to the church, but in the *not yet*, the “literal” fulfillment will be applied to national Israel. See, e.g., Bruce A. Ware, “The New Covenant and the People(s) of God,” in Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church*, 68–97.

48. For a discussion by Ryrie, see *Dispensationalism*, 182–83, and for one by Walvoord, see John F. Walvoord, “Biblical Kingdoms Compared and Contrasted,” in Willis and Master, *Issues in Dispensationalism*, 75–91.

49. Blaising, “Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism,” 41.

50. See ibid., 46–48; cf. J. Lanier Burns, “Israel and the Church of a Progressive Dispensationalist,” in Bateman, *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, 263–91.

51. Blaising, “Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism,” 48.

52. Ibid., 48 (emphasis mine).

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., 49.

55. Ibid., 50.

56. Blaising views the consummation as consisting of redeemed people living as *nations*, according to their own identities "and assignments." Redeemed Israel, then, will have a different "assignment" than redeemed Gentile nations, which also have their own "assignment." "God's Plan for History: The Consummation," 212. Although progressives strongly affirm *one* people of God (contra earlier forms of dispensationalism), one wonders how speaking of different "assignments" is not a return to *two* peoples, at least in the sense that God's promises are applied *differently* to redeemed national Israel and Gentile nations. On this point, covenant theology *and* progressive covenantalism would contend that the church as God's new humanity, regardless of our ethnicity and gender, *equally* and *fully* receive *all* God's promises in Christ Jesus without distinction of national assignment.

57. See Blaising, "Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," 52–53. Older dispensationalists equated typology with spiritual interpretation. Blaising gives the example of how oil was thought to be a type of the Holy Spirit in that oil was symbolic of the Spirit. However, older dispensationalists did not view typology as a divinely planned and purposed "person, event, or institution" that pointed beyond itself to something greater in God's unfolding plan and that over time came to be recognized as such.

58. Ibid., 52.

59. See Craig A. Blaising, "The Structure of Biblical Covenants: The Covenants Prior to Christ," in Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 134–35; cf. Eugene H. Merrill, "The Covenant with Abraham: The Keystone of Biblical Architecture," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 12 (2008): 5–17; Darrell L. Bock, "Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism," in Bateman, *Three Crucial Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, 169–203. Blaising begins his analysis of the structure of the biblical covenants with the Noahic covenant, although recognizing the links to the divine intentions in Genesis 1–2. "Structure of Biblical Covenants," 128–29. However, Merrill, like Lewis Sperry Chafer before him, does recognize an Adamic covenant in Gen. 1:26–28. See Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 239–41; and Merrill, "Covenant and the Kingdom: Genesis 1–3 as Foundation for Biblical Theology," *CTR* 1, no. 2 (1987): 295–308. Yet this affirmation is different from a majority of dispensationalists.

60. A "royal-grant" covenant is an "unconditional" or "unilateral" covenant. The king enters into a relationship with his subjects and guarantees a certain gift to his subjects regardless of whether they obey. In contrast, a "bilateral" or "conditional" covenant is a covenant similar to the suzerain-vassal treaties of the ancient Near East. In such an arrangement the suzerain, or king, enters into relationship with his vassals, or subjects. The king promises certain things to the subjects, and the subjects in return promise to obey the terms of the covenant. They also agree that if they disobey the king, the king has the right to punish them, but if they obey, then the king must keep his promises to them. Merrill also identifies the Abrahamic covenant as a royal grant; see *Everlasting Dominion*, 239; "Covenant with Abraham," 8. For a more detailed discussion of these various kinds of covenants, see Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 17–43; Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975); cf. George M. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: The Biblical Colloquium, 1955).

61. Blaising, "Structure of Biblical Covenants," 133. See also Merrill, "Covenant with Abraham," 10–11.

62. Blaising, "Structure of Biblical Covenants," 134.

63. Ibid., 144.

64. Ibid., 173. For a detailed discussion of the Davidic covenant and kingdom promise, see Darrell L. Bock, "Current Messianic Activity and OT Davidic Promise: Dispensationalism, Hermeneutics, and NT Fulfillment," *TJ* 15, no. 1 (1994): 55–87. Progressives, contra traditional dispensationalists, argue that the Davidic covenant has an inaugural fulfillment in Christ's first coming, although its complete fulfillment occurs at Christ's return. However, Saucy denies that Christ's present session involves an active messianic rule. Blaising and Bock, on the other hand, affirm Christ's present rule, which is consummated at Christ's return. See Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 72–76, 80, 101, 106; Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 162–87.

65. Blaising, "Structure of Biblical Covenants," 202.

66. Blaising, "Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," 53.

67. As noted above, progressives appeal to the already–not yet tension of inaugurated eschatology to explain this. In Christ and the arrival of the new covenant, God's promises are "already" beginning to reach their fulfillment, yet, as Blaising comments, "The fact that the fullness of new covenant blessing awaits the return of Christ is not surprising since the prophecies of the new covenant envisioned Messiah reigning upon the earth over a transformed people. Included in that vision was the political restoration of Israel in peace with all other nations." Craig A. Blaising, "The Fulfillment of the Biblical Covenants through Jesus Christ," in Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 210. But what is important to note is that progressives are convinced that there is still a future land promise for Israel tied to the Abrahamic covenant—a covenant that is irrevocable and not yet fully realized in all its promises.

68. Blaising, "Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," 54.

69. Blaising, "God's Plan for History: The Consummation," 211.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. See ibid., 13–21; Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 71–85; Vlach, "What Is Dispensationalism?," 24–38.

73. The latter is especially evident in Vlach's summary of the essence of dispensationalism: (1) progressive revelation from the New Testament does not interpret Old Testament passages in a way that cancels the original authorial intent of the Old Testament writers as determined by historical-grammatical hermeneutics; (2) types exist, but national Israel is not a type that is superseded by

the church; (3) Israel and the church are distinct—thus, the church cannot be identified as the new or true Israel; (4) there is both a spiritual unity in salvation between Jews and Gentiles and a future role for Israel as a nation; (5) the nation Israel will be saved, will be restored with a unique identity, and will function in a future millennial kingdom on the earth; and (6) there are multiple senses of "seed of Abraham"—thus, the church's identification as "seed of Abraham" does not cancel God's promises to the believing Jewish "seed of Abraham." Vlach, "What Is Dispensationalism?," 24–38.

74. Blaising, "Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," 15.

75. For some helpful overviews of covenant theology and its development, see Peter A. Lillback, "Covenant Theology," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Martin Davie, et al., 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 225–27; William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology*, rev. ed. (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2013); John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 55–84; Michael S. Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006); Herman Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 193–232; Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology: The Key of Theology in Reformed Thought and Tradition* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2004); Jeong Koo Jeon, *Covenant Theology: John Murray's and Meredith G. Kline's Response to the Historical Development of Federal Theology in Reformed Thought* (New York: University Press of America, 1999); Geerhardus Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B.Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1979), 234–67; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980); Vern Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 39–51; Willem VanGemeren, "Systems of Continuity," in Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 37–62.

76. No theological viewpoint arises without historical precedents. Thus, R. Scott Clark is right to argue that although covenant theology arose in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, elements of it can be found in the patristic era as well. "Theses on Covenant Theology," September 1, 2012, http://rscottclark.org/2012/09/theses-on-covenant-theology/. See also Golding, *Covenant Theology*, 13–45, who discusses some early theologians who affirm a basic covenant theology direction without its full development.

77. Horton, *God of Promise*, 13; cf. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), for a more extensive development of this idea.

78. Horton, *God of Promise*, 14.

79. On these three covenants, see R. Scott Clark, "Christ and Covenant: Federal Theology in Orthodoxy," in *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis, Brill's Companion to the Christian Tradition 40 (Boston: Brill, 2013), 406–7. As we will note below, covenant theologians disagree as to exactly with whom God makes the covenant of grace, i.e., whether the elect alone or the elect and their children.

80. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 40. This point is underscored by Richard L. Pratt Jr., who argues that "baptism administers the NT dispensation of the covenant of grace in ways that are analogous to the administration of the OT dispensation *of that same covenant*," although there are *different* covenants involved in redemptive history. "Reformed View: Baptism as a Sacrament of the Covenant," in *Understanding Four Views on Baptism*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 65 (emphasis mine).

81. If one asks, When did the church begin? dispensationalism and covenant theology answer differently. For dispensationalism, the church is new in redemptive history and thus begins at Pentecost. For covenant theology, the church begins with the inauguration of the covenant of grace after God's initial redemption promise (Gen. 3:15), acknowledging a redemptive-historical difference between Israel and the church but viewing the *nature* of the two communities as the same.

82. As noted above, the mixed nature of the covenant communities refers to the belief that under both the old and the new covenants, the locus of the covenant community and the locus of the elect are distinct, hence covenant theology's important emphasis on the "visible" versus "invisible" church. Against a believers' view of the church, i.e., that the church is constituted by regenerate people, covenant theology contends that the church is constituted by both believers and unbelievers, or, as they like to say, "believers and their children"—children who may or may not be a part of the elect.

83. Bavinck admits that Christians now experience a greater "consciousness and enjoyment" of salvation because the "natural and temporal" forms of the old have given way to the "spiritual and eternal" in Christ's coming and work. *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 221.

84. For a Seventh-day Adventist form of covenant theology, see Hans K. LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2005). Federal Vision is associated with Douglas Wilson, Richard Lusk, et al. See Douglas Wilson, *"Reformed" Is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2002). For a critique of Federal Vision by traditional covenant theology, see Guy Prentiss Waters, *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology: A Comparative Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006). For Reformed Baptist views embracing some form of covenant theology, see Earl M. Blackburn, ed., *Covenant Theology: A Baptist Distinctive* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013); Richard C. Barcellos, ed., *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2014); Greg Nichols, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed and Baptistic Perspective on God's Covenants* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2011).

85. Horton, *God of Promise*, 10. For a detailed discussion of how to define *covenant*, see Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 34–43; Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 3–15.

86. Horton, *God of Promise*, 10.

87. See Horton, *God of Promise*, 77–110; cf. Golding, *Covenant Theology*; Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 212–16; Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," 234–67; John Murray, "Covenant Theology," in *Collected Writings* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982), 4:216–40; Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 3–63.

88. J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2016), 131–32; cf. Vos, "Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," 245–52.

89. If *covenant* is defined solely in terms of ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties, then God's eternal plan is not covenantal, since Scripture knows of no suzerain-vassal arrangement between the persons of the Godhead. As Horton notes, "After all, each person [of the Trinity] is equally divine: there are no lords and servants in the eternal trinitarian relationship. Furthermore, there is no formal treaty structure to this covenant in Scripture—no historical prologue, stipulations, sanctions, and so forth. . . . Only an overly restrictive definition of covenant would seem to justify the claim that the covenant of redemption is speculative rather than biblical." *God of Promise*, 81–82.

90. Horton, *God of Promise*, 79; cf. also Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (1852; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:354–73; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1941; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 265–83; Murray, "Covenant Theology," 4:216–40.

91. For a helpful discussion of the covenant of redemption, along with criticisms of the concept from within covenant theology, see David VanDrunen and R. Scott Clark, "The Covenant before the Covenants," in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 167–96. Also see the helpful summary of the covenant of redemption in Nichols, *Covenant Theology*, 303–19.

92. On the scriptural data, see Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 129–41.

93. VanDrunen and Clark, "The Covenant before the Covenants," 175.

94. See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 211–18; Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 216–28.

95. See the Westminster Confession of Faith 7.2.

96. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:121.

97. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 215.

98. See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 216.

99. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 215. Adam's obedience to God's positive command is often viewed in terms of merit or of Adam earning eternal life. Cf. Horton, *God of Promise*, 89. Bavinck states, "In Scripture, there are only two covenants, two ways to heaven for human beings, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The covenant of works is the way to heaven for the unfallen, the covenant of grace that for fallen humans." *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 227–28.

100. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 216; cf. Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 63–64.

101. Horton, *God of Promise*, 89.

102. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 216.

103. Herman Bavinck, *God and Creation*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 564; cf. Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 224–28.

104. There is debate within covenant theology on the perpetuity of the covenant of works. Berkhof argues the majority view that in one sense the covenant is abrogated, and in another sense it is not. *Systematic Theology*, 218; cf. Vos, "Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," 254–55. For a contrary view, see Robert Letham, "'Not a Covenant of Works in Disguise' (Herman Bavinck): The Place of the Mosaic Covenant in Redemptive History," *MAJT* 24 (2013): 143–77. Letham argues that the *effects* of the covenant of works remain, but as a covenant it is broken and now abolished (148). Humans are still required to obey God as creatures but not in covenant terms. The covenant of works is not ongoing; rather, it is God's law given in the covenant that remains in force today.

105. For a helpful discussion of the debate within covenant theology, see Horton, *God of Promise*, 83–104; cf. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 119–21; Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 65–66; Nichols, *Covenant Theology*, 331–34.

106. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 121; cf. John Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2:49; Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 44–58.

107. See Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 63; cf. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, rev. ed., 1–58.

108. See Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2:49–57.

109. Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 65; cf. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 119.

110. Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 65.

111. Ibid., 65.

112. Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 56.

113. See ibid., 56.

114. Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 421.

115. See Horton, *God of Promise*, 77–110; cf. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 612.

116. See Horton, *God of Promise*, 31–34, 47, 90, 94, 97–104, 130–31; cf. Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 320–23.

117. Horton, *God of Promise*, 88.

118. Cornelis P. Venema, "The Mosaic Covenant: A 'Republication' of the Covenant of Works? A Review Article: *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*," *MAJT* 21 (2010): 92 (emphasis original). Bavinck argues similarly: "The covenant with Israel was essentially no other than that with Abraham. . . . The covenant on Mount Sinai is and remains a covenant of grace." *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 220.

119. Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 72–73.

120. For helpful discussions of the covenant of grace, see Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 272–83; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:362–77; Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 216–32; Vos, "Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," 252–67; Golding, *Covenant Theology*, 121–63.

121. Robert Randy Booth, *Children of the Promise: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 9; cf. Murray, "Covenant Theology," 4:223–34.

122. Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 215–16; cf. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 277–80; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:364–73; Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 45–52.

123. Covenant theologians differ on how to view Israel's land promise and its present fulfillment. Some argue that, tied to the Sinai covenant, the promise was broken by national Israel and thus forfeited. Horton holds, "It is hardly anti-Semitic to observe that the covenant with Israel as a national entity in league with God was conditional and that the nation had so thoroughly violated that covenant that its theocratic status was revoked. Dispensationalism . . . treat[s] the land promise as eternal and irrevocable, even to the extent that there can be a difference between Israel and the church in God's plan. . . . [This fails] to recognize that the Hebrew Scriptures themselves qualify this national covenant in strictly conditional terms." *God of Promise*, 47. Others argue that the land is grounded in Eden and typological of the new creation that has now come in Christ and the dawning of the new creation. See O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), 3–31.

124. Booth, *Children of the Promise*, 10; cf. Pratt, "Reformed View," 64–69, for the same view.

125. It is interesting to consider how Reformed Baptist covenant theology thinks about *the* covenant of grace differently than paedobaptist covenant theology. Reformed Baptist theology offers two approaches. First, the 1689 Federalists argue that *the* covenant of grace is to be identified only with the new covenant; the other biblical covenants reveal and point forward to the covenant of grace / new covenant, but they are *not* administrations of it. See Pascal Denault, "By Farther Steps: A Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist Covenant Theology," in Barcellos, *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage*, 71–107. Second, other Reformed Baptists adopt the framework of paedobaptist covenant theology except on the nature of the church and the circumcision-baptism relationship. See Walter Chantry, "The Covenants of Works and Grace," in Blackburn, *Covenant Theology*, 108.

126. See Venema, "The Mosaic Covenant," 93, who argues that because the Mosaic administration "includes everything that belongs to the substance of the covenant of grace, it communicated the same grace of Christ, albeit in the form of anticipatory types and shadows."

127. See, e.g., Booth, *Children of the Promise*, 51; Jeffrey D. Niell, "The Newness of the New Covenant," in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 127–55; cf. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 25–26. In stating that covenant theology views the new covenant in *renewal* terms, we are highlighting its emphasis on continuity in the covenant of grace. Yet some covenant theologians (e.g., Michael Horton) talk about the newness of the new covenant in qualitatively different terms, especially when contrasted with the Mosaic covenant. As Horton states, "The point could not be clearer [from Jer. 31:31–34]: the new covenant is not a renewal of the old covenant made at Sinai, but an entirely different covenant with an entirely different basis." *God of Promise*, 53. Yet, as noted above, Horton views the old covenant as a mixture of the covenants of works and of grace. When it comes to viewing the new covenant in relation to the Abrahamic and other biblical covenants, which Horton believes are "gospel" covenants, given their unconditional, royal-grant nature, he does argue for a substance continuity between the Old Testament covenants and the new covenant.

128. These points are taken from a variety of sources. See Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 223–24; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 299–301; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:376–77; Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 57–63, 275–86, 293–96. Cf. David Gibson, "'Fathers of Faith, My Fathers Now!': On Abraham, Covenant, and the Theology of Paedobaptism," *Themelios* 40, no. 1 (2015): 14–34; Booth, *Children of the Promise*, 63–66; Douglas Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations: Infant Baptism—Covenant Mercy for the People of God* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 1996), 22–34; Niell, "Newness of the New Covenant," 127–55; Richard L. Pratt Jr., "Infant Baptism in the New Covenant," in Strawbridge, *Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, 156–74; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The Case for Infant Baptism," *Christianity Today* (October 9, 1964), 7–10.

129. See Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 228–32.

130. Cornelis P. Venema, "Covenant Theology and Baptism," in Strawbridge, *Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, 211.

131. For a development of this argument, see Horton, *God of Promise*, 23–76. Horton, like Blaising in his discussion of the covenants, follows a fairly standard way of categorizing the covenants today: royal-grant and suzerain-vassal. A royal-grant covenant, as represented by the Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants, is unconditional. They all represent a promise of God to fulfill unilaterally the covenant regardless of what the covenant parties do. On the other hand, a suzerain-vassal covenant is conditional and bilateral and thus depends on the parties of the covenant keeping their obligations. In this category Horton places Adam and Israel and their respective covenants.

132. Horton, *God of Promise*, 48.

133. Venema, "Covenant Theology and Baptism," 211. For further discussion of this point, see Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 280–81; Murray, "Covenant Theology," 4:223–34.

134. See Horton, *God of Promise*, 182–86. Horton argues that the new covenant has a vast array of conditions attached to it for final salvation. These conditions involve not only initial repentance and faith but also perseverance in both, as well as holiness of life. However, within the new covenant, since it is a covenant of promise, "everything that God *requires* in this covenant is also *given* by God!" (184).

135. Booth, *Children of the Promise*, 24 (emphasis original).

136. For a development of the "conditional" and "breakable" nature of every biblical covenant, including the new covenant, see Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations*, 81–96; Pratt, "Infant Baptism in the New Covenant," 169–74.

137. On this point, see Venema, "Covenant Theology and Baptism," 214.

138. Horton, *God of Promise*, 182. Horton's more complete statement is this: "Nevertheless, the covenant of grace in its *administration* involves conditions. It is a covenant made with believers and their children. Not everyone in the covenant of grace is elect: the Israel below is a larger class than the Israel above. Some Israelites heard the gospel in the wilderness and responded in faith, while others did not—and the writer to the Hebrews uses this as a warning also to the New Testament heirs of the same covenant of grace (Heb. 4:1–11)."

139. Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 232.

140. Horton, *God of Promise*, 185, 182.

141. For an affirmation of this point, see also Pratt, "Infant Baptism in the New Covenant," 170.

142. Venema, "Covenant Theology and Baptism," 212.

143. Ibid., 214. For a further discussion of this "dual aspect," see Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 272–89.

144. Booth, *Children of the Promise*, 10 (emphasis mine).

145. Interestingly and a bit ironically, covenant theology appeals to the Abrahamic covenant in a similar way as dispensational theology does but with different conclusions. As noted above, dispensationalism argues that the Abrahamic covenant is foundational to all the other covenants and that, hermeneutically speaking, the specific promises that were given and not explicitly abrogated in the New Testament (particularly the land promise) are now still in force. Covenant theologians do *not* view the land promise in exactly the same way, but they argue in a similar fashion for the genealogical principle across the canon starting with the Abrahamic covenant. We will return to this point in chaps. 3 and 19.

146. For example, J. V. Fesko identifies the Abrahamic covenant with the gospel and the new covenant, and then he moves directly from circumcision to baptism and explains how they signify the same truths and how the genealogical principle continues without change. *Word, Water, and Spirit: A Reformed Perspective on Baptism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 342–43, 355–56.

147. See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 632.

148. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 633 (emphasis mine). In fact, Berkhof argues that what is normative for Christians today is not the Mosaic (Sinaitic, old) covenant but the Abrahamic covenant (interpreted in light of its spiritual aspects). The Sinaitic, argues Berkhof, "is an interlude, covering a period in which the real character of the covenant of grace, that is, its free and gracious character, is somewhat eclipsed by all kinds of external ceremonies and forms, which, in connection with the theocratic life of Israel, placed the demands of the law prominently in the foreground, cf. Gal. 3. In the covenant with Abraham, on the other hand, the promise and the faith that responds to the promise are made emphatic" (296–97). In a similar fashion, R. Scott Clark argues that the new covenant is "new" because it is contrasted with Moses (the old covenant) but not with Abraham (or Adam), and it is the covenant with Abraham that continues in the new covenant ushered in by our Lord Jesus Christ. See "A Contemporary Reformed Defense of Infant Baptism," 4, R. Scott Clark's website, September 3, 2012, http://rscottclark.org/2012/09/a-contemporary-reformed-defense-of-infant-baptism/; cf. Horton, *God of Promise*, 40–57, who makes this same point.

149. See John Murray, "Baptism," in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:374. See also this same emphasis in Venema, "Covenant Theology and Baptism," 222; Bryan Chapell, "A Pastoral Overview of Infant Baptism," in Strawbridge, *Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, 11–18.

150. See Venema, "Covenant Theology and Baptism," 214; cf. Horton, *God of Promise*, 182; Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 228–32; Fesko, *Word, Water, and Spirit*, 351–56.

151. See, e.g., the nuanced discussion of the Israel-church relationship in Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 27–70; Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 271–300; Robertson, *Israel of God*, 33–51. Also see Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 651–772.

152. Booth, *Children of the Promise*, 73 (emphasis mine). For this same point, see Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:549–52; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 565–72; Bromiley, "Case for Infant Baptism," 8–9; John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 31–44.

153. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 571.

154. Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 730.

155. See Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 651–772.

156. Booth, *Children of the Promise*, 73 (emphasis original); cf. Gibson, "'Fathers of Faith, My Fathers Now!,'" 21–29; Pratt, "Reformed View," 64–72.

157. Pratt, “Reformed View,” 68.

158. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 566; cf. Pratt, “Reformed View,” 68–72; Fesko, *Word, Water, and Spirit*, 351–56; Booth, *Children of the Promise*, 88–90; Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 31–33.

159. Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 32.

160. See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 566.

161. Pratt, “Reformed View,” 69.

162. On the issue of the biblical order of baptism—namely, first conversion, then baptism—and the close relationship between the two, see the excellent treatment in G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 93–305; Robert H. Stein, “Baptism and Becoming a Christian in the New Testament,” *SBJT* 2, no. 1 (1998): 6–17.

163. These four pieces of evidence are fairly standard in covenant theology literature. See, e.g., Fesko, *Word, Water, and Spirit*, 337–67; Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 651–832; Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 715–871; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 632–35; Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 31–68; Booth, *Children of the Promise*, 71–95; Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations*, 13–96.

164. See Pratt, “Infant Baptism in the New Covenant,” 127–74.

165. Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 728–49; cf. Fesko, *Word, Water, Spirit*, 351–56.

166. See, e.g., Clark H. Pinnock, ed., *Grace Unlimited* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975); and Pinnock, *The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989).

167. See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 545–49; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 781–94.

168. See Gregg Strawbridge, “Introduction,” in Strawbridge, *Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, 4–5.

169. Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations*, 34.

170. Ibid., 34–35.

171. John Murray makes this precise point: “Are we to believe that infants in this age are excluded from that which was provided by the Abrahamic covenant? In other words, are we to believe that infants now may not properly be given the sign of that blessing which is enshrined in the new covenant? Is the new covenant in this respect less generous than was the Abrahamic? Is there less efficacy, as far as infants are concerned, in the new covenant than there was in the old? . . . If infants are excluded now, it cannot be too strongly emphasized that this change implies a complete reversal of the earlier divinely instituted practice. So we must ask: do we find any hint or intimation of such reversal in either the Old or the New Testament? More pointedly, does the New Testament revoke or does it provide any intimation of revoking so expressly authorized a principle as that of the inclusion of infants in the covenant and their participation in the covenant sign and seal? . . . In the absence of such evidence of repeal we conclude that the administering of the sign and seal of the covenant to the infant seed of believers is still in operation and has perpetual divine warrant.” *Christian Baptism*, 48–50. Cf. Gibson, “‘Fathers of Faith, My Fathers Now!,’” 21–29.

172. See Fesko, *Word, Water, and Spirit*, 337–67; Pratt, “Reformed View,” 64–72; Booth, *Children of the Promise*, 96–119; Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 45–68; Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations*, 39–80.

173. For a helpful discussion of “sign and seal,” see Booth, *Children of the Promise*, 98–99.

174. Examples of this argument abound. For example, Louis Berkhof admits that the covenant made with Abraham has a national aspect to it, but then he turns around and contends that the Abrahamic covenant, with its rite of circumcision, must be viewed primarily as a *spiritual* covenant, parallel to the new covenant. *Systematic Theology*, 632–33. Or as Randy Booth contends, “The argument that circumcision had a purely natural or physical reference cannot stand the test of biblical teaching. Circumcision carried primarily a spiritual significance (i.e., justification by faith), and therefore may not be regarded as simply a physical sign of descent. It represented cleanliness (cf. Deut. 30:6; Isa. 52:1). Circumcision was an outward sign of the fact that God required a ‘circumcised’ or cleansed heart.” *Children of the Promise*, 99–100. Cf. Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 46–47.

175. For these points, see Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 45–68; Booth, *Children of the Promise*, 96–119; Mark E. Ross, “Baptism and Circumcision as Signs and Seals,” in Strawbridge, *Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, 85–111; Geerhardus Vos, *Ecclesiology, The Means of Grace, Eschatology*, vol. 5 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), 161–64.

176. See Booth, *Children of the Promise*, 107.

177. See ibid.

178. Ibid., 102.

179. Ross, “Baptism and Circumcision as Signs and Seals,” 94 (emphasis original).

180. See Pratt, “Reformed View,” 65–67, who argues that the Passover is fulfilled in the Lord’s Supper, instead of in Christ. We argue the latter. Also, within paedobaptist covenant theology there is a debate over paedocommunion. Some insist that children should be included in communion since children are full covenant members by baptism (e.g., Douglas Wilson, Peter Leithart, and Gregg Strawbridge in *The Case for Covenant Communion*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge [Monroe, LA: Athanasius, 2006]). Contra paedocommunion, see Cornelis P. Venema, *Children at the Lord’s Table?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009); Fesko, *Word, Water, and Spirit*, 361–65. For a survey of views and critique from a progressive covenantal view, see Brent E. Parker, “Paedocommunion, Paedobaptism, and Covenant Theology: A Baptist Critique and Assessment” *SBJT* 20, no. 1 (2016): 91–122.

3

Hermeneutical Issues in “Putting Together” the Covenants

What does it mean to be “biblical”?[1] How do we rightly exegete biblical texts and draw correct theological conclusions from them? At the heart of Christian theology is the attempt to be biblical, to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5 ESV). But how do we know that our theological proposals are biblically warranted?[2] Obviously, these questions are not new; they have been with us since Scripture was first given and interpreted. And, it must be admitted, these questions are not as easy and straightforward to answer as many assume. All of us have experienced diversity of opinion within the church, even among those of us who affirm Scripture’s full authority. This has apparently led some to treat the Bible like a wax nose, twisting and shaping it at will to fit a variety of viewpoints, with the conclusion that it is impossible to demonstrate one’s interpretation as better, or more biblical, than another.

For this reason, it is necessary to reflect on the hermeneutical task, at least to describe how we are approaching Scripture, interpreting it, and drawing our theological conclusions. Given our thesis that progressive covenantalism explains the data *better* than the other dominant biblical-theological systems on the biblical covenants and their relationships, it is incumbent on us to state our basic hermeneutical approach. Our goal in discussing these points is twofold: first, to describe our hermeneutical commitments; and second, to provide a point of entry for discussing why and where we differ from dispensationalism and covenant theology.

The debate between dispensational and covenant theology is complicated. In theological debates, it is difficult to adjudicate between viewpoints. As most admit, theological positions involve more than merely appealing to one or two texts; entire positions involve a discussion of how texts are understood in their context, how those texts are interrelated with other texts, and ultimately how the entire canon of Scripture is put together. We enter this discussion with a singular focus: a careful investigation of the nature of the biblical covenants and their relationships to each other, since we contend that it is *this* point that is central to the debate.

Before the biblical covenants are expounded in part 2 and some theological implications developed in part 3, this chapter will focus on two broad areas. First, we will discuss how we are approaching, interpreting, and applying Scripture. Second, building on these hermeneutical points, we will revisit the systems of dispensational and covenant theology and discuss some of the key hermeneutical issues that separate them—issues that require adjudication before we can evaluate which system is more "biblical." As we do this, *kingdom through covenant* will be contrasted with the other two systems and presented as better accounting for the Bible's storyline as unveiled through the progression of the biblical covenants.

Hermeneutical Basics: Reading Scripture and Doing Theology

Regarding hermeneutical basics, much could be said; we can only scratch the surface of the larger discussion. Furthermore, most of what follows is in agreement with a majority of approaches to evangelical hermeneutics, so, in one sense, we are not saying anything new. Yet it is still important to describe how we approach the task of reading and applying Scripture and thus how we move from text to theological formulation. Where we differ with dispensational and covenant theology is not over the larger issues of hermeneutics but over specific details and the application of those details, which we will discuss in due course.[3]

Let us describe our hermeneutical approach by developing the following statement: In order to be "biblical" in our theology, our interpretation and application of Scripture must (1) take seriously what Scripture claims to be and (2) interpret Scripture in light of what it actually is as God's unfolding

revelation across time. Let us develop these two points before turning to some hermeneutical implications.

The Scriptural Claim for Itself: Scripture's Self-Attestation

Being "biblical" in our theology takes seriously what Scripture claims to be. What, then, does Scripture claim for itself? We cannot give a full-blown explication and defense of the doctrine of Scripture; many books have undertaken that task and have done it well.[4] In agreement with historic Christian orthodoxy, we affirm that Scripture is God's Word written, the product of God's mighty action through the Word and by the Holy Spirit whereby human authors freely wrote exactly what God intended to be written and without error.[5]

Why has the church throughout the ages affirmed this about Scripture? The answer is straightforward: Scripture makes this claim about itself. The church does not confer authority on this book because she desires it to be God's Word; rather, Scripture itself testifies that it is God's authoritative Word, written through the agency of human authors, and that it is the product of the sovereign-personal triune "God who is there" and is from "the God who is not silent."[6] As such, Scripture both attests to and bears the marks of its divine origin and is thus completely authoritative, sufficient, and reliable. Not surprisingly, especially since the Enlightenment, some biblical scholars and theologians have challenged this claim, namely, that Scripture actually makes such a pervasive claim about itself. James Barr, for example, denies it.[7] But when Scripture is read on its own terms, it can be shown repeatedly to make this claim and to exhibit, in the words of Sinclair Ferguson, a "canonical self-consciousness" from Genesis to Revelation that Scripture is God's authoritative Word written.[8] We will leave the reader to the literature in the footnotes for a development of this assertion. In what follows, we assume this view of Scripture in our interpretation of it.

How does this view of Scripture affect our interpretation of it? Two answers may be given, consistent with historic Christian theology. First, because Scripture is *God's* Word, from the triune, sovereign, and omniscient Creator of the universe, we expect *an overall unity and coherence* between the Testaments, which, despite their diversity, together declare God's

unfailing plan and purposes in this fallen world. Kevin Vanhoozer nicely describes Scripture this way: it is "a unified communicative act, that is, as the complex, multi-levelled speech act of a single divine author,"[9] which leads us to view and interpret Scripture as a *unified* revelation. As we think through the progression of the biblical covenants, given our view of Scripture, we will *not* view the covenants as independent and isolated from each other, but as together, in all their diversity, unfolding the one plan of God, centered on our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:9–10).

Second, since Scripture is God's Word *through human authors*, we discover God's intent through the writing(s) of the human authors by grammatical-historical-literary exegesis; hence the expression "what God says, Scripture says" (i.e., the biblical authors), and vice versa. Ultimately, this point leads us to a canonical reading of Scripture in order to discover how to interpret the meaning of specific texts. It is not enough to read Scripture in a "thin" manner, that is, as isolated texts apart from the whole. Instead, we must read texts in a "thick" way, that is, in light of the entire canon of Scripture.[10] We discover God's intent through the writings of the biblical authors, but given the diversity of authors throughout time, we must interpret biblical authors in light of the entire canon. It is only by reading Scripture "thickly" that we discover its true meaning—that is, God's intent—and how Scripture applies to us today. This observation is another way of stating the important Reformation principle that "Scripture must interpret Scripture."

It is also another way of speaking about the "fuller meaning" of Scripture, or what has been labeled the *sensus plenior*.[11] This expression is understood in diverse ways, so it requires careful definition.[12] We agree with G. K. Beale's understanding of the term when he argues that, for example, "the Old Testament authors did not exhaustively understand the meaning, implications, and possible applications of all that they wrote."[13] As authors who wrote under divine inspiration, what they wrote was God given, true, and authoritative. However, they might not, and probably did not, understand where the entire revelation was going, given the fact that God had not yet disclosed all the details of his eternal plan. Thus, as more revelation is given through later authors, we discover more of God's plan

and where that plan is going. It is for this reason that the New Testament's interpretation of the Old Testament becomes definitive, since later texts bring with them greater clarity and understanding. In other words, we must carefully allow the New Testament to show us how the Old Testament is brought to fulfillment in Christ. In this way, as Beale rightly acknowledges, the New Testament's interpretation of the Old Testament may expand the Old Testament author's meaning in the sense of seeing new implications and applications. However, given that we discover God's intent through the human authors, this expansion through later texts does *not* contravene the integrity of the earlier texts "but rather develops them in a way which is consistent with the Old Testament author's understanding of the way in which God interacts with his people" in previous eras of redemptive history.[14] Thus, Scripture as an entire canon must interpret Scripture; the later parts must "draw out and explain more clearly the earlier parts,"[15] and theological conclusions must be exegetically derived from the entire canon.

Although this point is widely acknowledged in biblical hermeneutics, it is a point of contention between dispensational and covenant theologians. On the dispensational side, it is contentious regarding how we think of the role of national, ethnic Israel in God's plan and how God's promises to Israel are fulfilled in Christ. On the covenant side, it is disputed regarding the perpetuity of the genealogical principle of the Abrahamic covenant and its fulfillment in Christ and the church.

For dispensational theology, Israel, as a nation, has received specific promises, often captured by the land promise, which still awaits fulfillment to national Israel in the millennium and consummation. Since this promise is irrevocable and, as dispensationalism contends, has not changed across the biblical covenants, it must be fulfilled in a "literal" way, which demands a specific future role for national Israel "distinct" from believing Gentile nations. Conversely, for many within covenant theology, the New Testament helps us grasp that God's promise of land to national Israel must be understood in light of Christ and the new creation. In this way, in the Abrahamic covenant, the promise of land looks back to Eden and serves as a type of Eden's recovery and expansion in the new creation. Given the disagreement on this point, one crucial area needing resolution is how much

the New Testament governs our understanding of the meaning of Old Testament texts and how those Old Testament texts find their fulfillment in the new covenant era. Grammatical-historical-literary exegesis needs to be set in the larger context of a canonical reading of Scripture; the parts must be read in terms of the whole.

For covenant theology, the disputed point of how much the New Testament should govern our interpretation of the Old is illustrated in its use of the genealogical principle. For covenant theology, the genealogical principle in the Abrahamic covenant remains unchanged across redemptive history even though the New Testament seems to apply it differently than the Old Testament does. We will return to this point in later chapters. For now, we simply note the following observation: how one applies a canonical reading—that is, the priority of the New Testament in our understanding of the Old—is important in adjudicating differences between dispensational and covenant theology.

Furthermore, it is also important to stress that, given what Scripture is, a canonical reading is *not* an optional way to interpret Scripture. In fact, to read the Bible canonically is *demanded* by the nature of Scripture and its claim regarding itself. Thus, *not* to read Scripture in this way is to fail to interpret it correctly and is to be less than "biblical." As we will discuss below, how this hermeneutical principle is applied is where differences arise. At this juncture, we simply state how we approach Scripture in conjunction with its claim regarding itself. Let us now turn to the second point, namely, that in order to be "biblical," we must interpret Scripture in light of what it actually is as God's unfolding revelation across time.

Interpreting Scripture according to What It Is

What *is* Scripture? Here we are thinking not in terms of what Scripture says about itself but in terms of the actual phenomena of Scripture, or better, how God has chosen to give us his Word and disclose himself to us through human authors. Let us discuss the phenomena of Scripture by focusing on two points—Scripture as a word-act revelation *and* a progressive revelation—before we draw out some of the hermeneutical implications.

Scripture Is a Word-Act Revelation

A helpful way of describing the phenomena of Scripture is by viewing the Bible as a word-act revelation. What does this mean? It means that Scripture is God's own authoritative interpretation of his redemptive acts through the agency of human authors. Let us think about this in three steps.

First, we affirm that all God's redemptive acts reveal him, his plan, and his purposes. God has disclosed himself in history through his mighty acts, what we often identify as special revelation, in contrast to God's revelation in the natural world. For example, in the Old Testament, the greatest revelatory redemptive act of God was his deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt (cf. Ex. 6:6–7). In the New Testament, proclaiming the gospel involves reciting God's acts in history (cf. Acts 2:22–36; 3:13–26; 10:36–43; 13:26–41; 1 Cor. 15:3–4). In fact, the supreme focal point of Scripture centers on what God has done in Christ Jesus. The New Testament continually proclaims that what God had promised in ages past, what the Old Testament prophets anticipated, God has now brought to fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus—the greatest display of God's mighty acts. That is why expressions of fulfillment are everywhere in the New Testament (cf. Mark 1:15; Luke 4:21; Gal. 4:4).

Second, as important as it is to affirm that God acts in order to reveal himself and to redeem his people, God's redemptive acts are never left to speak for themselves, and they never appear separated from God's verbal communications of truth. Word *and* act always accompany each other. Furthermore, just as redemption is historically successive, so also is revelation, for God's revelatory word interprets God's redemptive acts. For example, Exodus 15:1–18 interprets the events of the Red Sea crossing; they are never left as self-interpreting. As Geerhardus Vos said many years ago, borrowing a phrase from the philosopher Immanuel Kant but employing it differently, "Without God's acts the words would be empty, without his words the acts would be blind."[16]

In fact, word and act often follow a general order in Scripture: first comes a preparatory word, then the divine act, and finally the interpretive word. For example, in the giving of the old covenant, we first see a preparatory word (Exodus 19), then the divine act of giving the law (Exodus 20), and finally an interpretative explanation of the law

(Exodus 21–23; 25–31). This same order may be observed of the Bible as a whole. The Old Testament is the predictive word that anticipates greater realities tied to the coming of Yahweh and his Messiah, the Gospels give the account of the redemptive-revelatory fact of the coming of God the Son incarnate, and the remainder of the New Testament unpacks the final interpretation of not only who the Son is but also the full implications of what he has achieved in the inauguration of the new covenant era and the fulfillment of the prophetic word.

Third, as a word-act revelation, Scripture is the product of God's own mighty actions. Scripture not only chronicles the activities of God's redemption in history, and it not only is a word that interprets God's redeeming acts, but it also is itself a product of God's own redemptive acts for the purpose of teaching, edifying, and instructing, and as such, it is fully authoritative and sufficient for our thinking and lives. Scripture is, as a written text in its final form, God's own divine interpretation, through human authors, of his own redemptive acts, which carries with it a true interpretation of his redemptive plan. Though it is not an exhaustive revelation, it is a true, objective, and first-order text. We thus read it as a complete canonical text on its own terms, according to its own structure and categories, in order to discern God's intent and redemptive plan—a "thick" reading of Scripture.[17] This point is further underscored by viewing Scripture as a *progressive* revelation.

Scripture Is a Progressive Revelation

Scripture as a word-act revelation also involves historical progression, since just as God's plan of redemption and mighty acts did not happen all at once, so the word-interpretation of those acts unfolds over time.[18] Revelation, alongside redemption, unfolds in a *progressive* manner by unique twists and turns in separate but related epochs, largely demarcated by God's acts and redemptive covenants, which reach their fulfillment, telos (end/goal), and terminus in the person and work of Messiah Jesus.

Hebrews 1:1–3 beautifully describes this point. "Long ago," the author reminds us, "God spoke to our fathers by the prophets," and he did so "at many times and in many ways" (ESV). God's word-act revelation took

place over time, and as it was given, it pointed beyond itself to something more to come. In fact, this is the precise point that the author makes by his use of "at many times and in many ways" (*polymerōs kai polytropōs*)—namely, not only was the Old Testament revelation repetitive, it was also incomplete. In the progress of revelation, more of God's plan was disclosed to us, pointing forward to and culminating in the coming of Christ. As William Lane rightly notes, "The fragmentary and varied character of God's self-disclosure under the old covenant awakened within the fathers an expectation that he would continue to speak to his people. . . . The ministry of the prophets marked the preparatory phase of that history."[19] But now, with the coming of the Son, the last days have dawned; the last days that the Old Testament revelation anticipated have now come to fulfillment "in Son" (*en huiō*; 1:2), underscoring that in Christ the final, definitive, complete revelation has now come. In this way, the author of Hebrews, along with the entire New Testament, places the Son in a qualitatively different category than the prophets who preceded him. The effect of this is not to downplay the authority of the Old Testament prophetic revelation; rather, the point is that the previous revelation was incomplete and, by its very nature, was intended by God to point beyond itself to God's full self-disclosure in his Son. This is why the Son is more than a mere prophet (though he is the fulfillment of the entire prophetic institution): he is the one about whom the prophets spoke; he is the one who fulfills the previous, incomplete revelation. Even more, in the Son, all God's revelation and redemptive purposes culminate.

All this is to say that Scripture as a word-act revelation is also a *progressive* revelation. This has important implications for how we read and apply Scripture, draw conclusions from Scripture, and warrant our theological proposals. Our reading of Scripture must trace out how Scripture unfolds God's plan of redemption, which is the task of biblical theology, discussed in chapter 1. Biblical theology attempts to give a theological reading of Scripture, grounded in exegesis, that grasps "the whole counsel of God" in terms of its redemptive-historical progression. Scripture consists of many literary forms, which all must be interpreted carefully, but beneath all these literary forms is an underlying storyline,

beginning in creation and moving to the new creation, which unfolds God's plan.[20] It is crucial that we read Scripture in such a way that we do justice to the Bible's own presentation and respect its own categories, which, we contend, are tied to *the progression of the biblical covenants*.

Michael Horton stresses these exact points as he thinks through theological method.[21] Given what Scripture is, Horton contends that the most "biblical" theological method is one that is "redemptive-historical-eschatological." By these terms he is saying what we have just described. Given the authority of Scripture and how it has come to us, we are to interpret Scripture according to its own presentation and intrasystematic categories—that is, on its own terms—which Horton contends are captured by the terms "eschatological" and "redemptive-historical."[22]

By "eschatological" Horton means more than a mere doctrinal topic. Rather, it is a lens through which we read Scripture and do our theology. Scripture itself comes to us as a redemptive revelation, rooted in history, unfolding God's eternal plan worked out in time, and as such, the very "form" and "shape" of Scripture is "eschatological." For this reason, Horton is uncomfortable with what George Lindbeck has labeled a "cognitive-propositionalist" approach to theology.[23] Scripture is more than a storehouse of facts or propositions; Scripture unfolds for us a *plot*, a divine interpretation of the drama of redemption, which is eschatological at heart and Christological in focus, and as such, our reading of Scripture and our drawing of theological conclusions must reflect this plot. By "redemptive-historical," Horton is referring to Scripture's own presentation of itself as "the organic unfolding of the divine plan in its execution through word (announcement), act (accomplishment), and word (interpretation)."[24] Given that redemption is progressive and unfolding, so is revelation, as it is God's own interpretation of his action and of the human response in actual historical contexts.

Horton draws a number of important implications for our interpretation of Scripture and the doing of theology. We will focus on one of them. Our reading of Scripture and our doing of theology must attend to the historical unfolding of redemptive history that is *organically* related and ultimately centered on Christ. The very "form" and "shape" of Scripture reminds us

that God disclosed himself not in one exhaustive act but in an organic, progressive manner, and in fact, it is this organic quality of revelation that serves to explain the diversity of Scripture. Theology, as a result, must be very careful not to proof-text without considering the redemptive-historical storyline and progression in Scripture and thus reading Scripture as a canonical text.[25]

"Putting Together" the Canon: The Three Horizons of Biblical Interpretation

What does this discussion have to do with biblical covenants? The simple answer is *everything*. As we think through the progression of the biblical covenants, since God has disclosed himself not in one exhaustive act but over time, we must carefully think through every biblical covenant first in its own immediate context, then ask what has preceded that covenant, and then relate that particular covenant to what comes after it and to how it is fulfilled in Christ's new covenant. It is only when we do this that we begin to understand how each covenant relates to previous and later covenants and how *all* the biblical covenants relate to Christ. We must also be careful as we trace out the historical unfolding of God's plan as demarcated by the biblical covenants and their covenant heads—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, David, and then our Lord—noting how the entire plan is *organically* related while at the same time preserving its diversity, and thus maintaining a proper balance between the continuity and discontinuity of God's plan as it culminates in the Lord Jesus.

On this point, the work of Richard Lints is helpful. In laying out an evangelical theological method, Lints emphasizes the same points we have stressed, especially in regard to how we must interpret any text of Scripture. He rightly contends that biblical theology is foundational to the doing of systematic theology. He also proposes, given what Scripture is, that we interpret biblical texts according to three horizons: textual, epochal, and canonical.[26] By emphasizing these three horizons, Lints helps us think through how to interpret Scripture properly—in light of what Scripture is—while also enabling us to avoid proof-texting. He also reminds us that, in biblical interpretation and theological formulation, *context* is king, and in

fact, three contexts are crucial in "putting together" the entire Bible, including the biblical covenants.[27] Let us briefly discuss each of these contexts for a proper biblical-theological interpretation of Scripture.[28]

Context, Context, Context

THE TEXTUAL HORIZON. Our interpretation of Scripture begins with a specific text, what Lints calls the *textual horizon*, or the immediate context. This is an obvious point, but it still needs to be said; we cannot read the Bible all at once, so we must start somewhere, and wherever we begin is our first context. In this context, biblical hermeneutics has sought to interpret texts according to the grammatical-historical-literary method, seeking to discern God's intent through the human author's intent by putting the text in its historical setting, understanding the rules of language the author is using, and analyzing the syntax, textual variants, word meanings, figures of speech, and the literary structure, including its literary form and genre. By paying careful attention to the text, a reader discovers what authors are seeking to communicate. Standard books in hermeneutics work through these areas, and we assume all this in our exegesis of individual passages of Scripture.[29] Yet our interpretation of texts does not terminate here, which leads to the second horizon of biblical interpretation.

THE EPOCHAL HORIZON. The *epochal horizon* is the second context in which we interpret texts. Here we read texts in light of where they are located in God's unfolding plan. Since Scripture is a progressive revelation, texts do not come to us in a vacuum; rather, they are embedded in a larger context of what has come *before* them. As God communicates through biblical authors, these same authors write in light of what has preceded them. When Lints labels this context the "epochal horizon," he does not intend to convey, nor do we, that the "epochs" embody different plans of God; rather, they simply remind us that God's revelation of redemption occurs over time. There is a unity within this development, but this fundamental unity should not lead us to minimize the differences among epochs—hence the balance between continuity *and* discontinuity in Scripture.

Furthermore, locating texts in God's unfolding plan helps illuminate *interbiblical*, or *intertextual*, links between earlier and later revelation. As

later authors refer to earlier texts, they build on what is given, and not only with a greater understanding of where God's plan is going; they also begin to identify God-given patterns between earlier and later events, persons, and institutions within the unfolding of God's plan—what is rightly labeled *typology*. As more revelation is given, including the development of God-given patterns (types), God's plan moves forward and ultimately reaches its telos in Christ. Later authors do *not* arbitrarily make connections by referring to earlier revelation; rather, they develop these patterns in ways that God intends and that do not contravene earlier texts.[30] It is only by reading texts first in their immediate context and then in relation to where these texts are in God's unfolding plan that we begin to grasp God's overall plan and purposes. Individual texts do not become fragmented, and the road from "text" to "reader" is *not* a matter of one's intuition, preference, or prejudice.

Is it necessary to be precise as to what the epochal differences are in Scripture? Probably not, yet it is crucial to read texts in light of what has preceded them in reference to God's redemptive actions and plan, as we will note below.[31] This question is a major debate within biblical theology.[32] Most agree that the major epochal division is between the Old Testament era and the fulfillment of God's plan in Christ. But there are also other crucial divisions, and Scripture divides history in a number of ways. For example, in Romans 5:12–21, Paul divides all human history under two heads: Adam and Christ. Under these two heads, Paul further subdivides redemptive history by the following epochs: Adam (5:12–13), from Adam to Moses (5:14–17), and from Moses and the giving of the law-covenant to Christ (5:18–21). Or in Acts 7:1–53, Stephen identifies three distinct periods: the age of the patriarchs (7:2–16); the Mosaic age, which included within it the time of the exodus and the conquest of the Promised Land (7:17–45a); and the age of the monarchy (7:45b–53). Or in the genealogy in Matthew 1, Matthew divides redemptive history into three distinct periods: Abraham to David (1:2–6a), Solomon to the exile (1:6b–11), and the exile to the coming of Christ (1:12–17).

It is Matthew's epochal structuring of redemptive history that Graeme Goldsworthy follows. However, in addition to the three epochs from

Matthew, Goldsworthy adds a prior epoch that includes creation (Genesis 1–2), the impact of the historic fall (Genesis 3), and primeval history (Genesis 4–11), thus speaking of the era of Genesis 1–11, prior to Abraham. Concerning the first epoch—creation, fall, primeval history—Goldsworthy argues that it provides the main theological presuppositions to all redemptive history, presuppositions that are then worked out as God's plan unfolds and ultimately culminates in Christ.[33]

For our purposes, what is crucial to note is that most, if not all, of these epochal divisions are tied to the biblical covenants, which is why we contend that *the Bible's own way of making epochal divisions is by the progression of the covenants*. For many like Goldsworthy, the unfolding of the "kingdom" is the backbone to the Bible's storyline, yet under closer examination, his epochal divisions can look a bit arbitrary.[34] Ironically, in *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, Goldsworthy charges the Vos-Clowney approach to biblical theology with being arbitrary in its epochal structuring of redemptive history since "both Vos and Clowney nominate the period from Moses to the coming of Christ as the last great epoch of the Old Testament."[35] However, as Goldsworthy notes, making the period from Moses to Christ the last great epoch of the Old Testament fails to account for the towering figures of David and Solomon and for the eventual failure of the kings that led to the exile. All these latter people and events play a central role in Old Testament history and in the Prophets.[36] For this reason, Goldsworthy, following the Robinson-Hebert proposal, suggests a better way of dividing up biblical history: (1) creation to David (with subdivisions of creation, fall, flood, Abraham and the patriarchs, Moses and the exodus, and the era of David and the kings); (2) the prophets, who in light of the disobedience of Israel and the Davidic kings, look to the future when God will fulfill his promises and bring salvation; and (3) the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophetic hope in Christ in terms of inaugurated eschatology (already–not yet).[37]

We do not disagree with Goldsworthy's overall presentation. He has made many excellent points and has captured well the epochal divisions of Scripture. Yet building on him, our modification of his proposal is that the Bible's epochal divisions are better warranted by tying them to the

progression of the biblical covenants. This allows for a nonarbitrary way to account for how the Old Testament is structured "on its own terms" and how its epochs are divided.[38] No doubt, *kingdom* is a crucial theme as one works across the canon,[39] but if we follow the Bible's own "intrasystematic" categories, it is *kingdom through covenantal progression* that captures the Bible's own *internal* structure in a nonarbitrary way, and thus better grasps the various epochal divisions in God's redemptive plan.

At this point, it is important to ask whether placing texts in their epochal-covenantal context is hermeneutically significant? Does Scripture give us warrant for this idea? Does thinking through where various texts are located in God's plan affect the conclusions we draw from Scripture, especially in how we understand the biblical covenants? The answer is *yes*. For example, in Romans 4, Paul argues that Abraham serves as the paradigm, for Jews *and* Gentiles, of one who was justified by grace through faith apart from works. Warrant for this claim comes from Genesis 15:6, where God declares Abraham righteous because Abraham believed the promises of God. But in order to demonstrate that God's declaration of justification is for both the Jew and the Gentile, Paul then argues that in the life of Abraham this declaration took place *before* he was circumcised (which occurred in Genesis 17, *after* Genesis 15), thus demonstrating that Abraham's justification was *not* tied to circumcision but came by faith alone in the promises of God. It is for this reason that Abraham can serve as the paradigm of faith for Jews *and* Gentiles in the new covenant. This is not to say that circumcision was not significant in the Old Testament; it certainly was, especially as it was given in the Abrahamic covenant and as it continued in the Mosaic covenant. But it is to affirm that one cannot draw the conclusion, which the Judaizers sadly did, that Gentiles, now that Christ has come and inaugurated the new covenant, must first be circumcised in order to enter into covenant relationship with Yahweh. Paul's argument against the Judaizers is that they misread Scripture. To claim that Gentiles must be circumcised to know God in the new covenant, first, is not even true of Abraham and, second, fails to grasp how circumcision pointed forward to our need for a circumcised heart.[40] Now that Christ has come, circumcision's role as a covenant sign in the previous covenants is fulfilled

(1 Cor. 7:19). Paul's argument works, however, *only* if circumcision is instituted *after* Genesis 15, thus illustrating the point that texts must carefully be interpreted in terms of what comes *before* and *after* them (and also by their covenantal location) in order to draw correct biblical conclusions.

Galatians 3, a significant covenant text, illustrates this same point. Paul counters the Judaizers, who, like many conservative Jews, "saw in the law given at Sinai not only a body of instruction but a hermeneutical key to the rest of Scripture."[41] The Judaizers viewed the law-covenant as permanent and *not* as a temporary means to bring us to Christ and the inauguration of the new covenant. This is why they insisted that for Gentiles to become Christians, they had to obey the Mosaic covenant by circumcision. Paul rejects the Judaizers because they misunderstand Scripture. Paul argues that Christians are *not* under the law *as a covenant*.[42] Rather, Jews and Gentiles are united to Christ by faith apart from the Mosaic law (3:1–6). Paul warrants his argument from Scripture. He first appeals to Genesis 15:6 to demonstrate that Abraham was justified by grace through faith (Gal. 3:6–9). True children of Abraham are *all* who have faith in Christ, regardless of their nationality. Also, Jews and Gentiles now receive *all* the promised blessings of Abraham because of Christ, who is Abraham's promised singular seed (3:16).[43] Furthermore, God declared Abraham righteous *before* giving the Mosaic covenant (3:15–29). From this, Paul draws two further conclusions. First, the Mosaic law's coming *after* Abraham did not nullify the previous promise that Abraham's true offspring, identified as believing Jews and Gentiles, inherit the promised blessings via Christ. Second, given the placement of the law-covenant in God's plan, God never intended for it to save. What, then, was the law's purpose? Multiple answers are possible, but Paul focuses on one: the law functioned as a guardian over Israel *until* Christ came (3:21–24). Now that Christ has come, the law, *as a covenant*, is fulfilled, and in Christ, the Abrahamic promise is given to believing Jews and Gentiles together as heirs (3:25–29).[44]

These two texts illustrate how important it is to put together God's plan by locating texts and covenants in relation to what *precedes* and *follows* them. We risk theological error if we do not carefully think about texts in

their epochal-covenantal location. We will fail to see how the *parts* of God's plan fit with the *whole*.[45] In fact, this was one of the key failures of a Jewish reading of Scripture. Old Testament Jews, along with the Judaizers, did not interpret the law-covenant in relation to its covenantal location. If they had done so, they would have taught what the New Testament teaches: in God's overall plan the law-covenant is temporary, a crucial part of God's plan but also, along with all the covenants, prophetically pointing to Christ's coming and the dawning of the new covenant and the new creation.[46] However, we must not end our reading of Scripture here: texts must also be read in terms of what comes *after* them, namely, the canonical horizon.

THE CANONICAL HORIZON. The third and final context that must be considered in our interpretation of any biblical text is the *canonical horizon*. Given the fact that Scripture is *God's* Word and is a *unified* revelation, texts must be understood in relation to the entire canon. We cannot adequately interpret and apply Scripture if we ignore the canonical level. As Kevin Vanhoozer notes, it is only when Scripture is read canonically that we are interpreting it in a truly "biblical" manner—"according to its truest, fullest, *divine* intention."[47] In fact, to read the Bible canonically corresponds to what the Bible actually *is*. That is why "to read the Bible as unified Scripture is not just one interpretative interest among others, but the interpretative strategy that best corresponds to the nature of the text itself, given its divine inspiration."[48] The canon may then be viewed

> as a great hall of witnesses in which different voices all testify to the Lord Jesus Christ. Over and above the laws and promises, the warnings and commands, the stories and the songs, is an all-embracing act, that of witnessing to what God was and is doing in Christ. . . . Thanks to their overarching canonical context, the smaller communicative acts are caught up and reoriented to the larger purpose of "making wise unto salvation."[49]

As texts are placed along the storyline of Scripture and ultimately interpreted in light of the culmination of God's plan in Christ, we begin to read Scripture in the way God intended and thus "biblically."

What, then, does it mean to be "biblical?" If we take seriously Scripture's claim for itself and what Scripture actually is, a three-horizon reading of the canon is the place to start—a *theological* reading, which may be summarized as a grammatical-historical–literary–canonical method of interpretation and which attempts to read each biblical text within its threefold context. In the final analysis, this is the best way to read Scripture and to draw theological conclusions because it does justice to what Scripture is and how it comes to us as a progressive revelation. In this way, we are letting Scripture interpret Scripture; we are seeking to unfold how the Bible itself is given to us, in its own intrasystematic categories and storyline, so that in the end, we read, apply, and draw theological conclusions from Scripture according to God's intent.[50]

At this point, it is legitimate to ask, In what ways does Scripture itself link the canon together in terms of its own intrasystematic categories? Much could be said here, but Richard Lints is on track when he notes that, in the big scheme of things, "essential to the canonical horizon of biblical interpretation is the continuity between the promises of God and his fulfillment of those promises."[51] That is why one of the important ways that God has glued the diverse epochs of redemptive history together is by the *promise-fulfillment* motif. But note: it is impossible to think of God's promises apart from thinking through *the progression of the covenants*, since the triune God who makes promises to his creatures, in creation and redemption, does so by entering into covenant relations with them. In truth, unpacking the promise-fulfillment motif is another way of unfolding the biblical covenants, and this is why the covenants serve as the backbone to the Bible's metanarrative. By working through the progressions of the covenants, the biblical authors teach us both the continuity of God's plan (tied to his promises) and its discontinuity (how fulfillment in Christ brings with it God-intended changes). Lints states it this way:

> The biblical authors frame their writings with the assertion that God has been faithful to his promises in times past, and so he shall be faithful in the future. The promise-fulfillment model is a thread that secures the unity of the diverse collection of these writings. It provides

> meaning in the midst of present circumstances and hope for future deliverance.[52]

Thus, as we trace out the storyline of Scripture, as we move from promise to fulfillment through the biblical covenants, we are better able to see how Scripture hangs together and reaches its fulfillment in Messiah Jesus. We begin to appreciate even more that the diverse stories of Scripture are not randomly placed but are part of a larger tapestry that finds its fulfillment and terminus in Christ.

In addition, Lints also suggests that closely associated with the promise-fulfillment theme is *typology*. In fact, one of the crucial means by which God's plan unfolds—indeed, how the promise-fulfillment motif is developed through the covenants—is the use of God-given typology. Typology, no doubt, is a disputed topic in biblical and theological studies, and it means different things to different people. As Paul Hoskins reminds us, "Studies in biblical typology have been complicated by the use of the terms 'typology' and 'type' where no definitions of these terms are given."[53] But regardless of the debate over typology, getting at the character of typology is crucial to adjudicating between the biblical-theological systems of dispensational and covenant theology. One of the reasons for the differences between these two views, as we will note below, centers on what typology is and how it works in the biblical covenants.[54] For example, as noted in chapter 2, the way dispensational theology understands the future role of national Israel in the land, contra covenant theology, is related to typological debates. Furthermore, covenant theology's use of the genealogical principle, contra dispensational theology, is also related to typological debates. And related to such typological debates is how typology works in the progression of the covenants. So given the importance of this issue, we will discuss briefly how we understand typology, since our proposal understands and utilizes typology in a specific way.

The Nature and Importance of Typology

It is first crucial to distinguish *typology* from *allegory*.[55] The major difference is that typology is grounded in *history*, the *text*, and

interbiblical/intertextual development, where various "persons, events, and institutions" are intended by God to correspond to each other, while allegory assumes none of these things. In addition, since allegories are not grounded in authorial intent, which is (inter)biblically warranted, "allegorical interpretation" depends on some kind of extratextual grid to warrant its explanation. As Vanhoozer notes, allegorical interpretation is represented by the interpretive strategy for declaring, "*This* (word) means *that* (concept),"[56] with *that* being determined by an extratextual framework. This is not what biblical typology is or how it functions in Scripture. In fact, when one investigates the six explicit New Testament texts that deal with typology (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11; Heb. 8:5; 9:24; 1 Pet. 3:21), a consistent picture emerges that clearly distinguishes it from allegory. What exactly is that pattern? Let us describe it by first starting with a definition of typology and then explaining its key features.[57]

Defining Typology. We will employ Richard Davidson's definition of typology, but it also reflects what Paul Hoskins refers to as the traditional view. Typology is the study of the Old Testament redemptive-historical realities or "types" (persons, events, institutions) that God has specifically designed to correspond to, and predictively prefigure, their intensified antitypical fulfillment aspects (inaugurated, appropriated, and consummated) in New Testament redemptive history.[58] There are two explanatory points to note from this definition.

First, typology is a feature of divine revelation rooted in *history* and the *text*.[59] It involves an *organic* relationship or analogical correspondences between "persons, events, and institutions" in one epoch ("type") and what they anticipate, or their fulfillment, in a later epoch ("antitype"). As Richard Lints reminds us,

> The typological relation is a central means by which particular epochal and textual horizons are linked to later horizons in redemptive revelation. It links the present to the future, and it retroactively links the present with the past. It is founded on the organic connection of God's promises with his fulfillment of those promises.[60]

Second, typology is *prophetic* and *predictive* and thus divinely intended. In other words, God planned for the type to point forward to its fulfillment, or antitype, in a later epoch of redemptive history.[61] For this reason, typologies are recurrent patterns pointing forward to and culminating first in Christ and then applied to or appropriated by Christ's people, the church. Typology is best viewed as a subset of predictive prophecy, not in the sense of direct verbal predictions but more "indirectly" in the sense of predictions built on models/patterns that God intends, which become unveiled or more clearly seen as later Old Testament authors reinforce those patterns, with the goal of anticipating their fulfillment in Christ. As God's plan is progressively revealed through the covenants, later Old Testament authors pick up the previous patterns, which then create a trajectory that New Testament authors rightly recognize as God-intended, predictive, and now coming to fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant age.[62] As *indirect* prophecy, typology corresponds well to the Pauline sense of "mystery" (e.g., Eph. 1:9–10; 3:1–10).[63] In speaking of "mystery," Paul states that the gospel was hidden in the past but now, in light of Christ's coming, is made known and disclosed publicly for all to see. Simultaneously, then, Scripture says that the gospel was *promised* beforehand and was *clearly* revealed through the prophets (e.g., Rom. 3:21), while it was *hidden* in ages past and *not* fully known until Christ's coming (e.g., Rom. 16:25–27). How do we reconcile this tension? The answer will help explain both how those who read the Old Testament were indicted for not understanding it correctly *and* why so many failed to "see" and grasp the coming of the Lord of glory (see, e.g., John 3:10–11; 5:39–40; 1 Cor. 2:7–8). One crucial way to reconcile this tension is through typology. Given its *indirect* nature, not only does typology require careful exegesis in its immediate context, but it also may not be fully recognized as a type until later authors pick up the pattern and it becomes more clearly known. Yet in an ontological sense, typology is *in* the text, exegetically discovered, while in the epistemological sense, it is recognized for what it is only as *later* Old Testament authors pick up the pattern. Then in Christ, the veil is removed, and the pattern is finally seen in all its undiminished glory.[64]

It is important to note that this understanding of typology depends on a high view of divine providence and knowledge.[65] How so? While the type bears significance for its own time, its greater significance is directed toward the future; it testifies to something greater than itself still to come. But the future antitype *will* surely come, not only because God completely knows that it will, according to his eternal plan, but also because God sovereignly *guarantees* that the prophetic fulfillment of the original type will occur in Christ.[66] The relationship between type and antitype is *not* arbitrary, a mere analogy or a construction by the reader; rather, it is an *organic* relationship ordained by God so that specific types do in fact point beyond themselves to their fulfillment in Christ. Apart from this doctrine of God, the traditional view of typology makes no sense. As noted, this is *not* to say that everyone associated with the Old Testament type understood and knew the pattern to be pointing forward. Rather, it is to say that *when* the type is *discovered* to be a type (at some point along the trajectory of its repeated pattern in redemptive history), it is then rightly "seen" or viewed as such and as *divinely* intended.[67]

Characteristics of Typology. Given this basic description of typology, how then does it *work* in Scripture? Typology exhibits a threefold character. First, typology involves a *repetition* of a person, event, or institution so that types are repeated in later persons, events, or institutions, thus allowing us to discover a pattern and trajectory. Yet ultimately the *types reach their antitypical fulfillment first in Christ and then in his people*. In this way, typological patterns have a Christological and eschatological orientation, given that Christ brings the last-days era of the prophets to fulfillment (Heb. 1:1–3). While not all typological patterns are directly Christocentric (e.g., the antitype of Peter's flood typology is not Christ but water baptism and final judgment, 1 Pet. 3:18–22), yet Brent Parker rightly insists that "all OT types have a *Christotelic* emphasis as they are qualified by their relationship to Jesus, his redemptive work, and the consummation of the new heavens and the new earth."[68] All typological patterns, then, either converge in or are mediated through Christ and his work.

For example, Adam is a type of Christ (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:21–49), the covenant head of the old creation. In God's plan, Adam anticipates the

coming of Jesus, the last Adam, and the head of the new creation. How do we know this? In the immediate context of Genesis 1–3, there are exegetical clues that speak of Adam's significance, *and through the covenants*, "other Adams" appear who take on Adam's role (e.g., Noah, Abraham, Israel, David). Yet none of these "Adams" are the ultimate fulfillment, though they "predict" the last Adam to come. Furthermore, in Christ, the last Adam, and his work, we as his people are restored to our Adamic role as image-sons in relation to God and the creation (Heb. 2:5–18). Thus, *through the covenants*, Adam, as a type, takes on greater definition until the last Adam comes.

Or think of the nation of Israel. Israel, as God's son (Ex. 4:22–23), not only takes on Adam's role in the world but also anticipates the coming of the true Son, the true Israel, the true servant, the true vine—namely, Christ (see Isa. 5:1–7; Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15; John 15:1–17). Furthermore, since types find their fulfillment first in Christ and not in us, we as God's people participate in the typological pattern only by virtue of our relationship to Christ. Thus, in the case of Israel, Christ is first the "true Israel," and in him, we, the church, are the eschatological people of God. The church is *not* the antitypical fulfillment of Israel in the first sense; Christ alone fills that role. Yet in Christ, the true Son/Israel, we are the beneficiaries of his work. In relationship to Christ, we are adopted sons (Gal. 3:26–4:7), the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), Abraham's spiritual offspring (Gal. 3:29), restored to what God created us to be (Eph. 4:20–24).[69] In this way, the new covenant promise given to the "house of Israel" and the "house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31) is applied to the church. Christ, as the antitypical fulfillment of Israel, takes on Israel's role, and by faith union with him, his work becomes ours as his new covenant people.

A second characteristic of typology is its *a fortiori* (lesser to greater) quality, or the fact that it exhibits *escalation* as the type is fulfilled in the antitype.[70] For example, through covenantal progression, as one moves from Adam or David to the prophets, priests, and kings, and through the covenants to the last Adam, the true Davidic king, the Great High Priest, and so on, the antitype is *always* greater than the previous types. Yet escalation across time does *not* occur incrementally from the original type

to each installment and then to Christ, as if there is a straight line of increase. Rather, escalation fully occurs with Christ's coming. The previous typological patterns point forward to the greater one to come (Rom. 5:14), but the *greater* aspect is realized only in Christ and then extended to his people. For example, Adam is a type of Christ, and "other Adams" arise, yet these "Adams" (e.g., Noah, Abraham, Israel, David) fail in their obedience and faith; there is really *no* increase in them. Yet all of them anticipate the last/second Adam, who obeys perfectly. What is true of Adam is also true of other typological patterns, whether they are various persons (Moses, Israel, David, prophets, priests, kings), events (the exodus), or institutions (sacrificial system, tabernacle-temple).

This observation is important for a number of reasons. Not only does the *a fortiori* quality of typology serve as an important means by which Scripture unpacks the unique identity of Christ,[71] but it is also a key way that Scripture grounds or warrants the uniqueness of the new covenant era. When fulfillment arrives, legitimate *discontinuity* or change between the old and new in God's unified plan is warranted, as the triune God has planned from eternity. When the antitype arrives in history—or better, when it is inaugurated—not only are the previous types brought to their telos, but also the entire era introduced entails anticipated changes in many areas, which the Old Testament had already predicted. This is why the era of fulfillment inaugurated by Christ (the "already"), even though it still awaits the consummation (the "not yet"), has introduced greater realities—realities that are directly linked to the inauguration of the kingdom, the dawning of the new covenant era, and the arrival of the new creation.[72]

A third characteristic of typology is that it develops *through covenantal progression*.[73] In fact, to think through the development of typological patterns is to walk through the covenants. For example, Adam and "other Adams" are associated with the covenants of creation, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David. In these covenant heads, Adam's role continues, and each one anticipates Christ, who by his obedience secures our redemption.[74] Or think of the promise to Abraham regarding his "seed." As the seed promise unfolds, it does so in Isaac, Israel, the Davidic king, and ultimately Christ—*and* then it extends to the church as Abraham's spiritual offspring.[75] Or

think of how Moses, who is foundational for the institution of the prophets and who inaugurates the priestly role under the old covenant, is developed in terms of an entire institution of prophets and priests that ultimately culminates in Christ.[76] More examples could be given: David and his sons, the entire tabernacle-temple structure, the exodus event that eventually anticipates a greater exodus to come, and so forth. *All* these types are tied to the covenants; one cannot think of them apart from wrestling with how the covenants relate to each other and how the covenants are fulfilled in Christ and the new covenant. In this way, all biblical history is eschatological and prophetic, not merely in verbal predictions but also in types/patterns associated with the covenants, which anticipate and predict the dawning of the end of the ages in the coming of the Lord of glory. This is why the entire New Testament is Christological in focus, since Jesus is the one whom the covenants and prophets anticipate (e.g., Matt. 5:17–18; 11:11–15; Rom. 3:21, 31). This is another reason why "putting together" the biblical covenants is the means by which we grasp the plan of God and thus understand the Scriptures. Apart from doing so, we fail to discern how the "parts" fit with the "whole," and we are less than "biblical" in our reading of Scripture.

What does it mean to be "biblical"? How do we rightly move from text to theological conclusions? We have only scratched the surface in terms of a full-orbed answer in our description of how we are approaching the hermeneutical task and the theological interpretation of Scripture. Yet it was important to do so since we are attempting to argue for a *via media* position on the covenants. With these basic points in mind, let us now turn to the second portion of this chapter and revisit the biblical-theological systems of dispensationalism and covenant theology by discussing some of the key hermeneutical issues that divide them in order to better assess their overall fit with Scripture. As we do so, we will begin to sketch out how *kingdom through covenant* serves as an alternative position, which we will explain in more detail in the chapters to follow.

Key Hermeneutical Issues Separating Dispensational and Covenant Theology

In terms of basic theological convictions, dispensational and covenant theology agree on more than what divides them, so one should not exaggerate their differences. Yet as described in the previous chapter, on some crucial points, specifically the Israel-church relationship and its linkage with each position's view of the biblical covenants, substantial differences remain that affect how these two different biblical-theological systems put together the Bible.

What, then, are some of the key hermeneutical differences that separate dispensational and covenant theology? Our reflections will draw on the helpful discussion by John Feinberg in the fine work *Continuity and Discontinuity*, which probes these issues in detail.[77] Feinberg, in describing the core hermeneutical distinctives of dispensational theology, or what he labels "systems of discontinuity," perceptively captures some of the differences between dispensational and covenant theology. Specifically, we will focus on three areas of difference in his discussion: the priority of the New Testament over the Old Testament, the nature of the biblical covenants, and the nature and use of typology. These areas will help us better grasp the core of dispensational theology and enable us to compare and contrast dispensational and covenant theology while we outline our approach to these same issues, which later chapters will develop in more detail.

As we think through these three areas, it is first important to note how interrelated they are and how each point stands not on its own but requires and assumes the other points. This should not surprise us since these three points take us to the core of each system. Furthermore, all these points, as noted in chapter 2, are rooted in a specific conception of the Israel-church relationship, which in turn is related to each system's view of the covenants and their interrelationships. Specifically, there is debate over typology, what constitutes a type, and how types reach their antitypical fulfillment in Christ. Furthermore, there is debate regarding the content of God's promises to national Israel and how or whether these promises are fulfilled in Christ, the church, and the new covenant. Since dispensationalism and covenant theology view the Israel-church relationship differently, these central points help us grasp the key differences between the views. Let us

now turn to these three areas incrementally, fully aware that all three of them together are necessary to comprehend the core differences between each view and to better understand how each system puts together the biblical covenants.

The Priority of the New Testament over the Old Testament in the Progress of Revelation

A key hermeneutical difference between dispensational and covenant theology, Feinberg asserts, is the priority given to the New Testament over the Old Testament, especially in conclusions drawn regarding the role and future of national, ethnic Israel in God's plan.[78] Feinberg correctly rejects the false claims that only dispensationalists consistently apply a "literal" hermeneutic in their interpretation of Scripture and that covenant theologians interpret the Bible nonliterally or spiritually.[79] This way of distinguishing the views, though often voiced by dispensationalists, is inaccurate, especially given the fact that covenant theologians claim that they interpret the Bible "literally," in the *sensus literalis* use of the term.[80] As Feinberg observes, "Both sides claim to interpret literally, and yet they derive different theological systems. This suggests that the difference is not literalism v. nonliteralism, but different understandings of what constitutes literal hermeneutics."[81] Feinberg is correct. But where, then, do the differences lie?

Feinberg proposes that the first difference lies in how each view understands "the progress of revelation to the priority of one Testament over the other."[82] Both views take seriously progressive revelation and recognize that the New Testament fulfills the Old Testament, but there is a basic disagreement over whether the New Testament can be used to "reinterpret" the Old Testament. For example, as Feinberg contends, dispensational theologians often begin with the Old Testament, "but wherever they begin they demand that the OT be taken on its own terms rather than reinterpreted in light of the NT."[83] On the other hand, Feinberg argues that nondispensationalists (i.e., covenant theologians) begin "with NT teaching as having priority, and then go back to the OT,"[84] so that the Old Testament is reinterpreted in light of the New Testament teaching. The

reason they do so, Feinberg insists, is because covenant theology views the Old Testament as provisional in God's unfolding plan, whereas the New Testament is permanent and final. Hence, the rationale to view the New Testament as having priority over the Old Testament and the tendency to argue that whatever the New Testament does not explicitly affirm is no longer in force in the new covenant era.[85]

In stressing this point, it is crucial to observe, and perhaps even ironically, that Feinberg, along with other dispensationalists, does *not* disagree with the application of this hermeneutical rule in most places. For example, he affirms, in agreement with covenant theology, that the sacrificial system, the food laws, the priesthood, and so on, were provisional and temporary in the Old Testament era and that these things now, in light of Christ's coming and the progress of revelation, have reached their fulfillment and terminus. As Feinberg accepts, "If the NT explicitly rejects an OT institution, etc., it is cancelled."[86] *All* Christians, then, regardless of whether they are dispensational or covenantal, agree that the New Testament has "priority" over the Old Testament. However, this is *not* Feinberg's primary concern. After all, he is discussing the core *differences* between the two systems, which, as we have argued in chapter 2, are centered on different understandings of the Israel-church relationship and the relationships between the covenants. Hence, Feinberg's real concern is *not* with the priority of the New Testament over the Old Testament per se but with how covenant theology applies this hermeneutic to *the* specific relationship he is concerned about, namely, the Israel-church relationship, and specifically the future role of national, ethnic Israel in God's plan.

In other words, Feinberg and dispensational theology contend that *at this specific point*, it is illegitimate to prioritize the New Testament and to read it back on the Old and to view national Israel as something provisional/shadowy or as merely a type of the church in God's plan. Instead, one must first work from the Old to the New Testament before appealing to the New to overturn the perceived teaching of the Old regarding the role of national Israel in God's plan. Even more to the point, Feinberg is concerned about how covenant theology appeals to the priority

of the New Testament in order to *reinterpret* the land promises to national Israel in a spiritual or typological fashion. How so? Given that the New Testament lacks a detailed treatment of the land promise, covenant theology has argued that the future land promise for national Israel is *not* explicitly affirmed in the New Testament and is thus no longer in force.[87] But, Feinberg responds, this is the problem with covenant theology: it has wrongly appealed to the priority of the New Testament and has not done justice to the Old Testament's teaching regarding this specific promise and the role of national Israel in God's plan. As Feinberg asserts, one must first allow the Old Testament to speak on its own terms, especially in regard to national Israel and the land promise, before one appeals to the New Testament to determine the issue.

In Feinberg's criticism of covenant theology, he raises a key issue that everyone must address: how do we know "whether something in the OT (especially prophecy about Israel's future) is still binding in the NT," especially if the New Testament does not explicitly deal with the issue or promise?[88] Feinberg responds in a twofold way. First,

> If an OT prophecy or promise is made unconditionally to a given people and is still unfulfilled to them even in the NT era, then the prophecy must still be fulfilled to them. While a prophecy given unconditionally to Israel has a fulfillment for the church if the NT *applies* it to the church, it must also be fulfilled to Israel. Progress of revelation cannot cancel unconditional promises.[89]

Second, and related to the first point, if the New Testament has not explicitly or implicitly overturned the land promise, that does not mean that it is no longer in force, since it is grounded in God's unconditional promise.[90] In this response, Feinberg raises some important issues regarding the priority given to the New Testament over the Old. Covenant theology, according to dispensationalism, tends to read the Old Testament in terms of the New and does not let the Old Testament speak on its own terms, especially in regard to the future role of national Israel and the unconditional land promise. A dispensational hermeneutic wants to let the Old Testament speak on its own terms first, and unless the New Testament

explicitly or implicitly abrogates it, what is unconditionally promised in the Old Testament era is still in force today.

What are we to think of this charge? Is Feinberg correct in his observation? What can we learn from this discussion for our purposes? This charge is certainly a common one made by dispensationalists against covenant theologians, yet it demands deeper reflection. Let us offer two thoughts that we hope will advance the discussion and illustrate how we approach this hermeneutical issue—the priority of the New Testament over the Old. First, we agree that there is some truth in Feinberg's charge, but, second, we do not think that he is completely accurate. In fact, it is our conviction that, ironically, *both* dispensational and covenant theology follow the *same* hermeneutic in appealing to the Old Testament and drawing theological conclusions, yet they do so in *different* areas *central to their theological systems*. But before we unpack this latter point, let us first focus on what is right about Feinberg's assertion.

Reading New Covenant Realities Back into the Old Testament

As we will argue in part 3, we agree that in specific areas central to covenant theology—primarily in ecclesiology and the ordinances (which are related to their understanding of the covenants) but not limited to these areas[91]—covenant theology tends to read new covenant realities and blessings back into the Old Testament and vice versa. In these areas, they do so without sufficiently thinking through the progression of the covenants, the nature of the covenant communities under their respective covenants, and how the covenantal signs function in their specific covenantal contexts, and without then wrestling with how the covenants, communities, and signs are brought to fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant. On this specific point we agree with Feinberg's basic criticism of covenant theology. However, we disagree in the area that he is most concerned about: Old Testament promises of a future role for national Israel in the millennium and of a consummation "distinct" from believing Gentiles or "different" from what we now have in the church, tied to the land promise. We are not convinced that dispensational theology has rightly understood the role of national Israel in God's plan, how Israel functions in

covenantal progression as a corporate Adam, and how Israel functions as a type that is fulfilled in Christ, the true Israel and King. Moreover, we are not convinced that dispensationalists have correctly understood the meaning of the land promise *in the progression of the covenants*.[92] Instead, we think that a better example of Feinberg's criticism of covenant theology is found in his own treatment of how Scripture speaks of the multiple senses of the terms "Israel" and the "seed of Abraham."[93]

Feinberg is correct, contrary to most dispensational polemics, that covenant theology does distinguish between Israel and the church yet that it tends *not* to recognize the multiple senses of terms such as "Israel" and "the seed of Abraham." For example, covenant theology views the Abrahamic covenant as substantially the same as the new covenant yet different in its administration. In so doing, covenant theology tends to flatten the Abrahamic covenant by reducing it primarily to *spiritual* realities while neglecting its national and typological aspects. This is why covenant theology is able to take the genealogical principle operative in the Abrahamic covenant—"you and your seed" (Gen. 17:7)—and apply it *in exactly the same way* across the canon in the new covenant. In fact, this is why covenant theology argues that the covenant signs of circumcision and baptism signify the same thing and that baptism is only an administrative change, not a substantial one. In addition, even though covenant theology argues that the church is the fulfillment of Israel, given the unity of the covenant of grace, the two communities are by nature the same—namely, a mixed community, constituted by believers and unbelievers. Even though the prophets seem to anticipate some kind of change in the new covenant community, given the unity of the covenant of grace and the unchanged genealogical principle from the Abrahamic covenant to the new, covenant theology insists that "believers and their children" are included in the church exactly as they were in Israel of old, which we contend is a mistake.[94]

As Feinberg rightly observes, the problem with covenant theology *at this point* is that it reduces the Abrahamic covenant primarily to its *spiritual* aspects, thus neglecting its national and typological aspects. But to do so is to read new covenant realities into the old era *too quickly* and in this way to

prioritize the New Testament over the Old without first doing justice to the Old Testament in its own textual and epochal-covenantal context. We must first understand the Abrahamic covenant in its own immediate context before we relate it to what has now come in Christ. No doubt, everyone agrees that the Abrahamic covenant ultimately leads us to the new covenant, but we must ask, what is the nature of that covenant first in its own setting? As dispensational theology has rightly argued, the Abrahamic covenant is much more diverse than covenant theology often presents it since it encompasses not only spiritual elements but also national and typological elements that result in significant discontinuity as the covenants progress and reach their fulfillment in Christ. This is best illustrated by the different senses Scripture gives to the "seed of Abraham."[95] Feinberg argues for four senses. First, there is the biological, ethnic, and national sense. Second, there is a political sense that refers to the entire nation. Third, there is a spiritual sense, which can apply to the redeemed—that is, people who are properly related spiritually to God by faith. Fourth, there is the typological sense, in which Israel can function as a type of the church.[96]

For Feinberg, and for dispensational theology in general, *not* to distinguish these diverse senses of Abraham's seed illustrates how covenant theology tends to reduce the Abrahamic covenant to its *spiritual* aspects. On the other hand, what distinguishes dispensational thinking is that all these diverse senses are viewed as operative in the New Testament and "that no sense (spiritual especially) is more important than any other, and that no sense cancels out the meaning and implications of the other senses."[97] Thus, Feinberg contends that by prioritizing the New Testament over the Old Testament *in this area* and by reading new covenant realities back into the old era, covenant theology tends to emphasize only a spiritual sense and downplays the national sense of the "seed of Abraham." For Feinberg, this tendency explains why covenant theology fails to distinguish Israel from the church and why it "reinterprets" the land promises to national Israel in either a spiritual or a typological fashion. As already noted, we will *not* follow Feinberg *on this specific application* for reasons discussed below, but his basic point, we believe, has some merit. Yet in our view, his point is better illustrated in explaining why covenant theology can take the sign of

the Abrahamic covenant (circumcision), downplay its primary significance of marking out a natural seed who is supposed to function as a priestly, royal people devoted to Yahweh, interpret it in terms of its spiritual significance, and then argue that circumcision signifies the same reality that baptism signifies under the new covenant.[98]

Regardless of the specific example, in terms of Feinberg's overall observation we are in basic agreement that covenant theology tends to read new covenant realities back into the old era *too quickly*, without first letting the Old Testament context be understood in its own epochal-covenantal context—before relating it to its fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant. That is why we have emphasized the necessity of the three horizons in the theological interpretation of Scripture. Each covenant must first be interpreted in its own immediate context (textual horizon), then in terms of what has preceded it (epochal-covenantal horizon), and finally in terms of the entire canon (canonical horizon). When we follow this reading of Scripture, we contend that the New Testament does have priority over the Old Testament. The New Testament's interpretation of the Old is definitive in interpreting the details of the Old but *not* in such a way that contravenes the earlier texts. This is why we must carefully allow the New Testament to show us how the Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ, while also doing justice to texts in their Old Testament context. Given the progressive nature of Scripture, we must carefully unfold the *interbiblical/intertextual* development of texts and covenants first *within* the Old Testament and then in terms of an entire canonical theology.[99] Scripture must interpret Scripture.

Recognizing Nuances in Covenantal Hermeneutics

Although we agree with Feinberg's overall point, we are convinced that he is not fully accurate in two areas. In fact, we are persuaded that discerning why this is the case is important in setting our view over against dispensational and covenant theology. Let us look at each of these two areas in turn.

First, Feinberg is not completely accurate in charging covenant theology with prioritizing the New Testament over the Old such that it fails to respect

the original Old Testament context and instead reinterprets that context in light of the New Testament.[100] In fact, we contend, ironically, that dispensational *and* covenant theology actually follow the *same* hermeneutic in appealing to the Old Testament, yet they do so *in different areas* central to their theological systems. Also, we are persuaded that both systems, in their own respective areas, fail to grasp the *interbiblical/intertextual* development of the unfolding covenants that ultimately culminates in Christ, the dawning of the new covenant, and the application of God's promises to the church. Let us focus on two examples that take us to the heart of each theological system.

For dispensational theology, on the one hand, the point of contention is their view of the Israel-church relationship. Specifically, the debated issue regards the future role for national Israel "distinct" from believing Gentiles, centered on the land promise given in the *unconditional* Abrahamic covenant. This promise, they contend, demands that national Israel, in the future, as a believing nation, must live in a specific place, namely, the Promised Land, and that this promise is unique to Israel as a nation, "distinct" from believing Gentile nations. For covenant theology, on the other hand, the point of contention also pertains to the Israel-church relationship but *not* in terms of a specific future role for national Israel "distinct" from Gentile believers. Rather, covenant theology appeals to the *same, unconditional* Abrahamic covenant in terms of the genealogical principle—"to you and your children." For covenant theology, given the unity of "the covenant of grace," the two covenant communities, Israel and the church, remain by nature the same, that is, a mixed people, and the two covenant signs, circumcision and baptism, remain the same in terms of their *spiritual* significance across the covenants.

However, it is important to observe that at work in both systems is the *same* hermeneutic, *only in different places*. Both views appeal to understanding the Old Testament on its own terms and to *not* letting the New Testament interpret how the specific points of their system are brought to fulfillment. What, then, will *we* argue? We will disagree with both views because they follow the same hermeneutic! Instead, we will insist that biblical texts and covenants must be interpreted and theologized in light of

the three horizons. We must understand the role of national Israel in God's plan *and* the genealogical principle first in its immediate and epochal-covenantal context and thus do justice to the Old Testament on its own terms. Next, we must ask how these two issues interbiblically/intertextually unfold across the covenants with special focus on development *within* the Old Testament itself. Finally, we must let the entire canon inform how these two issues are fulfilled in Christ and applied to the church. By these means we are seeking to let all Scripture tell us the precise relationships between the covenants, including the role of national Israel and the development of the genealogical principle as they reach their fulfillment, telos, and terminus in Messiah Jesus.

Second, and related to the above point, we are convinced that Feinberg is not fully accurate in his charge against the hermeneutic of covenant theology, especially in relation to the future role of national Israel. In our view, his discussion of the issue somewhat begs the question, but before we are too hard on him, we need to concede another point: he rightly acknowledges that more needs to be said than merely that covenant theology prioritizes the New Testament over the Old. Feinberg also admits that, to make his charge stick, other assumptions about the nature of the covenants and especially the role of typology have to be addressed, subjects to which we now turn.

The Nature of the Biblical Covenants

In adjudicating theological systems, Feinberg is fully aware that more than one issue is involved. As he builds on his previous point, he rightly admits that a second issue of disagreement between the two views centers on each one's "understanding of the covenants,"[101] specifically how each view understands promises made to national Israel. Astutely, Feinberg observes that the debate is not "simplistically that OT covenants like the Abrahamic and Davidic are viewed as conditional by nondispensationalists and unconditional by dispensationalists," since that is not true in all cases.[102] Instead, the debate centers on whether *unconditional* land promises were made to national Israel in the Old Testament. If this is the case, Feinberg insists, regardless of how the New Testament applies Old Testament texts

concerning Israel to the church,[103] not only must the original meaning of these texts remain the same vis-à-vis the promise of land to national Israel, but also we must think in terms of "double fulfillment"—an initial application and fulfillment to the church but an ultimate fulfillment to national Israel in the future.[104] One cannot, Feinberg argues, do what covenant theology often does, namely, treat the New Testament application of these texts to the church as proof that they are now being completely fulfilled spiritually in the church. For dispensationalists, this interpretation not only overturns the unconditional nature of these promises and the meaning of the Old Testament texts but also illegitimately views Israel and the church as basically the same communities. Instead, as Feinberg and dispensational theology argue, the church must be viewed neither as the replacement nor as the continuation of Israel but as something unique, which requires that we think of national Israel as distinct from the church, "despite the fact that spiritual aspects of the kingdom are now being applied to the church."[105]

For our purposes, this discussion highlights two important issues. First, it reminds us that properly discerning the nature of the biblical covenants and their relationships is crucial in adjudicating differences between dispensational and covenant theology. This involves determining whether the covenants are unconditional or conditional and asking to whom these promises were made. Second, we must also think carefully about the Israel-church relationship as tied to the covenants. Should we understand unconditional promises to Israel as promising a distinct future for national Israel tied to the land promise? And does this understanding hold not only in the Abrahamic covenant but also in the Abrahamic covenant as located in context with the entire covenantal progression from Adam to Christ? Or is it better to view the role of Israel in terms of the entire sweep of redemptive history and see that *all* God's promises are fulfilled in Christ and the church? In relation to covenant theology, should we view the Israel-church relationship in terms of the two communities being the same in their nature and structure? Or is it better to view Christ's fulfillment work as inaugurating a new and better covenant that results in the church being different in nature than Israel? Answering these questions takes us to the

heart of the differences between dispensational and covenant theology, but what is our alternative proposal *at these points*?

On these issues, in the following chapters, we will defend at least two points. First, we will argue that dividing up the biblical covenants in categories of unconditional versus conditional is incorrect. Instead, the Old Testament covenants blend both aspects and, in an unfolding way, tell a story of God's glorious promises, his unilateral action to save, and the demand for a covenant mediator who, unlike his Old Testament counterparts, obeys perfectly and thus accomplishes our redemption. In other words, in the coming of our Lord Jesus, we find God's promise brought to pass by his own sovereign action through an obedient Son, who by his life and triumphant cross work achieves and secures our redemption on unshakable grounds by inaugurating a new covenant. Underneath this conviction is the truth that the Bible presents a *plurality* of covenants that *progressively* reveal God's one plan for his one people. It is best to think of the progression of the covenants as the means by which our triune God reveals his glorious plan and to recognize that each covenant, in its epochal-covenantal location, contributes to the entire plan, now seen in light of its fulfillment in Christ.

Second, we will argue that what is missing in the covenantal discussion, especially the Israel-church relationship, is a stronger emphasis on Christology. This is *not* to say that dispensational and covenant theology do not focus on Christ! Instead, we contend that in order to grasp God's plan through the progression of the covenants, we must see that all the covenants, including the various covenant mediators, find their antitypical fulfillment in Christ, who then applies his work to the church. The church, then, is *not* directly the "new Israel" or her replacement. Rather, in Christ, the church is God's new creation, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, because Jesus is the last Adam and true Israel, the great Davidic king, who inherits *all* God's promises by his person and work (Eph. 2:11–21). "*All* God's promises" includes the land promise. Just as Israel's role must be viewed in light of the progression of the covenants, so also must the land. If we do so, we discover that Israel's land is a type or microcosm of creation and the garden-temple sanctuary of Eden and that it anticipates its

antitypical fulfillment in the new creation, which Jesus himself brings to pass by his incarnation and work. In Christ and his church, the international people of the new creation are created, and at the consummation, Christ will culminate his work by creating a place for us in a transformed new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21–22). All this is to say that the church, in union with Messiah Jesus, is God's *new* covenant, new creation people in continuity with the elect in all ages, and these people are the inheritors of God's promises yet are *different* from Israel in her nature and structure.

So contra dispensational theology, Jesus is the antitypical fulfillment of Israel and Adam, and in him, *all* God's promises are fulfilled for his people, including the land promise realized in the new creation. Or contra covenant theology, Jesus's *new* covenant people are not a mixed community but a people who are united to Christ by faith and are partakers of new covenant blessings, which minimally include the forgiveness of sin, the gift of the Spirit, and heart circumcision. Thus, in contrast to Israel, the church is constituted as a believing, regenerate people who *all* savingly know God. Across the covenants, then, the genealogical principle from the Abrahamic covenant does *not* remain unchanged. Rather, in Christ, it is transformed so that what circumcision pointed forward to—namely, the circumcision of the heart—is now true of the *entire* community. Our relationship to our covenant head and mediator, our Lord Jesus, is one of spiritual rebirth and not one of natural relations, such as to "you and your children," as important as families remain until the end.

In sketching out our position *on these points*, we are convinced that another crucial point of division between dispensational and covenant theology concerns the nature of typology and how typological structures interbiblically/intertextually develop by covenantal progression. In fact, this is the third area that Feinberg argues is a point of division between the two biblical-theological systems, and as such, we want to address it briefly as we conclude this section.

The Nature of Typology and Its Use in Dispensational and Covenant Theology

In dispensational theology, typology is often utilized (although not in a uniform manner), but Israel, as a nation, is *not* viewed as a type in the predictive, greater-fulfillment sense affirmed by the traditional view, which we hold. Robert Saucy captures the dispensational view well when he writes,

> If a type is understood as a *shadow* pointing forward to the *reality* of its antitype, then Israel is not a type. For it would mean, as with the sacrifices of the old covenant, that the coming of the reality in the antitype brings the type to an end. On the other hand, if a type is more loosely defined simply as a general historical and theological correspondence, then the many analogies between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament people of God may well be explained by seeing Israel as a type without necessitating its cessation as a nation and the fulfillment of the promises related to its future.[106]

In covenant theology, typology is repeatedly employed, but it is rarely applied to the genealogical principle or to circumcision across the covenants so that the relationship of Christ to his people in the new covenant is the antitypical fulfillment of previous covenant relationships, and circumcision of heart, not baptism, is the antitypical fulfillment of circumcision, which now characterizes the *entire* believing, regenerate community.[107] Often, covenant theology rightly views Christ as the antitypical "true Israel," but it also maintains a *direct* typological relationship between Israel and the church without any *a fortiori* escalation, hence the reason why the two communities are substantially the same.[108] But in moving *too quickly* from Israel to the church without first thinking how Israel as a type leads us to Christ as the antitype, covenant theology fails to see why the church is *different* in nature from Israel; this approach minimizes the greater, unbreakable nature of the new covenant, tied to Christ's finished work and the universal distribution of the Spirit to the entire covenant community.[109] For this reason, covenant theology argues that the mixed nature of Israel and the church is basically the same, that the genealogical principle remains unchanged over time, and that the covenant signs—circumcision and baptism—signify the same realities. What is

missing is a careful analysis of the progression of the covenants—from Israel (rooted in Adam) *to* Christ and then *to* the church—which results in a transformed "genealogical" relationship of Christ to his people and in *differences* in the nature of the church and the significance of the covenant sign, namely, baptism.

To say it another way, dispensational and covenant theologians employ typology in many places and often with similar results.[110] For example, they mostly agree that such persons as Adam, Moses, and David, in addition to other prophets, priests, and kings, point forward to and reach their fulfillment in our Lord Jesus Christ. They generally agree that the sacrificial system, tabernacle, and temple are fulfilled in Christ, who brings these types to an end, and that the exodus anticipates a greater redemption in Christ. However, we contend that both views do not employ typology (as defined above) to those areas *that are central to their system*, yet these are precisely the issues that must be decided biblically. Let us illustrate this point by once again returning to each theological system in turn.

In the case of dispensational theology, if proponents viewed Christ as the antitypical fulfillment of Israel, and if in him *all* God's promises are fulfilled and applied to the church, including the land promise in the new creation, then their view, at its core, would be incorrect. Why? Because it is in Christ, as the last Adam, true Israel, and great Davidic king, that Israel's typological role is fulfilled. This interpretation does *not* entail that the Jewish people have no future, but it does entail that their future, along with anyone else's, is seen in relation to Christ. In Christ, Jewish and Gentile believers equally and fully inherit and receive *all* God's promises as revealed through the covenants (Eph. 2:11–22). This also includes that to which the land promise ultimately pointed, namely, the new creation. In the progression of the covenants, the land functions as an actual place but also as a type, which anticipates something greater. The land is a type that looks back to Eden and, in light of God's redemptive plan, forward to the new creation, which is Eden as coextensive with the entire new creation (Revelation 21–22). Christ, as the antitype of Adam and Israel, is the first man of the new creation, and in his bodily resurrection, he inaugurates the

new creation, first in his people and then in the consummated glory of the new creation.

However, this way of viewing things, Feinberg and dispensationalism reject. It is not surprising that Feinberg, in his discussion of typology, not only adopts a different view of typology (than that outlined above) but also argues that Christ is *not* the antitype of Israel and that the land is *not* a typological pattern. Let us look at each of these areas in turn to clarify our point.

First, Feinberg recognizes that a common way to view typology, such as we affirm (though we would state it differently), is that the "type is shadow and the antitype is reality"; thus, the implication is that "the meaning of the antitype supersedes and cancels the meaning of the type in its own context."[111] Yet as he admits, dispensational theology rejects this view. He says dispensationalists "do not think types necessarily are shadows, and they demand that both type and antitype be given their due meanings in their own contexts while maintaining a typological relation to one another."[112] Furthermore, he endorses the view of David Baker that typology is not "in" the text and discovered by exegesis and thus is not intended by the author. Instead, typology rests on analogies between two persons, events, and institutions that are identified only retrospectively. Types do not prefigure something in the future, since that future thing would have a different meaning from what was apparent in the original context. Even if the New Testament interprets the Old Testament typologically, unless the New Testament antitype explicitly cancels the meaning of the Old Testament type, the meaning of the Old Testament text is still in force.[113] As Feinberg summarizes, a

> proper understanding of typology informs us that even if the NT interprets the OT typologically and even if we are to do so, that does not allow us to ignore or cancel the meaning of the type or substitute the meaning of the antitype for it. . . . [Types] are concrete historical events, persons, promises. They look to the future, but not in a way that makes their meaning equivalent to the antitype. . . . NT antitypes neither explicitly nor implicitly cancel the meaning of OT types.[114]

From this discussion it is obvious that we differ from Feinberg on typology, which leads to a second observation.

Why does Feinberg argue in this way? The answer is found throughout his entire discussion of what is essential to dispensational theology. He is convinced that national Israel is *not* a type of Christ, who has a people, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, who forever receive all God's promises, including the land, equally and fully.[115] Instead, Feinberg is persuaded that, if he were to accept that Israel is a type of Christ, it would undermine a future role for Israel as a nation, receiving specific promises (associated with the land) "distinct" from believing Gentile nations. He is convinced that God's promise to Abraham can be fulfilled in only one way to national Israel, which is still future. Yet his (indeed, the general dispensational) interpretation of these points begs the question since for this view to stand, it must demonstrate that Israel is not a type of Christ (at least in the traditional view of typology) and that in Christ, the church receives all God's promises and inherits the new creation.

However, as we will argue in our exposition of the covenants, the Bible's storyline begins in creation with Adam as the head of the human race, and all the other covenants unfold from this starting point. In creation, Eden, as the garden-temple sanctuary, is the archetype that the land later typifies and that, as a type, anticipates the recovery of the new creation by the last Adam. Furthermore, Adam, as the covenant head, is a type of the last Adam to come, and as the covenants progress, Adam's role is picked up in Noah, Abraham and his seed, and the nation of Israel, and is epitomized in the Davidic king whom the Prophets say will rule over the entire creation (e.g., Psalms 2, 72). In fact, through the progression of the covenants, there is *interbiblical* development of the typological patterns, so that when the new covenant era is inaugurated by the last Adam and the true Israel—our Lord Jesus Christ—these types reach their antitypical fulfillment in him (in an already–not yet way) and are applied to the church. Ultimately, our disagreement with dispensational theology is not merely over specific details but over how the Bible's entire storyline unfolds, beginning in creation and moving to the new creation through covenantal progression that is fulfilled in Christ. We are convinced that progressive covenantalism,

at least on these points, is a more "biblical" rendering of Scripture's metanarrative.[116]

What about covenant theology? Where do we differ with them in their use of typology and understanding of the interrelationships between the covenants? Two points will illustrate our differences. First, we are persuaded that their understanding of the genealogical principle is flawed, especially in regard to Christ's relationship to his people under the new covenant. It is a mistake to think that the genealogical principle of the Abrahamic covenant is not transformed as we move through covenantal progression. For example, under the Old Testament covenants, the genealogical principle—that is, the relationship between the covenant mediator and his seed—was *biological and natural* (e.g., Adam, Noah, Abraham, David). In the Abrahamic covenant (and then the old covenant), the sign of the covenant, circumcision, was applied to the flesh to indicate that the circumcised individual and his family were consecrated to God's priestly service of establishing God's kingdom within the covenant relationship. However, in these covenants, as John Meade explains, "The sign of circumcision of the flesh did not indicate the thing signified—devotion to Yahweh as king-priests."[117] In fact, "the sign of circumcision in the flesh under the Abrahamic and old covenants did not and could not bring about the reality signified—a truly devoted covenant member."[118] It is only when God himself, by his Spirit, circumcises the people's hearts that what circumcision signified will actually be the case (see Deut. 30:6; Ezek. 36:25–27). In the Old Testament, the sign of circumcision in the flesh becomes a type that points forward to the need for the circumcision of the heart.

However, as redemptive history unfolds, the Prophets anticipate a day when the Messiah will come and *all* his people will experience heart circumcision by the Spirit. What is promised is that *all* the people of the new covenant will have the inward reality of a new heart, who in relation to Christ, the covenant head, and by the Spirit, will live in service and obedience to God. In other words, under Christ's mediation, his seed/people are born of the Spirit, and *all* those in Christ are regenerated, are justified, savingly know God, and await their certain glorification at Christ's return. It

is for this reason that the sign of the new covenant, baptism, is applied to only those who are in fact the *spiritual* seed of Abraham—that is, those who have professed faith in Christ and have been circumcised of heart. As we will argue, this is precisely what the Prophets anticipated in the dawning of the new covenant (e.g., Jeremiah 31), namely, that the Lord would bring about a *spiritually* renewed covenant people, *all* of whom would know him, in contrast to the mixed, disobedient nation of Israel. In other words, in failing to grasp the progression in the covenants across redemptive history, specifically in terms of the relationship between the covenant mediator and his seed, covenant theology has failed to understand correctly how the genealogical principle has changed from Abraham to Christ. Their emphasis on the continuity of the covenant of grace has led them to flatten the newness of the new covenant community.

Second, we are also convinced that, as strange as it may appear, covenant theology does not consistently work out the implications of Christ being the antitype of all the covenant mediators, especially Israel. This criticism is similar to our evaluation of dispensational theology but for different reasons: both systems are not Christological enough! In the case of covenant theology, contra dispensational theology, it views Christ as the "true Israel," but it moves *too quickly* from Israel to the church without first thinking how Israel as a type leads us to Christ as the antitype, which then has important ecclesiological implications. As noted above, this is why covenant theology tends to flatten the differences between the covenant signs and communities. However, a better way of conceiving these relationships is by noting how, as we move from type to antitype, from covenant heads such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses/Israel, and David to Christ, we must view Israel first in relation to Christ rather than in relation to the church. This is why we will argue, contra covenant theology, that it is *incorrect* to view the church as by nature the same as Israel or as a kind of "renewed" instantiation of Israel. Instead, the church is *new* in the redemptive-historical sense. Because of her identification with Christ, the antitype of Israel and the head of the new creation, the church is a "new man" (Eph. 2:11–22) and is by nature *different* from Israel since she is no longer a mixed community. Moreover, all this is true because Christ Jesus

has fulfilled all the previous covenants, inaugurated the new covenant, and brought about God-intended covenantal change. And we, as God's new covenant people, receive the benefits of his work in only one way—through repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ—which then, by God's grace and power, transfers us from being "in Adam" to being "in Christ," with all the benefits of that union. Furthermore, the New Testament is clear: to be "in Christ" and thus "in" and "of" the new covenant entails that one has experienced a heart circumcision, since the New Testament knows nothing of one who has been transferred from Adam to Christ who is not effectually called of the Father, born of the Spirit, justified, holy, and awaiting glorification (see Rom. 8:28–39). *In these specific areas*, we part company with covenant theology and argue for what we believe is a more biblical alternative.

Summary Statement

We must now turn to the detailed exposition of the biblical covenants and their progression in redemptive history. In so doing, we will follow the hermeneutical method as outlined above. Each biblical covenant will first be placed in its own immediate context and will then be understood in terms of what comes *before* it in its epochal-covenantal context and finally in terms of what comes *after* it in light of the entire canon and Christ's coming. It is only by following this procedure that we are able to do justice to the Old Testament context on its own terms, unpack the interbiblical development within the Old Testament, and then discover how all the biblical covenants find their fulfillment and terminus in Christ. In addition, as each covenant is treated and then related to the whole, we will also note how legitimate typological patterns are developed through covenantal progression, with special focus on crucial points of difference between dispensational and covenant theology. Specific attention will be given to (1) the various covenant heads and their relation to Christ; (2) the covenant signs and how they are unfolded across the canon and related to the new covenant; and (3) the important role of national Israel in the biblical covenants and how Israel is a corporate Adam who functions as a type and pattern of the greater Adam, Israel, and Davidic king, who is the only true

and fully obedient covenant keeper and who achieves for us what we could never achieve—namely, our eternal redemption—by his life, death, and resurrection for us as our covenant head.

We readily admit that the debate between dispensational and covenant theology is a complicated one but important in its own right. Although we stand on the shoulders of giants in both camps, our goal is to propose a mediating position—*kingdom through covenant*, or *progressive covenantalism*—which we believe better accounts for the Bible's overall storyline, centered on the glory of our triune God, who is graciously and sovereignly accomplishing his plan and purposes for his glory and the good of the church. Let us now turn to that task.

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1. Parts of chap. 3 are adapted from Stephen J. Wellum, "What Is at Stake in the Openness Debate? The Inerrancy of Scripture," chap. 7 in *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*, ed. John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003). Used by permission of Crossway.

2. As a theological student, I was first confronted with this question of what it means to be "biblical" by my former professor Kevin J. Vanhoozer during the 1980s at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. For his answer to this question, see *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), and numerous other works.

3. See the following books for a basic evangelical approach to hermeneutics: Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006); Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002); Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011).

4. For recent expositions and defenses of the Christian view of Scripture, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010); D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016).

5. Kevin J. Vanhoozer has called this view the "Received View," in contrast to post-Enlightenment views of Scripture, since it was held in the early church and passed on throughout the ages, at least until recent times. See his article "God's Mighty Speech-Acts: The Doctrine of Scripture Today," in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 143–81. Until fairly recently, evangelicals and nonevangelicals alike have agreed that the witness of church history has favored a high view of Scripture, including its inerrancy. But in recent years this view has been challenged by a revisionist historiography. A new generation of historians is arguing that the modern conservative position on Scripture is something of an aberration that owes its impetus in part to the scholastic theology of the post-Reformation period and in part to the Princetonians, especially Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, and B. B. Warfield. Probably the best-known work to espouse this view is that of Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979). Rogers and McKim's thesis is that the historic position of the church maintains the Bible's authority only in areas of *faith and practice* (understood in a restrictive sense), *not* in every area on which it chooses to speak. This proposal, however, has been shown to be seriously flawed. For a critique of this viewpoint, see John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: Infallibility and Inerrancy in the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982); Paul Kjoss Helseth, *"Right Reason" and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010). See also the historical essays in the following works: D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, 43–317; D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983); Carson and Woodbridge, eds., *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986); Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979); Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984); John D. Hannah, ed., *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984).

6. The expressions “the God who is there” and “the God who is not silent” are taken from two of Francis A. Schaeffer’s works, *The God Who Is There*, 30th anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998); and *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1972).

7. See James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1977), 78.

8. See Sinclair B. Ferguson, “How Does the Bible Look at Itself?,” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, a Challenge, a Debate*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 47–66. For more on Scripture’s self-attestation and what it claims for itself, see E. J. Schnabel, “Scripture,” in *NDBT*, 34–43; Wayne Grudem, “Scripture’s Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture,” in Carson and Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth*, 19–59; John M. Frame, “Scripture Speaks for Itself,” in *God’s Inerrant Word*, ed. John W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 178–81; John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994); Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009). For a description of the biblical data grounding this conviction, including the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy, see Wellum, “The Inerrancy of Scripture,” in Piper, Taylor, and Helseth, *Beyond the Bounds*, 237–74.

9. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” in *NDBT*, 61.

10. On a “thin” vs. “thick” reading of Scripture, see Vanhoozer, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” 61–62.

11. On this expression, see Douglas J. Moo, “The Problem of *Sensus Plenior*,” in Carson and Woodbridge, *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, 179–211; G. K. Beale, “Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 392–93.

12. On a full treatment of *sensus plenior*, see Raymond E. Brown, *The* Sensus Plenior *of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore: St. Mary’s University, 1955), 88–122; Matthew W. I. Dunn, “Raymond Brown and the *Sensus Plenior* Interpretation of the Bible,” *SR* 36 (2007): 531–51; Douglas A. Oss, “Canon as Context: The Function of *Sensus Plenior* in Evangelical Hermeneutics,” *GTJ* 9, no. 1 (1988): 105–27. For most proponents of *sensus plenior*, the “fuller sense” is a meaning that the human author did not consciously intend, and as such, the meaning of the text cannot be discovered by grammatical-historical exegesis. We reject this view. The problem with it is that it opens the door to a subjective reading of the text without hermeneutical controls. Instead, we argue for a thorough exegetical theology that seeks to uncover the author’s intent yet is also sensitive to interbiblical development across the canon. In this way, we discover God’s intent through the human authors of Scripture at the canonical level. God says more than the individual authors may have known, yet he does not contravene what the authors wrote and intended.

13. Beale, “Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?,” 393.

14. Ibid. Michael D. Williams rightly argues that fanciful and allegorical interpretations are preventable “not by denying the reality of the fuller sense but by insisting that the fuller sense be established only as an extension of the original sense and solely on the basis of subsequent biblical revelation.” Thus, an acceptable form of *sensus plenior* should be “a fuller sense of what is already present, not an entirely other sense, as one finds in allegorical interpretation. While it is fair to see an oak within an acorn, it is not fair to see a cow within an acorn. But we must not lose sight of the author and his intention.” *Far as the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 81–82.

15. Beale, “Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?,” 393. For a development of these points, see G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 340–64; cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 307–452. See also Jared M. Compton, “Shared Intentions? Reflections on Inspiration and Interpretation in Light of Scripture’s Dual Authorship,” *Themelios* 33, no. 3 (2008): 23–33, esp. 30–33.

16. Geerhardus Vos, “The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1979), 10. See also George Ladd, who rightly finds that the “events themselves . . . are not self-explanatory; there was always a divinely initiated prophetic or apostolic word of interpretation. That Jesus died is an objective fact that even the Pharisees could affirm. That Jesus died *for our sins* is no less an ‘objective’ fact; but it is a theological event occurring within the historical fact which could be understood only from the prophetic word of interpretation. Revelation, therefore, occurred in the complex of event-Word.” G. E. Ladd, “Biblical Theology, Nature of,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:506.

17. *Intratextual* is another term that nicely describes our interpretation and application of Scripture. While the term may be used in New Testament studies to refer to how a biblical author alludes to other passages within his own writing, here we employ *intratextual* to emphasize how the self-description of Scripture should direct and shape our theology. Contra an *extratextual* reading of Scripture (the idea that people approach Scripture with a prior worldview that then squeezes the Scripture into that grid and interprets it accordingly), *intratextual* seeks to let Scripture speak *on its own terms*, that is, according to its own presentation, worldview framework, and structures (e.g., “covenant”). As we read biblical texts leading to a canonical reading, we let Scripture unfold its own plan along its own storyline, which is the only way to “think God’s thoughts after him.”

18. We use the term *progressive* in the sense of God’s unfolding plan over time, not in the sense that an earlier era was inferior and the later era has progressed or has reached a superior stage. The latter idea is associated with classic liberalism and its evolutionary and Hegelian understanding of religion, including its interpretation of Christianity. Instead, *progressive* emphasizes

the idea that God's redemptive plan did not occur all at once but was gradually disclosed in redemptive history as God entered into covenant relationships with his people and brought his plan to fulfillment in Christ.

19. William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, WBC 47A (Dallas: Word, 1991), 11.

20. Kevin Vanhoozer has strongly stressed the importance of literary forms for understanding the intent of the biblical authors and thus the intent of the divine author as well. For a full defense of this point, see his *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* D. A. Carson, agreeing with Vanhoozer about literary forms, rightly stresses the second point, that, as important as genre is to our grasping the author's intent, we must also read Scripture along its God-given storyline. See Carson's *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 141–278; cf. Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 147–264.

21. See Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 1–19, 147–276.

22. Horton's "intrasystematic categories" is what we mean by the term *intratextual*. For a helpful summary of the redemptive-historical approach to interpretation, see Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "The Redemptive-Historical View," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 89–110.

23. See George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 25th anniversary ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009).

24. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 5.

25. See ibid., 1–19, 147–276.

26. See Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 259–311.

27. We can borrow from the domain of real estate, whose three rules are "location, location, location," and apply it to biblical interpretation. The three rules of biblical-theological interpretation are "context, context, context," i.e., the textual, epochal, and canonical contexts.

28. Reading Scripture according to three horizons is not new. In fact, it is what all Christians have done, at least implicitly though not consistently, in their reading and application of the biblical text. For others who advocate this approach, see Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 16; Carson, *Gagging of God*, 190n133; Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 147–80; Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 60–62. In his own way, Vanhoozer states the basic thrust of the three horizons: "When describing 'what it meant/means,' it is perhaps best to think of a series of expanding interpretative frameworks. There is first the semantic range of what words could possibly have meant in their historical situation, then the historical context of what authors could have meant at a particular point in the history of redemption, then the literary context of what the words could have meant as part of a particular kind of literature, and finally what the words at a certain time in a certain kind of text mean today when read as part of a unified Canon that, taken as a whole, points to Jesus Christ" (62).

29. See, e.g., Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 52–64. Vanhoozer describes a text as "an extended piece of discourse—something said by someone to someone else about something—fixed by writing." He views literary texts as "communicative actions performed on a variety of levels for the reader's contemplation." To understand a text properly, one needs to do more than parse every verb, Vanhoozer contends; one "needs to know what an author is doing," which entails paying attention to what authors *do* in their sentences, paragraphs, and entire literary works. Interpreting texts properly involves "not only linguistic and historical but also *literary* competence." It is only when we do this that we interpret a text, including the biblical text, "on its own terms" and thus according to what the author is seeking to communicate to his readers. Ibid., 64. See also Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*; McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*; Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*; Walter C. Kaiser and Moisés Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007); cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*

30. On this point, see Beale, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?," 391–98; cf. Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *NDBT*, 98. Carson reviews different senses of *intertextuality* today (what we label *interbiblical*). One use of the term refers to current ways of thinking through how later texts use early texts in Scripture but also expands this to how contemporary interpreters absorb biblical texts, which in turn affects how they interpret biblical texts. This is *not* what we mean by *intertextual* or *interbiblical*. We speak of *intertextual* to describe how later biblical authors legitimately interpret earlier biblical texts and intentionally use an earlier text, identifying textual clues that are really *in* the text and that are developed as God's revelation is given more definition. Intertextuality properly understood, then, establishes, as Carson argues, "the beginnings of a typology that develops across the sweep of redemptive history." Ibid., 98. Carefully used, this kind of intertextuality allows the reader to grasp how God's revelation is united, develops, and is fulfilled in Christ. For a further discussion of intertextuality, see G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 22–35. For a "broader" view of intertextuality, which we do not fully endorse, see Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016). To see intertextuality in the New Testament's use of the Old, see G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007); G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012).

31. An important debate in biblical theology is whether we ought to read Scripture, specifically the Old Testament, by the ordering of the Hebrew canon. For example, Stephen G. Dempster insists that we should. *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 15–51. See also Dempster, "An 'Extraordinary Fact': *Torah* and Temple and the Contours of the Hebrew Canon" (Parts 1 and 2), *TynBul* 48, nos. 1–2 (1997): 23–53, 191–218; Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 53–57; John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995); James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 59–65; cf. Craig G. Bartholomew, et al., *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, Scripture and Hermeneutics 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006). We are sympathetic with this approach and basically adopt it in our reading of the Old Testament canon. However, one potential problem is the difficulty of establishing *the* official order of the Old Testament canon since there are a variety of orderings. Regardless of whether *the* official order of the Old Testament canon can be established (for which a strong case can be made), we minimally maintain that the actual practice of New Testament authors is to interpret Old Testament texts in relation to where they are covenantally located in history, and thus it is crucial to read texts in light of *earlier* and then *later* texts (hence the epochal and canonical horizons). G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson make this basic point: "One of the distinctive differences one sometimes finds between the way NT writers read the OT and the way their non-Christian Jewish contemporaries read it *is the salvation-historical grid* that is often adopted by the former. Some kind of historical sequence under the providence of a sovereign God is necessary for almost any kind of typological hermeneutic, of course, but there is something more." "Introduction," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, xxvi–xxvii (emphasis mine). They then go on to illustrate this point, as we do below, by appealing to Galatians 3, Romans 4, and the book of Hebrews to underscore the interpretive significance of reading texts in terms of historical sequence. Given this fact, whether one can establish the precise order of the canon is not as significant as seeking to interpret biblical texts in terms of where they are located in the unfolding plan of God.

32. See Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 19–110. Goldsworthy compares and contrasts a number of evangelical biblical theologies and wrestles with the important question of how the Bible itself divides redemptive history. Goldsworthy gives his own proposal, and our *kingdom through covenantal progression* is a modification of his proposal.

33. See Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 80–234; Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000); Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 111–69.

34. Goldsworthy does speak of the covenants, but they do not function as the main way by which God's plan unfolds over time. For him, kingdom is the main category. *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 241–45. However, Goldsworthy's failure to link *kingdom* with *covenants* and to think through covenantal progression as the way the Bible is structured is a weakness of his work and something we are seeking to remedy in this book.

35. Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 112.

36. See ibid., 111–69, for his critique of Vos-Clowney and his alternative proposal.

37. See ibid., 19–37, 190–214, for Goldsworthy's proposal, following the work of Donald Robinson and Gabriel Hebert. In brief, the proposal attempts to "put together" the Bible's storyline in terms of three main stages of revelation: "biblical history from creation, and especially from Abraham, to Solomon; the eschatology of the writing prophets; and the fulfillment of all things in Christ." Ibid., 25.

38. For our critique and modification of Goldsworthy's proposal, see Peter J. Gentry, "The Significance of Covenants in Biblical Theology," *SBJT* 20, no. 1 (2016): 9–33; Stephen J. Wellum, "Review of Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*," 9Marks, November 13, 2012, https://www.9marks.org/review/christ-centered-biblical-theology-hermeneutical-foundations-and-principles/.

39. Besides Goldsworthy's books, others who stress that *kingdom* is foundational to the Bible's backbone include George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974); G. R. Beasley-Murray, "The Kingdom of God in the Old and New Testaments," in *Reclaiming the Prophetic Mantle: Preaching the Old Testament Faithfully*, ed. George L. Kline (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 179–201; Bruce Waltke, "The Kingdom of God in Biblical Theology," in *Looking into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology*, ed. David W. Baker (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 15–27; Darrell L. Bock, "The Kingdom of God in New Testament Theology," in Baker, *Looking into the Future*, 28–60; Dan G. McCartney, "*Ecce Homo*: The Coming of the Kingdom as the Restoration of Human Vicegerency," *WTJ* 56, no. 1 (1994): 1–21.

40. On this point, see John D. Meade, "Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart: The Typology of the Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 127–58.

41. Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 98; cf. Beale and Carson, "Introduction," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, xxvi–xxvii.

42. See Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, NSBT 31 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

43. See Jason S. DeRouchie, “Father of a Multitude of Nations: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective,” in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 7–38.

44. See Douglas Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 195–272.

45. Hebrews offers more examples of this point, i.e., that texts must be read by virtue of their location in the Bible’s storyline. In Hebrews 7, the author concludes that the Old Testament viewed the Levitical priesthood as temporary because God *later* announced another priest in a different order (Heb. 7:11, 28; cf. Psalm 110). In Hebrews 8, building on his argument in chap. 7, the author concludes that since the promise of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31 comes *after* the establishment of the old covenant, this is proof that the old covenant should have been viewed as temporary and as pointing beyond itself to something greater. In these ways, Scripture is read by tracing out the Bible’s storyline and interpreting texts in light of where they are covenantally located. See Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 155–98.

46. See Carson, “Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul’s Understanding of the Old and the New,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2, *The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 410–12. Carson argues that Paul understands the significance of the Mosaic covenant by paying strict attention to its place in the Pentateuch’s storyline. When Paul does so, he almost treats the law-covenant as a parenthesis (Gal. 3:15–4:7). Carson states, “The promise to Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed antedates Moses and the giving of the law by centuries, and that promise cannot be annulled by the giving of the law (3:17), regardless of how much space is given over to the law in the sacred text, or how large a role it played in the history of Israel.” Ibid., 412.

47. Vanhoozer, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” 61.

48. Ibid. For a more detailed development of this point, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 194–203.

49. Vanhoozer, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” 62.

50. On this point, Richard Lints rightly insists that our reading of Scripture, if it is on the Bible’s “own terms,” must follow the “interpretive matrix of the Scriptures.” “In order to do this, a theological framework cannot simply mine the Scriptures looking for answers to a set of specific questions that arise uniquely in the modern era. It should seek out the questions that the Scriptures are asking, for these remain the questions that are important for understanding the past and present and future.” As Lints notes, the attempt to follow the interpretive matrix of Scripture is not searching “for doctrinal models and keys that fit the Bible’s complex locks and open them up to the reader.” Rather, we must seek to unpack the *Bible’s own structure* (i.e., intratextual) and make sure that “the conceptual categories of the theological framework adequately reflect the phenomena of Scripture” in terms of both its specific content *and* its structure. Our understanding of the interpretive framework may have to be modified in light of exegesis, however. As Lints notes, “the fact that this framework is properly subject to reform should in no way be taken to imply that the Scriptures themselves contain data that may be organized in any number of conflicting fashions or indeed that there are a variety of competing frameworks in the Scriptures themselves.” *Fabric of Theology*, 268–89; quotations from 269, 270, 288. Our proposal is that *the progression of the biblical covenants* serves as the main framework and backbone of the Bible’s storyline and that to ignore this fact or to misunderstand the relationships between the covenants and how Scripture intends for them to be “put together” leads to a misreading of Scripture on its own terms and as God intended.

51. Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 303.

52. Ibid.

53. Paul M. Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 18. Hoskins describes two different conceptions of typology within contemporary biblical studies: a traditional view, which believes that the correspondence between type and antitype is God given, intentional, and predictive; and a critical view, which is more skeptical about the predictive and prospective significance of the types. Ibid., 18–36. Our view of typology will argue for the traditional conception. For a defense of such a view, see Richard Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical TUPOS Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981); Davidson, “The Eschatological Hermeneutic of Biblical Typology,” *TheoRhēma* 6, no. 2 (2011): 5–48; Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 13–27. On the larger subject of typology, see John H. Stek, “Biblical Typology Yesterday and Today,” *CTJ* 5 (1970): 133–62; Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. D. H. Madvig (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982); Carson, “Mystery and Fulfillment,” 404; Douglas J. Moo and Andrew D. Naselli, “The Problem of the New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament,” in Carson, *Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, 702–46; Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 304–10; G. K. Beale, “Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?,” 387–404; Graeme Goldsworthy, “Relationship of Old Testament and New Testament,” in *NDBT*, 81–89; Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 234–57; Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 170–89; David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: The Theological Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 169–89; Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*; Daniel J. Treier, “Typology,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 823–27.

54. For an excellent discussion of how important typology is for resolving differences between dispensational and covenant theology, see Brent E. Parker, “The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern: A Theological Critique of Covenant and

Dispensational Theologies" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017); Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship," in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 39–68.

55. On this point, see Brent E. Parker, "Typology and Allegory: Is There a Distinction? A Brief Examination of Figural Reading," *SBJT* 21, no. 1 (2017): 57–83.

56. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 119. Galatians 4:24–26 is a difficult text. Many argue that Paul is employing an allegorical interpretation while others explain the passage along the lines of typology. A. B. Caneday argues that *allegory* is present but not on the basis of Paul's interpretative prowess; rather, the Genesis *text* is allegorical in that the characters in the historical narrative are invested with symbolic representations and significance. For an analysis of this *textually warranted* form of allegory, see A. B. Caneday, "Covenant Lineage Allegorically Prefigured: 'Which Things Are Written Allegorically' (Galatians 4:21–31)," *SBJT* 14, no. 3 (2010): 50–77.

57. Our understanding of typology is indebted to the work of Richard Davidson (who investigates all the uses of *typos* in the New Testament and then draws conclusions as to the nature of typology on that basis), G. K. Beale, Paul Hoskins, Douglas Moo and Andrew Naselli, Richard Lints, Graeme Goldsworthy, et al. (see n53 above for their works). For a detailed discussion of typology, debates surrounding it, and a defense of the traditional view, see Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern," 20–94.

58. This definition is compiled from the summary discussion in Davidson, *Typology in Scripture*, 397–408; Davidson, "The Eschatological Hermeneutic of Biblical Typology," 5–48. Cf. Beale, who defines typology this way: "*The study of analogical correspondences among revealed truths about persons, events, institutions, and other things within the historical framework of God's special revelation, which, from a retrospective view, are of a prophetic nature and are escalated in their meaning*." *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 14 (emphasis original). Graham A. Cole also gives a helpful definition of typology: "The idea that persons (e.g., Moses), events (e.g., the exodus), and institutions (e.g., the temple) can—in the plan of God—prefigure a later stage in that plan and provide the conceptuality necessary for understanding the divine intent (e.g., the coming of Christ to be the new Moses, to effect the new exodus, and to be the new temple)." *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 289.

59. The historical and textual dimensions are important. Types are not symbols of spiritual ideas but are real historical people and events, and in God's plan, *he* intends for them to point forward to the antitype.

60. Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 304. The emphasis on history is important since it distinguishes a traditional view of typology from what Davidson labels a postcritical, neo-typological viewpoint. *Typology in Scripture*, 46–75. For the latter view, the historicity of the types is not essential. For a traditional view, the correspondence between type and antitype is not a mere literary phenomenon but rather is rooted in historical realities. See Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple*, 27; Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment," 404.

61. See Earle E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 127; Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple*, 21.

62. The predictive-prospective nature of typology is a distinguishing feature of the traditional view over against what Hoskins labels the critical view (or what Davidson labels the postcritical neo-typology view). For the critical view, which we reject, the discovery of typological patterns is based on analogies that later New Testament authors retrospectively make—a construction by the later authors but not really "in" the Old Testament texts. The critical view rejects the traditional view's claim that typological patterns are *in* the Old Testament texts, i.e., something Old Testament authors intended. It rejects the idea that *from the vantage point of the Old Testament*, especially the prophets who have picked up earlier typological patterns, types were predictive (see R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982], 38–43). Some within the critical view argue that even though Old Testament authors did not intend for types to be predictive, God did. Others, like Richard Longenecker, go further and argue that the type was not even part of the fuller divine intention; instead, it is a *new* meaning that only New Testament authors make due to writing under divine inspiration. *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 124–34; cf. David Crump, *Encountering Jesus, Encountering Scripture: Reading the Bible Critically in Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013). Others are even more critical and argue that New Testament authors are distorting Old Testament texts because what they "see" is not "in" the Old Testament. Regardless of one's place on the spectrum, the critical view rejects the understanding of typology that casts Old Testament authors as predictive, and it insists that the New Testament's reading of these texts is out of sync with the intention of earlier authors. David Baker favors this view when he contends that typology is not prophecy, nor is exegetically derived, since "it [typology] is theological reflection on relationships between events, persons and institutions recorded in biblical texts." *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 181; cf. 180–89.

63. For a helpful article on "mystery" in Paul, see Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment," 393–436, and for a larger biblical theology of "mystery," see Beale and Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed*.

64. Types are *predictive* and *prospective* by nature (ontology) because they are divinely designed. Yet, epistemologically, they are *retrospective* in the sense that later authors recognize the types as God-intended patterns by interbiblical development. If the types are retrospective in an ontological sense, then they are not God-intended but are a mere analogy of human construction and thus are arbitrary and a form of allegory. Instead, redemption *and* revelation are divinely planned and progressive. As later Old Testament authors reflect on earlier texts and as God reveals more of his plan, they begin to "see" how God's plan is unfolding. Due to interbiblical development *in the Old Testament*, the prophets see more clearly the significance of various types and how

they fit in God's plan leading us to Christ. The New Testament authors then pick up the Old Testament trajectory and detail how the previous types reach their terminus in Christ (Heb. 1:1–3). Thus, types are not analogies that later readers construct contrary to the meaning of earlier texts. Types are prospective and God-intended to predict their antitypical fulfillment in Christ, yet, epistemologically, they are understood retrospectively, as God's covenantal revelation unfolds and takes on greater clarity.

65. See Beale, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Text?," 394–95; and Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 306–10, who makes this same argument.

66. See Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 303–11; cf. Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 245–57; Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple*, 21–27.

67. Typological patterns are discovered *exegetically* by interpreting texts in their textual, epochal, and canonical contexts. On the criteria to determine what is a legitimate type, see Beale, *Handbook of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 19–25; cf. Davidson, "The Eschatological Hermeneutic of Biblical Eschatology," 5–48; Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern," 79–93. Louis Berkhof correctly insisted that the "accidental similarity between an Old and New Testament person or event does not constitute the one a type of the other. There must be some Scriptural evidence that it was so designed by God." *Principles of Biblical Interpretation: Sacred Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1952), 145. Cf. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 145–46. For a study of the intertextual development of exodus typology in the Old Testament, see Friedbert Ninow, *Indicators of Typology within the Old Testament: The Exodus Motif* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2001). For other studies that warrant the legitimacy of types within the Old Testament, see Chad L. Bird, "Typological Interpretation *within* the Old Testament: Melchizedekian Typology," *Concordia Journal* 26 (2000): 36–52; Daniel R. Streett, "As It Was in the Days of Noah: The Prophets' Typological Interpretation of Noah's Flood," *CTR*, n.s., 5, no. 1 (2007): 33–51.

68. Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern," 72. See Hans K. LaRondelle, who argues that "because the covenantal communion with God is established through Christ only, all typology in the New Testament converges and culminates in Christ. Because Christ fulfills and completes Old Testament salvation history, New Testament typology originates, centers, and terminates in him." *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 44–45.

69. As we will later develop in more detail, this observation that we, as the church, are the "Israel of God" only by virtue of our union with Christ, who is the antitypical fulfillment of Israel, is crucial for carving a *via media* between dispensationalism's and covenant theology's views of the church.

70. For a detailed treatment of escalation in typology, see Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern," 69–79; cf. Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 305.

71. For a development of this point, see Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 95–188.

72. For a helpful discussion of inaugurated eschatology, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 41–116.

73. Craig Blaising wrongly thinks that we affirm that "typology is the progressive movement which directs the narrative from promise to fulfillment." "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom through Covenant*: A Hermeneutical-Theological Response," *MSJ* 26, no. 1 (2015): 115. This is incorrect. We affirm that the Bible's metanarrative unfolds *through the progression of the covenants* and that typology develops through this same covenantal progression. What "establishes" the divine plan is the unfolding of the covenants, not typology (contra Blaising's assertion on p. 116), and typology develops from type to antitype in and through the storyline of the biblical covenants.

74. See Gen. 1–3; 5:1–2; 9:1–17; 12:1–3; Ex. 4:22–23; 2 Sam. 7:5–16; Psalm 8; Rom. 5:12–21; Heb. 2:5–18.

75. See Gen. 12:1–3; 17:1–22; Ex. 1:1–7; 2 Sam. 7:5–16; Gal. 3:16, 29. See T. D. Alexander, "Seed," in *NDBT*, 769–73; DeRouchie, "Father of a Multitude of Nations," 7–38.

76. See Exodus 19–20, 24, 32–34; Leviticus 8–9; Deut. 18:14–22; 34:10–12; John 1:14–18; Heb. 1:1–3; 3:1–6.

77. See John S. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments; Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 63–86.

78. See Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 73–79.

79. Vern S. Poythress nicely discusses the thorny issue of "literal" interpretation. He demonstrates, like Feinberg, that the difference between dispensational and covenant theology is not over this point but over how "literal" is employed in specific areas, for example, the Israel-church relationship. It is incorrect to reduce the differences to this point. Also, it is best to understand "literal" in the *sensus literalis* sense, i.e., the meaning of sentences tied to the intention of the author and their employment of various literary forms. *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 78–96. Thus, as Kevin Vanhoozer argues, "Taking the Bible literally means reading for its literary sense, the sense of its communicative act. This entails, first, doing justice to the propositional, poetic, and purposive aspects of each text as a communicative act and, second, relating these to the Bible considered as a unified divine communicative act: the Word of God." *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 312. For a historical survey of the concept of *sensus literalis*, see Charles J. Scalise, "The 'Sensus Literalis': A Hermeneutical Key to Biblical Exegesis," *SJT* 42, no. 1 (1989): 45–65.

80. See, e.g., Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 171–75; cf. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 57–60; Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 78–129.

81. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 74. See also David L. Turner, "The Continuity of Scripture and Eschatology: Key Hermeneutical Issues," *GTJ* 6, no. 2 (1985): 275–87, who argues that the charge of hyperliteralism or spiritualizing will not move the debate forward (esp. 275–78).

82. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 74.

83. Ibid., 75.

84. Ibid.

85. See ibid., 75–76. Feinberg quotes Willem VanGemeren to illustrate this basic hermeneutical point from the side of covenant theology. VanGemeren, in noting how covenant theology determines what is still in force from the Old Testament, describes his hermeneutical approach as follows: "Whatever the NT did not explicitly affirm was rejected and OT prophetic language was typologically interpreted." "Israel as the Hermeneutical Crux in the Interpretation of Prophecy (II)," *WTJ* 46, no. 2 (1984): 262; cited in Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 76. This hermeneutical observation is also related to how dispensational and covenant theology employ typology, a point we will return to below.

86. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 76.

87. No doubt, covenant theology's view of the land promise to Israel and its fulfillment in the New Testament is more complicated than saying that the New Testament does not explicitly affirm the land promise to Israel and thus that it is no longer in force. Within covenant theology, the land promise is typological in two ways. First, some link Israel's land back to Eden and observe the expansion of the land promise throughout the Old Testament prophecies, which ultimately culminates in the new creation. See, e.g., O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), 3–31; G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 750–72. Second, others argue that the land promise is tied to the conditionality of the old covenant, which Israel as a nation broke. See, e.g., Michael S. Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 47; Keith A. Mathison, *From Age to Age: The Unfolding of Biblical Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 83–84. Dispensationalists respond by noting that the land promise is grounded not merely in the conditionality of the old covenant but also in the unconditional Abrahamic covenant. This debate highlights two points that we will discuss below: first, whether the covenants should be viewed as either unconditional or conditional, and, second, whether the land promise is typological in nature.

88. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 76.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid. Feinberg writes, "If the NT explicitly rejects an OT institution, etc., it is canceled. But if God makes a point once (the OT), why must he repeat it in the NT for it still to be true and operative? So long as he neither explicitly or [*sic*] implicitly rejects the OT teaching, why assume it is canceled just because the NT does not repeat it? . . . Some may respond that the key word here is 'implicit.' While God may not explicitly negate OT promises to Israel in the NT, he surely does implicitly by applying them to the church. My response is that the promises cannot be canceled even implicitly *if they are made unconditionally*!" (emphasis original).

91. One can also think of some areas in soteriology. Everyone acknowledges that there is one plan of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Yet covenant theology argues that the salvation *experience* of the Old Testament believer is basically the same as that of the new covenant believer, thus only acknowledging a knowledge difference from old to new and reading the full experience of the new covenant back on Old Testament saints. This is specifically seen in how covenant theologians view the indwelling (not regeneration) of the Holy Spirit under the old covenant. See Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 68; B. B. Warfield, "The Spirit of God in the Old Testament," in *Biblical Doctrines* (1929; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1988), 121–28; cf. James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 1–24.

92. Our view is that Christ is the last Adam, true Israel, and Davidic king who, in himself, fulfills Israel's role and who reconstitutes a people composed of believing Jews and Gentiles into a new humanity, the church. In Christ, *all* God's promises are fulfilled and applied to the church, including the land promise. Regarding the land promise, we agree with many in covenant theology who argue that Israel's land is typological. First, it is a type that looks back to creation and Eden, and through the progression of the covenants is a recovery or microcosm of Eden. Second, as a type it reaches its antitypical fulfillment in Christ and his entire new creation work, which ultimately is consummated in the new creation. What Eden anticipated (and what the land of Israel was a small recovery of) is the dwelling of God with his people (the church, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles) in a new creation, where there is no temple because "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Rev. 21:22). For an excellent defense of this view, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); cf. Robertson, *Israel of God*, 3–31; Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

93. See Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 71–73.

94. As noted in chap. 2, this equation of the Abrahamic covenant with the new covenant is specifically seen in how covenant theologians discuss the parties of the covenant. In arguing for the "dual aspect" of the covenant, namely, that in "visible Israel/church" the parties of the covenant are "believers and their children," covenant theology demonstrates that they view new

covenant membership through the lens of the Abrahamic covenant, thus identifying the two covenants without allowing for any redemptive-historical changes between them via covenantal progression.

95. On this point, in addition to Feinberg, see T. D. Alexander, "Seed," 769–73; DeRouchie, "Father of a Multitude of Nations," 7–38; DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective," *JETS* 58, no. 3 (2015): 445–85; cf. John G. Reisinger, *Abraham's Four Seeds* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 1998).

96. Interestingly, Feinberg discusses the *typological* nature of the "seed of Abraham" only in terms of the church. He admits that the New Testament draws lessons from Israel for the church (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:1–6) and thus justifies this typological relation. However, there are two points missing from his discussion, which we will develop below. First, Feinberg adopts a specific view of typology that we reject, i.e., that typology is more analogical than predictive and prospective. Second, Feinberg never discusses Christ as the antitype of Israel. On this point, see DeRouchie, "Father of a Multitude of Nations," 7–38; and Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship," 39–68. This is a major problem with Feinberg's discussion of Abraham's seed. As we will develop, a crucial Christological point is neglected, so that the Israel-Christ-church relationship is not properly construed. This point has important implications for our *kingdom through covenant* view, which, interestingly, distinguish it from *both* dispensationalism *and* covenant theology regarding the Israel-church relationship. Feinberg claims that the "more one emphasizes the distinctness and importance of the various senses [of Abraham's seed], the more dispensational and discontinuity-oriented his system becomes, for the distinct senses necessitate speaking of Israel ethnically, politically, and spiritually, as well as speaking of the church." "Systems of Discontinuity," 73. This is generally true, but in our proposal, while we will emphasize the distinctness and importance of the various senses of Abraham's seed, we will also insist that Israel is first a type of Christ before it is applied to the church, and as such, we do not fit in the dispensational category.

97. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 73.

98. For a development of this point, see chap. 19 and Stephen J. Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 97–161; and esp. Meade, "Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart," 127–58; cf. Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 89–137.

99. G. K. Beale offers some helpful observations in this regard. Given the progressive nature of Scripture, Beale admits that probably "the Old Testament authors did not exhaustively understand the meaning, implications, and possible applications of all that they wrote." As authors who wrote under divine inspiration, what they wrote was God given, true, and authoritative. Yet they probably did not understand where the entire revelation was going, since God had not yet disclosed all the details of his plan. Thus, as God gives more revelation across time through later authors, he unveils more of his plan. For this reason, the New Testament has priority over the Old. As Beale argues, the New Testament's interpretation of the Old may expand the previous author's meaning by seeing new implications and applications; however, given that we discover God's intent through the human authors, later texts do *not* contravene the integrity of the earlier texts but rather develop them "in a way which is consistent with the Old Testament author's understanding of the way in which God interacts with his people" in previous eras of redemptive history. Scripture, then, as an entire canon must interpret Scripture; the later parts must "draw out and explain more clearly the earlier parts." "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?," 393. Cf. G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 223–60.

100. For this charge, see Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 75. Jewett also argues that on the matter of circumcision covenant theology reads the Old Testament through the New and the New Testament "as though it were the Old." *Infant Baptism*, 105.

101. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 79.

102. Ibid. Within both dispensational and covenant theology there is a legitimate debate over which biblical covenants are conditional versus which are unconditional. See Horton, *God of Promise*, 23–110; Bruce K. Waltke, "The Phenomenon of Conditionality within Unconditional Covenants," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 123–39; Craig A. Blaising, "The Structure of Biblical Covenants: The Covenants Prior to Christ," in Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1993), 128–211; Elliott E. Johnson, "Covenants in Traditional Dispensationalism," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999), 121–68; Darrell L. Bock, "Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism," in Bateman, *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, 169–223.

103. Feinberg lists the following examples: Joel 2:28 / Acts 2:16–17; Amos 9:11–12 / Acts 15:16–18; Hos. 11:1 / Matt. 2:15. "Systems of Discontinuity," 77.

104. See Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 77–83; cf. Bruce A. Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 68–97.

105. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 83.

106. Robert Saucy, "The Progressive Dispensational View," in *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 161–62.

107. On this point, see Meade, "Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart," 127–58. J. V. Fesko comes close to tying circumcision to the circumcision of the heart but not as an antitypical fulfillment. When cast as an antitype, baptism, as the new

covenant sign, signifies that circumcision of the heart has taken place in a person as he or she professes faith in Christ, rather than pointing to the need for it. *Word, Water, and Spirit: A Reformed Perspective on Baptism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 337–67.

108. On this point, see Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern," 127–36.

109. For this argument, see James R. White, "The Newness of the New Covenant (Part 1)," and "The Newness of the New Covenant (Part 2)," in *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology*, ed. Richard C. Barcellos (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2014), 325–55, 357–82.

110. For nuanced differences on the nature and use of typology within dispensational theology, see Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern," 178–88.

111. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 78. We would not draw the implications Feinberg does. He assumes that this understanding of typology (1) fails to do justice to the original context, (2) is not predictive-prophetic in the sense that God intended the type to point beyond itself to the antitype, and (3) is not developed intertextually *in the Old Testament* so that the New Testament's fulfillment of the type is precisely what God intended. We affirm that types have a meaning in their own context, that they are prophetic, and that they find their fulfillment and terminus in the antitype. Also, we know God's intention regarding the type by tracing the interbiblical/intertextual development of it, which is first fulfilled in Christ and then applied to the church.

112. Ibid.

113. See ibid., 77–79. For Baker's discussion of typology, see *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 169–89.

114. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 78–79. See also a similar point in Paul D. Feinberg, "Hermeneutics of Discontinuity," in Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 122–24.

115. This can be seen in John Feinberg's discussion, as noted above, that "seed of Abraham" carries a biological/ethnic/national sense, a political sense, a spiritual sense, and a typological sense. "Systems of Discontinuity," 71–73. However, while he affirms that Israel can be viewed as a type of the church, he omits any discussion of how Israel is typological of Christ, the new and true Israel.

116. Paul Feinberg faces similar problems with typology in "Hermeneutics of Discontinuity," 122–24. We agree with his commitment to "historical-grammatical" hermeneutics in determining textual meaning, but he fails to do justice to intertextual development *within the Old Testament* for types. He assumes that the land promise is not a type, and since the New Testament does not explicitly abrogate it, the promise is still in force. However, if the land is a type that looks back to Eden and forward to the new creation, *and the Old Testament develops the promise in this way*, then Feinberg's position does not stand. The New Testament is not changing the meaning of the "land"; rather, it properly shows what the land promise meant and was prophetically anticipating in God's plan.

117. Meade, "Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart," 152.

118. Ibid., 153.

Part 2

EXPOSITION OF THE BIBLICAL COVENANTS

4

The Notion of Covenant in the Bible and in the Ancient Near East

Those who have lived during the past forty years have experienced enormous changes and shifts in culture and society. I am certainly no expert in government, politics, or society, and cannot provide a profound study of changes in our culture and the reasons for them. I may, however, be allowed a nonexpert opinion based on my own experience, observations, and reading over the years. At least two factors appear to be fundamental in the changes in culture and society in North America.

First, relationships in family and society are no longer characterized by generosity, love, and trust. Instead, everything is measured out precisely. The cost of every little thing is detailed, and we must pay for everything. When a person is hired, every minute duty and responsibility of work is specified in many, many rules so that if anything goes wrong, the business knows the situation exactly. Nothing is presumed. For example, about forty years ago a ministry in Canada called Christian Horizons fired a worker because that worker was having homosexual relations. The employee took the matter to court, and the judge upheld the complaint of the worker because the employer had not spelled out in any document that those employed by this Christian mission could not be homosexual. Homosexuality is not the point of this illustration. The point is that what was formerly sufficient as “understood” now has to be detailed in writing. A basic distrust lurks behind almost all business relations. Thirty years ago I bought a house in Toronto. I did not hire an inspector. I checked the house out myself, believed what the former owner related verbally about the

condition of the house, and proceeded to purchase it. Some twenty years ago, when we moved to Louisville, the people who bought our house in Toronto did not believe the information we provided about the house. They hired an inspector. I had informed them that the basement was dry, but they did not believe me. The inspector measured the humidity. He told them the basement was dry. In Louisville, we had to hire a house inspector and a termite inspector, and we had to look at the disclosure agreement signed by the former owner. One can still be cheated after all that.

Second, North America is becoming fragmented by individual and regional interests. What our countries are all about—the larger plan, the overall purpose, what draws a people together as a nation—is absent. This is partly due to the spirit of our times and the central character of our society today. A major change and shift is taking place. For the last two centuries, civilization was dominated by reason. Reason was king. Everything could be worked out by reason, and everything could be conquered by science. In the past, people were not interested in stories, because stories are not always logical and ordered and scientific. Today, reason is no longer king, and people are keenly interested in stories, as we can easily see from the amount of energy, money, and time spent on movies or at theaters. But people are not interested in the "Big Story." Why? Because big stories attempt to explain all the little stories, and when you propose an explanation that covers everything, you are bigoted. You are forcing your opinion on someone else. You have committed the unpardonable sin of being intolerant. Alternatively, there is so much information that the task of adducing a big story that encompasses it all seems too daunting or even hubristic.

The question of relationships is handled in the Bible by one concept, one word: *covenant*. And the question of an overall plan is handled by the sequence of significant covenants.

Covenants in the Bible

The idea and notion of covenant *as found in the Bible and biblical world*, and likely even in the term, is foreign to our culture, society, and thought-world today. A brief overview of covenants in the Old Testament and in the

ancient Near East, along with definitions, will begin to adjust our perspective to that of the Bible.

Covenants in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for covenant is *bĕrît*. The same word is used in Scripture for a wide diversity of oath-bound commitments in various relationships. It is used to refer to international treaties (Josh. 9:6; 1 Kings 15:19), clan alliances (Gen. 14:13), personal agreements (Gen. 31:44), national agreements (Jer. 34:8–10), and loyalty agreements (1 Sam. 20:14–17), including marriage (Mal. 2:14).

International Treaties

In Joshua 9, when Joshua led Israel into the land of Canaan and attacked the Canaanites who were living in the land at that time, Israel was deceived and tricked by the Gibeonites into making a treaty with them. This was a peace treaty between two nations.

In 1 Kings 5:12, Hiram, king of Tyre, a city in ancient Phoenicia, and Solomon, king of Israel, made an international treaty. There were peaceful relations between the two countries and agreements for commerce and trade.

Clan/Tribal Alliances

In Genesis 14:13, powerful nomads of the desert formed an alliance to help each other in case of attack by enemies. This was essentially an alliance between clans or tribes.

Personal Agreements

After years of attempting to best and outwit each other, Laban and his nephew Jacob finally made an agreement not to harm each other (Gen. 31:44). This was a private agreement between two individual persons.

National Legal Agreements

In Jeremiah 34:8–10, King Zedekiah made a covenant with the people to proclaim freedom for all the slaves. Although this may seem somewhat similar to a legal agreement or contract, it was different in character from

contracts and legal documents of today. Since the covenant was made between king and people, it operated at a national level.

Loyalty Agreements
Jonathan, the son of King Saul, developed a deep friendship with David during the years when Saul sought to get rid of David and kill him. This friendship was formally solemnized twice by agreements of loyalty (1 Sam. 18:3; 23:18).

Marriage
The marriage relationship is a particular kind of loyalty agreement formally solemnized by a vow before God. This is clearly indicated by Proverbs 2:17 and Malachi 2:14.

What this evidence demonstrates is that the Hebrew word *bĕrît* is used for a *wide variety of relationships,* and therefore, we should be careful about definitions that are too narrow.

Definitions and Illustrations

Defining the term "covenant" (*bĕrît*) is difficult, but for heuristic purposes the following may be used as a place to start. Gordon Hugenberger's definition is brief and clear:

> A covenant, in its normal sense, is an elected, as opposed to natural, relationship of obligation under oath.[1]

The following description, adapted from Daniel C. Lane, is similar but fuller:

> A covenant is an enduring agreement that defines a relationship between two parties involving a solemn, binding obligation (or obligations) specified on the part of at least one of the parties toward the other, made by oath under threat of divine curse, and ratified by a visual ritual.[2]

Hugenberger, who produced an extensive and scholarly treatment of marriage as a covenant, notes that in the history of Israel a covenant always

entails (1) a relationship (2) with a nonrelative (3) that involves obligations and (4) is established through an oath.[3] Thus, a *bĕrît* is a relationship involving an oath-bound commitment.

It should be noted, however, that in Scripture the relationship between parents and children is considered covenantal, and this relationship is not with a *nonrelative*, nor is it a relationship one *chooses*. In Proverbs 3:3, a father commands his son to "let love [*ḥesed*] and faithfulness [*'ĕmet*] never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart" (NIV). Normally the objects of the pair of words "bind . . . write . . ." are the individual commands or instructions of the covenant.[4] Here in Proverbs 3:3, however, the third-person masculine plural pronoun clearly refers to *ḥesed* and *'ĕmet*. Kindness and faithfulness speak of the character/manner of the obedience of children to their parents, that is, the quality or way of performing covenant responsibilities. Thus Proverbs 3:3 *is* equivalent to the parallel passages, but the emphasis here falls on the manner in which children render obedience to their parents: the motivation for obeying parents is covenant loyalty, not duress.

In brief, the definition of covenant must be short and simple to cover all instances in Scripture: it is a relationship between two parties involving permanent and serious commitments of faithful, loyal love, obedience, and trust. Covenants differ considerably from business contracts or marketplace agreements.

Scholars debate whether *bĕrît* "can denote a relationship between parties, or simply the obligation one party takes upon himself."[5] This debate seems to be based upon a false dichotomy. Fulfilling an obligation between human parties involves them formalizing some understanding between them, and no relationship between human parties is without obligations unless it functions at a merely animal level.

Extensive studies of the etymology or origin of the word *bĕrît* have not been particularly illuminating as to its meaning.[6] In the branch of the Semitic family to which Hebrew belongs, *bĕrît* is attested as a loanword in Egyptian texts as early as 1300 BC.[7] This fact indicates that the use of the word was already well established before that time. Later we will see that

examples and usage help us understand the term better than etymology does.

John Davies instructively notes that “the fundamental image behind each of the applications of ברית [*bĕrît*] is the use of familial categories for those who are not bound by ties of natural kinship.”[8] Thus by a ceremony or (quasi-)legal process, people who are not kin are now bound as tightly as in any family relationship. Marriage is the best example of this pattern. A man and a woman, who are not previously related, are now bound closer than any other bond of blood or kinship.

Covenants in the Ancient Near East

We must not think that the kinds of agreements or covenants described in the Bible were entirely unique to the nation of Israel. Covenants or treaties either identical or similar to those mentioned in the Old Testament were common all across the ancient Near East, in lands and regions known today as Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Two types of treaties in the ancient Near East are especially noteworthy: (1) the suzerain-vassal treaty and (2) the royal charter or land grant. The first type is a diplomatic treaty between a great king, or suzerain, and client kings, or vassals. The focus of these treaties was to reinforce the interests of the suzerain by arguments from history and oath-bound affirmations of loyalty on the part of the vassal states, backed up by divine sanctions. The second type of treaty involved a grant of property or even a privileged position of a priestly or royal office given as a favor by a god or king. These treaties focused on honor and the interpersonal relationship.

In an important study, Moshe Weinfeld describes the differences between the vassal treaty and the royal grant in this way:

> While the “treaty” constitutes an obligation of the vassal to his master, the suzerain, the “grant” constitutes an obligation of the master to his servant. In the “grant” the curse is directed towards the one who will violate the rights of the king’s vassal, while in the treaty the curse is directed towards the vassal who will violate the rights of his king. In other words, the “grant” serves mainly to protect the rights of the servant, while the treaty comes to protect the rights of the master.

> What is more, while the grant is a reward for loyalty and good deeds already performed, the treaty is an inducement for future loyalty.[9]

In addition to the differences between the two, there are important similarities as well:

> While the grant is mainly a promise by the donor to the recipient, it presupposes the loyalty of the latter. By the same token the treaty, whose principal concern is with the obligation of the vassal, presupposes the sovereign's promise to protect his vassal's country and dynasty.[10]

John Davies nicely summarizes the differences between grant and suzerainty treaties as follows:

> If a difference is to be observed, it will be in terms of the fact that a suzerainty treaty places the emphasis on the interstate relationships (expressed in terms of the monarch's personal dealings), while the grant treaty has its focus more on the interpersonal relationships, and the favour of the greater king to the lesser.[11]

Scholars have found it helpful to compare and contrast biblical covenants in form and structure to treaties in the ancient Near East. For example, the book of Deuteronomy is almost identical in form (but not in content) to the international treaties in the ancient Near East, especially to the suzerain-vassal treaties of the Hittites from the second millennium.[12] Discussion of the biblical covenants in this work will benefit from noting both differences and similarities between the major covenants in the Old Testament and those in the nations surrounding Israel. Two important points have frequently eluded scholars as they have attempted to use models or patterns of treaties in the ancient Near East to analyze and characterize those in the Old Testament. First, it may be that the biblical treaty in question is an adaptation of a genre or literary model in the ancient Near East and not necessarily a consciously close imitation of the literary structure in all aspects, so that one need not "discover" every feature of the genre or model in the biblical example. Second, although one may distinguish these two types of treaties, they represent *different emphases on a continuum* rather

than polar opposites.[13] Thus, rather than categorizing a treaty as either suzerain-vassal or royal-grant, it may be that a covenant in the Old Testament bears features of both types, and it would diminish the communication of Scripture to represent the covenant solely in terms of one model.

Major Covenants in the Bible

While there are a great number and variety of covenants or treaties described in the Old Testament, certain covenants between God and other parties—be they groups or individuals—stand out in the plot structure of the narrative as determined by the canon of the Old Testament. Table 4.1 concisely lists the major covenants.

Table 4.1 The Major Covenants

Covenant	**Main Scripture Texts**
1. The covenant with creation	Genesis 1–3
2. The covenant with Noah	Genesis 6–9
3. The covenant with Abraham	Genesis 12; 15; 17; 22
4. The covenant at Sinai	Ex. 19:3b–8; 20–24
5. The covenant with David	2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89
6. The new covenant	Jeremiah 31–34; Ezek. 33:29–39:29

Some debate exists as to what should or should not be included in a list such as this. Not all are persuaded that the features portrayed in Genesis 1–2 can be labeled a covenant. Some would add to this list covenants such as the covenant with Levi (Num. 25:6–13; cf. Mal. 2:1–9). At least the six covenants in this list, however, need to be discussed and studied.

The Documents of the Old Testament

At first glance, what we call the Old Testament seems to be an odd assortment of texts of various genres, or literary types. Manuscripts that transmit the Hebrew Old Testament demonstrate different arrangements of the individual literary pieces included in the collection. There are, in fact, approximately seventy different arrangements in the manuscripts. These

arrangements can be classified according to three types: (1) chronological, that is, in the order in which it is thought they were written; (2) liturgical, that is, in the order in which passages are read in synagogue services; and (3) literary-rational, that is, in an arrangement based on literary principles.

The literary-rational order divides the documents into three groups: (1) Torah (instruction or law), (2) Prophets, and (3) Writings. Table 4.2 shows this arrangement. Each group or section contains history or narrative plus another genre of texts. The name for each section is derived from the "other genre," so that the Torah consists of history plus "instruction," the Prophets consist of history plus "prophecy," and the Writings consist of history plus various other "writings." There is also a guiding principle for the arrangement of the books within each section: the history books are arranged according to the chronology of the events narrated and the nonhistory books are arranged in order of size. This is what is meant by a literary-rational arrangement.

The chronological and liturgical arrangements are later and secondary, based on minor rearrangements of the literary-rational order according to either chronology or liturgical requirements in Jewish worship. The literary-rational arrangement is the original one. The arrangement of the books in our English versions today is derived not from the Hebrew canon but from Christian manuscripts of the Greek translation that rearrange the texts according to genre.

Table 4.2 Old Testament Canon: The Twenty-Four Books

The Law	**The Prophets**	**The Writings**
1. Genesis	6. Joshua	14. Ruth
2. Exodus	7. Judges	15. Psalms
3. Leviticus	8. Samuel	16. Job
4. Numbers	9. Kings	17. Proverbs
5. Deuteronomy	10. Jeremiah	18. Ecclesiastes
	11. Ezekiel	19. Song of Songs
	12. Isaiah	20. Lamentations
	13. The Twelve Prophets	21. Daniel
		22. Esther

		23. Ezra–Nehemiah
		24. Chronicles

Historical evidence shows that the arrangement in the Hebrew canon certainly dates from the second century BC and probably even earlier, from Ezra and Nehemiah in the late fifth century BC.[14] This arrangement was accepted and adopted by Jesus and his apostles in the New Testament (see Luke 24:44). The arrangements in Christian manuscripts of the fourth century AD show a failure to preserve this tradition.

One can see from the arrangement in the Hebrew canon that the first nine books and the last four are historical or narrative. Sandwiched in between are nonnarrative books that form a commentary on the historical/narrative section.

Important questions arise from observing the collection of documents known as the Old Testament. Is this just an anthology of texts, or is it a single text? Is it a book and not just a library of books? The apostles taught that the Scriptures are not only human in origin but also divine. Thus, although a wide variety of authors are involved from the human standpoint, there is only one author from the divine standpoint. This suggests that the collection should be considered a single text.

This book focuses on the Hebrew canon and Old Testament since this is the part of the Christian Bible where the major texts relating to the covenants are located and also where the literary plot structure of the whole is established. Obviously, we consider the documents of the New Testament to be integral to the canon of the Christian Bible as a whole and essential and vital to this biblical theology.[15]

The Major Covenants as the Framework of the Biblical Metanarrative

What, we may well ask, in literary terms, is the plot structure of the Old Testament or even the entire Bible as a single text? The thesis of this work is that the covenants constitute the framework of the larger story. They are the backbone of the biblical narrative.

The biblical story begins with the fact that there is only one God. He has created everything and especially made humankind to rule under him. In this context, God is the center of the universe, and we humans find our purpose in having a right relationship to God and to one another. The first man and woman, however, rejected this way. Now, what happens when God is no longer the center of our universe? Who steps in to take his place? Why, we do. I want to be at the center of the universe. Will this work? No, because you want to be there too. And so, chaos and evil have reigned since the rebellion of Adam and Eve, because from then on, we no longer had a right relationship with God and did not treat each other as genuinely human.

God judged the entire human race and made a new start with Noah. This too ended up in chaos and evil, as is clear from the story of the Tower of Babel.

Then he made a fresh start with Abraham. He would restore a creation and humanity ruined by pride and rebellion by using Abraham and his family as a pilot project. The people of Israel would be an example, a light to the world of what it meant to be properly related to God and to treat each other according to the dignity of our humanity. We may call this the Mosaic covenant, set forth in Exodus and restated in Deuteronomy.

But the people of Israel did not keep the Mosaic covenant. They were to be blessed for obedience, cursed for disobedience. That is why the biblical story ends up by talking about a new covenant. This time it would be possible to keep this covenant.

This summary of the biblical story illustrates that in less than three hundred words—the amount of space allowed for a dissertation abstract—the *covenants* adequately account for the literary or plot structure of the Bible as a text. The Jewish scholar Rabbi Richard Elliott Friedman has recognized this:

> With the Noahic covenant promising the stability of the cosmic structure, the Abrahamic covenant promising people and land, the Davidic covenant promising sovereignty, and the Israelite covenant promising life, security, and prosperity, the biblical authors and editors possessed a platform from which they could portray and reconcile nearly every historical, legendary, didactic, folk, and the like, account

> in their tradition. If we could delete all references to covenant—which we cannot do, precisely because it is regularly integral to its contexts—we would have an anthology of stories. As it is we have a structure that can house a plot.[16]

The claim here is that the covenants are the key to the larger story of Scripture, the biblical metanarrative. While the claim is based on the idea that the canon is a single book and not just an anthology of texts, it is not the same as discovering a plan to the arrangement of the books, although that is in part related.[17] It is a question of the literary plot structure of the metanarrative as a whole, even though, strictly speaking, not every part is narrative. Even genres that are not narrative have at base a larger story that provides the framework for understanding them.[18] Thus the nonnarrative genres are based on the story.

Nor is this claim the same as the goal pursued by the biblical theology movement of the twentieth century, where the aim was to find a "center" for, as an example, the Old Testament. Thus Walther Eichrodt, in his magisterial *Theology of the Old Testament*, proposed that "covenant" was the central idea or notion on which a biblical theology could be constructed.[19] Our claim is not that *covenant* is central to a biblical theology of the Old Testament but rather that the *covenants* (plural) are at the heart of the metanarrative plot structure.[20]

A Comparison of Contract and Covenant

In our culture in North America, the biblical understanding of a covenant relationship is disappearing and being replaced by the notion of contract or marketplace-style agreements. In table 4.3, Elmer Martens provides a comparison and contrast between covenant and contract that clarifies and sharpens our understanding of the biblical idea of a covenant relationship.

Table 4.3 Comparison and Contrast between Covenant and Contract[21]

Category	**Contract**	**Covenant**
Form / literary structure	1. Date 2. Parties 3. Transaction 4. Investiture	1. Speaker introduced 2. History of relationship 3. General command 4. Detailed stipulations

	5. Guarantees 6. Scribe 7. List of witnesses	5. Document statement 6. Witnesses 7. Blessings and curses
Occasion	Expected benefit	Desire for relationship
Initiative	Mutual agreement	Stronger party
Orientation	Negotiation Thing-oriented	Gift Person-oriented
Obligation	Performance	Loyalty
Termination	Specified	Indeterminate
Violation	Yes	Yes

Various categories help to highlight the similarities and differences between contract and covenant and so enable us to appreciate the significance of the loyalty aspect in covenant. The most obvious difference between contract and covenant is the form or literary structure. We have many contracts in Egyptian Aramaic from the fifth century BC. A consistent format gives the date, lists the parties, describes the transaction, and is followed by guarantees and witnesses. This format differs markedly from that of the covenants or treaties, whether of the second or first millennium BC. Yet beyond the aspect of form there are other fundamental differences. Martens comments helpfully on these as follows:

> The occasion for contract is largely the benefits that each party expects. Thus for a satisfactory sum one party agrees to supply a specified quantity of some desired product for the other party. The contract is characteristically *thing*-oriented. The covenant is *person*-oriented and, theologically speaking, arises, not with benefits as the chief barter item, but out of a desire for a measure of intimacy. In a contract negotiation and arrival at a mutually satisfactory agreement is important. In a covenant, negotiation has no place. The greater in grace offers his help; the initiative is his. “Gift” is descriptive of covenant as “negotiation” is descriptive of contract. Both covenant and contract have obligations, but with this difference. The conditions set out in a contract require fulfillment of terms; the obligation of a covenant is one of loyalty. A covenant, commonly, is forever; a contract for a specified period. A ticking off of terms in check-list fashion can reveal

> a broken contract, and the point of brokenness can be clearly identified. A covenant, too, can be broken, but the point at which this transpires is less clear, because here the focus is not on stipulations, one, two, three, but on a quality of intimacy. Of all the differences between covenant and contract, the place in covenant of personal loyalty is the most striking.[22]

At the heart of covenant, then, is the *relationship* between parties characterized by faithfulness and loyalty in love. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament, a word pair is consistently used to express this notion: *ḥesed* and *’ĕmet*. Neither word has a convenient and simple equivalent in English. The first, *ḥesed*, has to do with showing kindness in loyal love. The second, *’ĕmet*, can be translated by either “faithfulness” or “truth.” As a word pair, one cannot easily reduce the meaning of the whole to the sum of its constituent parts, just as current speakers of English cannot explain the meaning of the expression *by and large* by analyzing *by* and *large* individually. This word pair operates, then, within covenant relationships and has to do with demonstrating faithful, loyal love within the covenant context.

Reflections on Covenant Relationship

An excellent illustration of the word pair *ḥesed* and *’ĕmet* is found in Genesis 47:29–30:

> When the time drew near for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, “If I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness [*ḥesed* and *’ĕmet*]. Do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried.”
>
> “I will do as you say,” he said. (NIV)

Jacob, also called Israel, is asking his son Joseph to bury him in Canaan and not in Egypt. A covenant relationship binds father and son here, since family relationships are covenantal in the Old Testament. The stronger party, Joseph, bears an obligation to help the weaker party, Jacob. The

fulfillment of this obligation is referred to as showing *ḥesed* and *ʾĕmet*—faithful, loyal love. We can summarize these elements as follows:

1. Covenant relationship
2. Obligation to help weaker party
3. Fulfillment of obligation demonstrates faithful, loyal love

Concerning *ḥesed*, Leon Morris notes, "In men it is the ideal; in God it is the actual."[23] When Solomon dedicated the temple, he affirmed in his prayer, "There is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart" (1 Kings 8:23 ESV). The comment of Francis I. Andersen is also significant:

> Contrary to what some commentators have inferred, this statement does not define *ḥesed* as covenant keeping. Rather "covenant and *ḥesed*" (hendiadys) identify the Lord's covenant as one of *ḥesed* as distinct from say, a political treaty or a commercial/marketplace contract. Much of the discussion of biblical covenants in recent decades, arising from the observations of G. E. Mendenhall, has inverted the real order of things by placing *ḥesed* in the framework of the formalities of covenant-making instead of placing the biblical covenant on the basis of *ḥesed*. In particular, what is celebrated here is the fact [that] the Lord kept his promise, and to that extent one might say, fulfilled an obligation. But it was self-imposed. The giving of the promise was the foundational act of *ḥesed*. The promise formalized the undertaking. Keeping the promise is not itself a subsequent and dependant act of *ḥesed*, it is simply "keeping" *ḥesed* and in that sense, God is reliable.[24]

The groundbreaking study of *ḥesed* by Nelson Glueck in 1967 has been challenged, and the meaning of *ḥesed* has been refined in a number of significant studies since that time, mainly by Katharine D. Sakenfeld, Francis I. Andersen, and Gordon R. Clark.[25] Andersen reacted to Glueck's study by attempting to defend that *ḥesed* means "a quite spontaneous expression of love, evoked by no kind of obligation."[26] In a helpful analysis, John Meade distinguished between ontological and functional

ḥesed in the being of God; God freely demonstrates *ḥesed* because it is his nature to do so.[27] Stephen Dempster developed the distinction of Meade following the key literary markers in the text. The key passage in the Old Testament for the ontological-functional understanding of *ḥesed* is the revelation given to Moses in Exodus 34:6–7.

In the context, Moses asks Yahweh to show him his glory. Yahweh responds in Exodus 33:19–23:

> And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen." (ESV)

Then, after Moses cuts another two tablets and ascends the mountain, Yahweh descends in the cloud and proclaims the name of the Lord (Ex. 34:6–7), as shown in tables 4.4 and 4.5.

Table 4.4 Yahweh Yahweh (Hebrew)[28]

ʾēl raḥûm wĕḥannûn ʾerek appayim wĕrab ḥesed wĕʾĕmet	Ontology
nōṣer ḥesed lāʾălāpîm nōśēʾ ʿāwôn wāpeša‘ wĕhaṭṭāʾâ	Function +
wĕnaqqēh lōʾ yĕnaqqeh pōqēd ʿāwôn ʾābôt ʿal bānîm wĕʿal bĕnē bānîm ʿal šillēšîm wĕʿal ribbēʿîm	Function –

Table 4.5 Yahweh Yahweh (English, ESV)

a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness	Ontology
keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin	Function +
but who will by no means clear the guilty,	Function –

visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generations	

The revelation begins by repeating the name Yahweh. This is the only instance in the entire Old Testament where the name is repeated twice. The repetition means, "Pay attention!" The number two is also the key to the literary structure. There are three pairs of qualities of the divine nature, and the first pair forms a chiasm with the last revelation of that nature, in Exodus 33:19b, which was a preview for Moses:

וְחַנֹּתִי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אָחֹן וְרִחַמְתִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם

> And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. (ESV)

Thus in Exodus 33:19b, we have "gracious" and "merciful," whereas in Exodus 34:6, we have "merciful" and "gracious" (a-b::b'-a'). These two qualities stress the incredible grace and compassion—completely unmerited—in Yahweh. The next two stress his qualities of forbearance (slowness to anger) as well as his overflowing faithful loving-kindness.

These ontological qualities then flow into incredible positive functions that form a chiasm with the negative functions: he guards *ḥesed*. The word *nōṣēr* ("guard") is chosen because of its assonance with *nōśē'* ("forgive") and also because it is more active than just "do." The usual expression in the Hebrew Bible is "do *ḥesed*." To "guard *ḥesed*" is stronger—God earnestly maintains and preserves *ḥesed*. As we can see from Exodus 20:5–6, "thousands" does not mean thousands of people but specifically stands in contrast to "visiting iniquity to the third and fourth generations" and hence means thousands of generations. This is an outflow of the divine nature. Second, this *ḥesed* issues in a comprehensive forgiveness but a forgiveness that nonetheless still takes sin very seriously (he does not acquit the guilty)—in other words, this is a costly forgiveness. There is a tension here within the divine nature, caused by human sin, but that will one day be resolved.

And this incredible and matchless revelation is what it means to see Yahweh's back. Imagine looking him full in the face!

Another wonderful illustration is Psalm 117:

Praise the LORD, all you nations;
extol him, all you peoples.
For great is his love [*ḥesed*] toward us,
and the faithfulness [*’ĕmet*] of the LORD endures forever.

Praise the LORD. (NIV)

This is the briefest and shortest hymn in the whole of Israel’s songbook (Psalms). According to the standard format for a hymn, there is a call to praise Yahweh followed by the reason for praise. In Psalm 117, verse 1 is the call to praise, and verse 2 is the reason for praise. In the section giving the reason for praise, the word pair *ḥesed* and *’ĕmet* is split over parallel lines. Thus, the reason for boasting about the Lord is his faithful, loyal love in his covenant with his people Israel. In fact, the celebration of this quality summarizes the entire Psalter.

When a budding scholar completes a doctoral dissertation, the dissertation must be summarized in three hundred words. This is called a dissertation abstract. And Psalm 117 is the dissertation abstract for the entire book of Psalms. It summarizes in just a very few words *all* the laments, hymns, and songs of thanksgiving in Israel’s hymnal, including the enormously long Psalm 119. The Lord is worthy of the worship of his people Israel because he demonstrates faithful, loyal love in the covenant relationship.

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1. Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage Developed from the Perspective of Malachi*, VTSup 52 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 11.

2. Adapted from Daniel C. Lane, “The Meaning and Use of the Old Testament Term for ‘Covenant’ (*bᵉrît*): With Some Implications for Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology” (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 2000). Lane’s actual wording is as follows: “A *berith* is an enduring agreement which establishes a defined relationship between two parties involving a solemn, binding obligation to specified stipulations on the part of at least one of the parties toward the other, which is taken by oath under threat of divine curse, and ratified by a visual ritual” (314).

3. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 11. A similar definition is followed by Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God’s Purpose for the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

4. See, e.g., Ex. 12:14; 13:9, 16; Deut. 6:8–9; 11:18; Prov. 1:9; 6:21; 7:3; Jer. 31:33.

5. John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, JSOTSup 395 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 175–76.

6. A useful summary of positions taken concerning etymology is provided by Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 37.

7. Kenneth A. Kitchen, “Egypt, Ugarit, Qatna and Covenant,” *UF* 11 (1979): 453–64.

8. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 177.

9. Moshe Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” *JAOS* 90, no. 2 (1970): 185.

10. Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (1972; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 74.

11. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 183.

12. Many scholars believe that the later neo-Assyrian treaties are also similar to the structure of Deuteronomy. This position is critiqued in chap. 10.

13. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 183.

14. See Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985). His argument is solid in spite of later publications that have sought to discredit his view.

15. It is our conviction that the canon of the New Testament was fixed as early as AD 125 and that the original order of the documents was as follows: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Hebrews, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Revelation. For a discussion and defense of this view, see especially David Trobisch, *Paul's Letter Collection: Tracing the Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Also noteworthy is C. E. Hill, "The New Testament Canon: *Deconstructio ad Absurdum*?," *JETS* 52, no. 1 (2009): 101–19; Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

16. Richard Elliott Friedman, "The Hiding of the Face: An Essay on the Literary Unity of Biblical Narrative," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine, and Ernest S. Frerichs (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 215.

17. See, e.g., Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

18. Scholars have shown, for example, that for Paul's writings in the New Testament, there is a narrative substructure to his thought.

19. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, 2 vols., Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961/1967).

20. For a defense of our methodology, see Peter J. Gentry, "The Significance of Covenants in Biblical Theology," *SBJT*, 20, no. 1 (2016): 9–33.

21. Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 73. Used by permission of the author.

22. Ibid., 72–73 (emphasis original). George E. Mendenhall also discusses the differences between covenant societies and contract societies: the former emphasize obligations, the latter, rights; the former emphasize the common good, the latter, the private interest group. *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), xi–xiii, 16–31.

23. Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 81.

24. Francis I. Andersen, "Yahweh, the Kind and Sensitive God," in *God Who Is Rich in Mercy: Essays Presented to Dr. D. B. Knox*, ed. Peter T. O'Brien and David G. Peterson (Homebush West, NSW, Australia: Lancer, 1986), 65.

25. Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, trans. Alfred Gottschalk, ed. Elias L. Epstein (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967; originally published in German in 1927); Katharine D. Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry*, HSM 17 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978); Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action: Loyalty in Biblical Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Andersen, "Yahweh, the Kind and Sensitive God," 41–87; Gordon R. Clark, *The Word "Hesed" in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSup 157 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1993).

26. Andersen, "Yahweh, the Kind and Sensitive God," 42.

27. John D. Meade, "OT *Ḥesed* in the NT," unpublished paper presented to the faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006. See now Peter J. Gentry, "'The Glory of God'—The Character of God's Being and Way in the World: Some Reflections on a Key Biblical Theology Theme," *SBJT* 20, no. 1 (2016): 149–61.

28. Personal communication, March 2, 2011. Tables 4.4 and 4.5 used by permission of Stephen Dempster. Now developed further in Gentry, "'The Glory of God,'" 149–61.

5

The Covenant with Noah

The *Toronto Star* is a major newspaper in the largest city in Canada.[1] This newspaper published an article in November 1996 announcing that Mr. Jean Chrétien, the prime minister of Canada at that time, had fulfilled 78 percent of his election promises. By contrast, the God revealing himself in a progression of covenants has fulfilled his promises to Noah and to the entire human race as entailed in the covenant with Noah 100 percent for several thousand years. The proof is in the alternating progression of seasons experienced up to the present.

The Context of the Covenant with Noah

Whether or not a covenant per se is entailed in Genesis 1–3 is debated. The first occurrence in the Bible of the word "covenant" (*bĕrît*) is in Genesis 6:18 and is in reference to the covenant with Noah. God says to Noah, "But I will establish my covenant [*bĕrît*] with you" (NIV). Consequently, Genesis 6–9 and the covenant with Noah will be examined first, and only then can (and will) the issues raised by Genesis 1–3 be considered.

First, we need to consider the context in which God makes this statement to Noah (in Gen. 6:18) and the meaning of the language used in this text. In the previous verse, God informs Noah that he is going to destroy all life on the earth—all human and animal life in the entire world. The means of destruction will be a cataclysmic event: floodwaters covering the entire earth. God instructs Noah, however, to construct a big "box" that will be the means of deliverance from the destruction of the flood.

The earlier part of chapter 6 explains why God had apparently given up on the human race and decided upon such a cataclysmic course of action. In verse 5, we are told, "The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" (NIV). A bit further on in verses 11–13 we read,

> Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them." (NIV)

Verse 5 describes the human situation as "bad," "evil," or "wicked," and traces this to the condition of the human heart, the center of our being where we feel, reason, and make decisions and plans. In verses 11–13, two terms in particular stand out: "corrupt" and "violence." The first word occurs three times and the second word twice, so that the cumulative effect is pronounced. It is difficult for the reader to miss the message! The term "corrupt" shows that a beautiful and good situation is now ruined, spoiled, and twisted. Frequently, not many hours after opening presents on Christmas Day, children manage to ruin and spoil beautiful and intricate toys so that they are damaged in appearance and function—a picture of corruption. The term "violence" (*ḥāmās*) refers specifically to social violence and conditions in human society where social justice is lacking.

The evil of the human heart resulting in corruption and social violence brings a response from God, according to verses 6–7:

> The LORD was grieved that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the LORD said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—humans and with them the animals, the birds, and the creatures that move along the ground—for I am grieved that I have made them."

Some translations speak of God "regretting" or "feeling sorry" that he had made man on the earth. It is important to note that the divine response refers to God's consistent opposition to injustice, social violence, and wickedness

and does not indicate that he is changeable or capricious. Bruce Waltke's comment is helpful:

> We see many cases in Scripture that show that if God plans to do evil and the people repent and do good, the evil will not transpire, and vice versa (e.g., Jer. 18:5–11). God regrets precisely because he is unchangeable. Paul House notes, "God's regret means action must be taken, not that a great cosmic mistake has been made." In other words, God's motives are always good and just.[2]

The flood, then, is a divine judgment in response to the evil of the human heart and the resultant corruption and violence.[3]

In contrast to his contemporaries, Noah was righteous in an age of social violence. Genesis 6:8 indicates that Noah was the object of divine favor. This was not an arbitrary result, since the next verse reveals that "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God" (NIV). The expression "he walked with God" clearly shows that Noah had a relationship with God long before God "established" his covenant with him. The term "righteous" (Heb. *ṣaddîq*) is a word that speaks of Noah's conduct in his relationship with God. Noah's actions toward God and toward his fellow man were based on faithfulness and loyalty to his relationship with God. Since any relationship with the creator God of the Bible would involve moral standards, "righteous" means that Noah's conduct was based on conformity to God's way, driven by his commitment to God. In an important study, J. W. Olley defines righteousness as "to bring about right and harmony for all, for individuals, related in the community and to the physical and spiritual realms."[4] To this definition Bruce Waltke adds, "The righteous (*ṣaddîq*) are willing to disadvantage themselves to advantage the community; the wicked are willing to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves."[5] God decides, then, in this context, to confirm his covenant with Noah.

Excursus

The relationship of Genesis 6:1–4 to the flood story and the interpretation of these four verses is extremely problematic. Only a brief comment is possible in the scope of this work. Two main issues are significant: (1) the identity of the "sons of God" who marry the daughters of the human race and have children by them (6:2, 4), and (2) the interpretation of the temporal expressions "in those days" and "afterward" in 6:4.

Three views predominate on the identity of the sons of God: (1) they represent the godly line of Seth (4:25–5:32) intermarrying with the ungodly line of Cain (4:17–24); (2) they represent powerful kings/tyrants ruling at the time; and (3) they represent angels who married human women. The last view is a problem since one would then have to wonder if the flood was a judgment on angelic rather than human corruption and violence. The third option, however, should be seriously considered since the exact expression "sons of God" refers consistently and exclusively to angelic beings in the Old Testament (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; cf. Ps. 29:1; Dan. 3:25) and is also supported by the New Testament (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6–7).1 Peter and Jude seek to bolster the faith of their readers by reference to events *well known* from the Old Testament. Their comments are structured in such a way as to refer in particular to two texts in Genesis (Genesis 6–9; 18–19).2 They speak of angels who sinned and were cast into a particular prison awaiting further judgment. According to Jude, both examples (i.e., angels and cities of the plain) involved gross immorality.

The temporal expressions "in those days" and "afterward" both occur in Genesis 6:4. For purposes of this discussion, a literal translation of this verse is useful:

> The Nephilim were on the earth in those days and also afterward when the sons of God had relations with human women and they bore children for them. They were the heroes who were from the ancient past, men of renown.

The temporal expressions could be understood in two possible ways. If one interprets "in those days" to be the times described in 6:1–3, then what is distinguished are the times before the flood from the times after the flood. The relative clause introduced by "afterward" would seem to indicate that

the cohabitation of angelic and human beings continued after the flood. One might conclude that the Nephilim were the product of such unions (cf. Num. 13:22, 28, 33).

Yet a different interpretation is possible. The expression “afterward” (*’aḥărê-kēn*) usually occurs in the second of two verbal sentences: the first sentence says that event X did or will happen, and the second says that subsequent to event X, event Y did or will happen.[3] Here we must note that the expression *’aḥărê-kēn* is modified by a relative clause that refers specifically to the event in Genesis 6:2.[4] Therefore, one could assume that “in those days” means before divine beings cohabitated with humans. Verse 4 would then comment that the Nephilim were in the earth before the business of angelic and human beings cohabiting and also afterward and therefore had nothing to do with these unions.

This latter interpretation is strengthened by considerations of discourse grammar. Genesis 6:4 consists of two clauses or sentences, the first verbal, the second verbless. Both are marked by asyndeton (i.e., no conjunction or connector at the beginning of the clause/sentence). In the first, the verb is noninitial. This pattern marks a commentary or explanatory digression. The fact that the first sentence is subject initial indicates a new topic. The relative clause in 6:4 correlates this new topic with the events of 6:2. The verbless clause is a further comment on the Nephilim. They were the heroes from the distant past. This may mean the distant past with reference to the writer, or it may indicate a period long past in reference to the event of 6:2. Therefore, the writer would be demythologizing the Nephilim. These heroes of ancient times were there before and after the events of 6:2 and were not necessarily related to them at all. Thus, 6:1 describes an increase in female humans, 6:2 relates a cohabitation of angelic and human beings, 6:3 concludes that the result is still human and therefore under God’s judgment, and 6:4 states that all this has nothing to do with the well-known Nephilim. Since the word Nephilim is not otherwise explained, these figures must have been well known to the ancient (first) readers of this text.

What this digression shows, then, is that if one assumes that Genesis 6:1–4 is referring to a union of angelic and human beings, this is not connected to the causes of the flood. In addition, according to 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, the judgment of the angels was separate from the judgment of the flood.

Covenant Making in the Old Testament and Ancient Near East

Before further considering God's covenant with Noah, it is necessary to acquire a better grasp of covenant making in the culture of the biblical world. What is normally involved in initiating a covenant or treaty? The events described in Genesis 21:22–34 provide an excellent example of what is entailed in covenant making in the ancient Near East. The narrative concerns the king of Gerar (a city in the south of Canaan, just west of Beersheba), who makes a covenant/treaty with Abraham. The agreement between the parties resolves a dispute over water rights relating to the well of Beersheba. Four features characterize this treaty and, in fact, are normative of covenants in general.

1. A covenant does not always or necessarily initiate a relationship. It does, however, formalize in binding and legal terms an agreement or commitment between parties who may or may not have developed or established a relationship before the covenant is made. In Genesis 21, Abimelech and Abraham have already developed a relationship together. When the covenant is made, Abimelech appeals to this already established understanding between them by speaking of the loving-kindness (*ḥesed*) he has shown Abraham in the past. In Joshua 9:3–27, however, the Gibeonites deceive and trick the Israelites into making a covenant with them, though the parties had no relationship prior to making the covenant. This was not the norm. If the parties have had dealings in the past, the covenant does specify a new level to the relationship.

2. There is conventional language for initiating covenants or treaties. The standard expression for initiating a covenant in the Old Testament is "to cut a covenant" (*kārat bĕrît*; Gen. 21:27, 32). How and why this peculiar expression arose will become clear shortly.

3. A covenant gives binding and quasi-legal status to a relationship by means of a formal and solemn ceremony. As a general rule, covenants belong to the public rather than the private sphere. This is why, for example, elopement is inappropriate for marriage: no formal or public ceremony is involved.

4. Covenant making involves a commitment or oath or promise and frequently signs or witnesses. Here the parties of the treaty solemnly swear

to the agreement. As William J. Dumbrell notes, the oath "is obviously an important ingredient in the total arrangement, but it is not the covenant itself."[6]

Although the ceremony is not described in complete detail in Genesis 21, we can put the pieces together from different sources. Animals are slaughtered and sacrificed. Each animal is cut in two, and the halves are laid facing or opposite each other. Then the parties of the treaty walk between the halves of the dead animal(s). This action is symbolic. What is being expressed is this: each party is saying, "If I fail to keep my obligation or my promise, may I be cut in two like this dead animal." The oath or promise, then, involves bringing a curse upon oneself for violating the treaty. This is why the expression "to cut a covenant" is the conventional language for initiating a covenant in the Old Testament.

Many other covenants and treaties are recorded in the Bible. As examples, one may mention the covenants between Joshua and the Gibeonites (Joshua 9), between the men of Jabesh Gilead and Nahash the Ammonite (1 Sam. 11:1–3), between David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:3; 23:18), between David and Abner (2 Sam. 3:12–21), between David and Israel (2 Sam. 3:21; 5:1–3), between Ahab of Israel and Ben-Hadad of Syria (1 Kings 20:31–34), and between Jehoiada the high priest and King Joash of Judah (2 Kings 11:17). While the components and also the nature and status of the parties differ, and the language varies somewhat, in each case a covenant involves a commitment or promise usually solemnized by oath in which an agreement and level of relationship between parties is specified.

Although this description of covenant making in the Old Testament is indebted to the pioneering labors of William J. Dumbrell, carefully nuanced differences from his presentation have been expressed here as well. Dumbrell's work has been sharply criticized in studies by Paul Williamson[7] and Jeffrey J. Niehaus.[8] Niehaus summarizes the definition of Dumbrell as follows: "A covenant does not create a relationship between two parties. Rather it confirms an already existing relationship."[9] He argues that the approach of Dumbrell blurs the distinction between covenants and covenant renewals. Niehaus also critiques Hafemann, who follows Dumbrell. The critique of Niehaus should be noted:

> [Hafemann] follows in Dumbrell's footsteps by believing that "[l]ike a treaty or a marriage, a 'covenant' is a particular kind of political or legal arrangement that confirms or formalizes a relationship that already exists between two parties." As in Dumbrell's case, so with Hafemann, it is this mistaken definition of covenant which makes the "one covenantal relationship" view possible. Yet, as we have pointed out above, it was covenant renewals, and not covenants, that served this function in the ancient Near East and in the Bible. The fact that marriage is a covenant is actually a piece of contrary evidence. Marriage does not confirm an existing relationship: it takes an existing relationship (in which a couple is engaged) to an entirely new level—thus transforming it—and establishes a new state of affairs, with new privileges and new responsibilities.[10]

This critique is helpful but only partially right. A covenant, such as marriage, does specify a different and new level of relationship from what has been true in the past, but certainly this is not the beginning of relationship between the two parties. Dumbrell may possibly blur the distinction between covenants and covenant renewals in some instances, but his definition is based firmly on passages like the treaty in Genesis 21. Past relationship between the parties is admitted by Niehaus in some measure:

> A point that appeared for a long time to have been well understood, or at least taken for granted, among scholars who studied ancient Near Eastern covenants is this: a covenant assumes some past history of relationship (however minimal) between two parties, but a covenant, once agreed upon, changes the relationship between the two covenanting parties and takes it to a different level. . . . With regard to these facts, the historical prologues, found in second millennium BC treaties, at least, provide a valuable service. They document the relationship that had existed, or the events of mutual involvement or interest, that had occurred, before the two parties agreed to enter into a covenant relationship. The historical prologue illustrates the fact that some sort of prior relationship, however minimal or even hostile, had obtained in the past. Now, however, the parties enter into a covenant which declares, sanctions, witnesses and ratifies the stipulations that

> shall govern the new, covenant relationship (be it parity or suzerain-vassal) according to which both parties shall live going forward.[11]

In summary, Craig Bartholomew's adjustment of Dumbrell's definition is helpful:

> Dumbrell neglects the constitutive side of the divine covenants in his understanding of covenants as commitments that normalize existing relationships. The divine covenants do operate within existing relationships, but they shape and give future direction to the relationship, just as does the marriage covenant.[12]

Initiating versus Affirming or Upholding a Covenant

The first occurrence(s) of the term "covenant" (*bĕrît*) in the Hebrew Scriptures is significant. The word appears first in the flood narrative (Gen. 6:18; 9:9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17). In four of those instances God speaks of "affirming" or "establishing" a covenant with Noah (6:18; 9:9, 11, 17). The construction in Hebrew is *hēqîm bĕrît*. The remaining four occurrences have to do with the *sign* of the covenant that aids in *remembering* the covenant. Thus, when we consider the covenant God made with Noah and his descendants, we notice right away that the normal expression for covenant initiation is lacking. Nowhere in the flood account do we read of God "cutting a covenant" (*kārat bĕrît*). Why is the language different here, and what does it signify? An exhaustive study of all instances of *bĕrît* in the Hebrew Bible and constructions involving this noun (see the appendix) reveals a completely consistent usage *inherent* in the language: the construction "to cut a covenant" (*kārat bĕrît*) refers to covenant initiation, while the expression "to establish a covenant" (*hēqîm bĕrît*) means "to affirm (verbally) the continued validity of a prior commitment"—that is, to affirm that one is still committed to the covenant relationship as established or initiated previously. Frequently, *hēqîm bĕrît* can have a more particular or specific use, meaning "to carry out or fulfill the obligations of a covenant made previously"—that is, to make good one's commitment, obligation, or promise, or to uphold a covenant.

The difference in the expressions can be illustrated in the case of the covenant with Abraham. In Genesis 15, God's promises to Abraham of land and seed given earlier in chapter 12 are formalized in a covenant. Notice that in 15:18, we have the standard terminology in the Hebrew text: "cut a covenant" (*kārat bĕrît*). Later, in Genesis 17, God verbally *reaffirms* and *upholds* his covenant promise. Verses 7, 19, and 21 consistently employ the expression *hēqîm bĕrît*, while the expression *kārat bĕrît* is *not* used. Here God is affirming and fulfilling in the life of someone who is already a covenant partner his promise given in the covenant initiated previously in chapter 15. So God upholds his promise and says Sarah will have a baby within the year.

Therefore, the construction *hēqîm bĕrît* in Genesis 6 and 9 indicates that God is not initiating a covenant with Noah but is rather affirming for Noah and his descendants a commitment initiated previously. This language clearly denotes a covenant established earlier between God and creation, or between God and humans at creation. When God says that he is affirming or upholding his covenant with Noah, he is saying that his commitment to his creation—the care of the Creator to preserve, provide for, and rule over all that he has made, including the blessings and ordinances that he initiated through and with Adam and Eve and their family—are now to be with Noah and his descendants.

This distinction is frequently obscured by English translations because the verb *hēqîm* means "to cause to rise or stand," and translators often use "establish" as an English equivalent. The result may be confusing because the word "establish" in English can refer to establishing something the first time or to strengthening and supporting something established previously that has since deteriorated and fallen into ruin. Therefore, some scholars claim that *hēqîm bĕrît* can mean to establish a covenant either in the sense of initiating it or in the sense of upholding a covenant already in existence.

The consistent distinction, however, as I have described it, between *kārat bĕrît* and *hēqîm bĕrît* in the Hebrew language from our earliest texts down through and including the Dead Sea Scrolls is considerable proof of a divine-human covenant established at creation. We do not consider it the main or only proof for a covenant in Genesis 1–3, but we will make an

effort to clear up misunderstandings by other scholars concerning the linguistic evidence for this view.

The idea that the covenant with Noah was a kind of reinstatement and upholding of a covenant initiated at creation was advanced by Dumbrell.[13] He based his view in part on the distinction in usage between *kārat bĕrît* and *hēqîm bĕrît*. The claim that these expressions were distinct in usage, however, did not originate with Dumbrell. Already in 1934, the great Jewish scholar Umberto Cassuto described the usage this way.[14] Subsequent scholarship has confirmed and supported this understanding,[15] but it has been challenged by Paul Williamson.[16]

Williamson claims that Dumbrell's discussion is flawed and argues that it is difficult in a number of texts to maintain that key verbs employed with *bĕrît* refer back to a covenant that has already been initiated (Gen. 6:18; 9:9, 11; 17:2, 9, 17; Num. 25:12; Deut. 29:11 (29:12 EV); 2 Chron. 15:12; Ezek. 16:8; 17:13).[17] Yet the texts he lists as evidence either beg the question, as with the references in Genesis, or do not involve the expression *hēqîm bĕrît*.[18] Moreover, the problem with Williamson's study is twofold: (1) Dumbrell did not adequately express his basic claim concerning the distinction between *kārat bĕrît* and *hēqîm bĕrît*, which needs to be modified somewhat by a more thorough study of all the texts, and (2) Williamson bases his research on the lexical study of Moshe Weinfeld and on criticisms of Dumbrell offered by others, such as Roger Beckwith.[19] He argues that "Weinfeld offers a more comprehensive list of relevant biblical texts and therefore provides a better basis on which to evaluate Dumbrell's assertion."[20] On the one hand, then, Williamson is reacting to propositions by Dumbrell that could be better described and nuanced. On the other hand, he does not seem to have based his own research on a careful examination of all the primary sources but rather has relied on secondary studies like that of Weinfeld. We will deal here with the claims initially made by Williamson, as well as his critique of our first edition, which he reviewed.

The description given here is based on an examination of all the primary sources,[21] and although indebted to Dumbrell, it avoids claims he makes that are not supported by the evidence and offers a carefully nuanced modification of the usage. While full review of Williamson's critique of

Dumbrell cannot be given here, examples from his discussion will be given.[22] In attempting to show that *hēqîm bĕrît* can mean "to initiate a covenant" and is equivalent in meaning to *kārat bĕrît*, he says, "Similarly, in Jeremiah 34:18 a strong case can be made in support of a covenant being instituted and not just renewed (cf. Jer 34:10)."[23] The evidence, however, is otherwise. The expression *kārat bĕrît* is employed in Jeremiah 34:8, 13, and 15, as well as the similar expression *bô' bibrît* ("enter a covenant") in 34:10, for initiating or making a covenant between King Zedekiah and all the people of Jerusalem to proclaim freedom for Hebrew slaves. The people then fulfilled the obligation by freeing the slaves but later reneged on the covenant and reenslaved the manumitted slaves. Jeremiah was sent to challenge this covenant violation (see the expression *'ābar bĕrît* in 34:18), and he called upon the people in 34:18 to "uphold the covenant" (*hēqîm bĕrît*), meaning to bring to pass in the experience of the people the promise entailed in the covenant made earlier to free the slaves. The people must make good on their commitment and promise made in the covenant. A simple straightforward reading of this text, then, shows that a "strong case" can be made *for* the distinction in usage between *kārat bĕrît* and *hēqîm bĕrît* as described herein rather than a "strong case" against. Williamson construed Dumbrell's argument to mean that *hēqîm bĕrît* indicated covenant *renewal*, and he has misunderstood the usage in Hebrew. In addition, this proof for Williamson's view has disappeared from the evidence he gives in critiquing the first edition of this book.[24]

For Exodus 6:4, Williamson appeals to Beckwith as follows:

> As Beckwith observes, the deployment of הקים in Exod. 6.4 illustrates that this verb does not necessarily suggest the confirmation or perpetuation of a pre-existing covenant. This latter text is of particular significance for a number of reasons. Although three patriarchs are alluded to, the covenant is spoken of in the singular. There is only one feasible explanation for this: God did not establish three different covenants, one with each patriarch, but made a singular commitment or covenant (i.e., solemn promise), initially to Abraham, but subsequently to Isaac and Jacob. It would appear from Exod. 6.4 that the commitment or promise in question relates essentially to the

> question of territory; only the promissory aspect relating to nationhood is picked up here; there is neither mention of nor allusion to the international dimensions of the promise that are reflected in Gen. 12.3; 17 and 22.18. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the covenant referred to in Exod. 6.4 is that solemnly established by divine oath in Gen. 15.18. If this is indeed the case, the fact that the verb הקים should be applied in Exod. 6.4 to the establishment of the "covenant between the pieces" is most significant; as Beckwith asserts, this would appear to confirm that this verb does not relate exclusively to the confirmation of a pre-existing covenant. While the latter interpretation of הקים could be said to fit in the case of Isaac and Jacob, it is rather strange in the case of Abraham; prior to Genesis 15 there was no pre-existing covenant to be "confirmed."[25]

Whether Williamson is appropriately representing Beckwith or not, his reasoning is difficult to follow. There is only one feasible explanation but not the one proffered by Beckwith. Beckwith is correct that there is only one covenant. This can only mean that a covenant was made with Abraham *and his descendants*, the promises of which were later repeated or affirmed to Isaac and Jacob, so that one can only speak of a single covenant with all three.[26] It is not possible in Hebrew to use the expression *kārat bĕrît* here since the covenant was "cut" only with Abraham and was later repeated to Abraham in Genesis 17 and 22, to Isaac in Genesis 26, and to Jacob in Genesis 35. The expression *kārat bĕrît* refers to an event, and there is no single event occurring with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the same time. Williamson, however, considers Genesis 15 and 17 as separate covenants. This leads him to affirm that *hēqîm* in Exodus 6:4 should be applied to Genesis 15, and therefore the expression *hēqîm bĕrît* does not refer to confirming a preexisting covenant. The point being made in Exodus 6:4, however, is that God will now uphold his covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them the land of Canaan, a promise that *none* of the patriarchs experienced during their lives, as the author to the Hebrews shrewdly noted (Heb. 11:13). This is why the expression *hēqîm bĕrît* is aptly used in this text. Moreover, the land promise is part of Genesis 17 (see 17:8) as well, so that one could see an allusion to either Genesis 15 or 17,

the latter being a confirmation of the former. Either way, the explanation provided by Williamson is difficult to follow since affirming Genesis 15 and 17 as separate covenants seems to contradict the affirmation of one covenant with all patriarchs. His assumptions, moreover, appear to beg the question. All other passages cited by Williamson are handled later.[27]

Our analysis of all constructions with *bĕrît* has now been extended in this edition to include a full study of all objects occurring with *hēqîm*.[28] The verb *hēqîm* simply means "to cause to rise or stand." It does have a variety of uses. The meaning, however, is determined largely by the object. Most of the objects fall into three categories: (1) architectural objects, (2) speech acts, and (3) persons (including children, peoples, seed). When the object is an architectural item, such as an altar, hut, pillar, ruin, stone, or tent, the verb can mean to set it up for the first time or to set it up if it has fallen down or become ruined. When the object is a covenant, oath, promise, vow, or word, the idea is always to carry out or keep that which one has spoken. Under persons and other objects, causing them to stand can involve helping a person stand up, resurrection, or raising up descendants—a variety of uses. A careful study of all objects of *hēqîm* confirms the claims made here. A covenant entails a commitment or obligation or relationship entered into by solemn speech acts. It is clearly in the category of oath, promise, vow, word. When this type of object is in view, the meaning is always to affirm verbally or carry out that which one has spoken.

The claim I am making for the distinction between *kārat bĕrît* and *hēqîm bĕrît* is not something special in relation to the word *bĕrît* but rather is based on the normal meaning of *hēqîm*. Consider the following example from Deuteronomy 27:26:

אָרוּר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָקִים אֶת־דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה־הַזֹּאת לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם

> "Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out." (NIV)

The NIV has rendered the Hebrew text quite well: a person upholds the Torah by carrying out the obligations or stipulations that are specified in it.

Although the analysis here is based on my own exhaustive firsthand lexical studies, it is interesting to see that a recent check of the dictionaries

or lexica largely supports the conclusions I reached. For the *hiphil* of קום, *HALOT* has eight categories: (1) “erect, put up,” (2) “take out, keep,” (3) “fulfil,” (4) “tell to get up,” (5) “raise, help up,” (6) “raise someone, nominate,” (7) “raise, erect, obtain,” and (8) “particular instances.”[29] For the first category, the objects of the verb are “stone,” “stones,” “siege towers,” “ruins,” “courtyard,” “curtains,” “throne of David,” “altar,” “stela,” “tent” (or “hut”), “pillar,” “pillars,” and so on. The point is that one is causing to stand, that is, erecting or setting up architectural features, buildings, monuments, and so forth. For the second category, the English rendering “take out” does not adequately render the original German *ausführen*.[30] In this category the verbal objects are usually “word,” “words,” “command,” “vow,” “covenant,” and “oath.” When one causes a “word” to stand, it means to carry out (not take out) or keep the promise or word. It is quite natural to put “covenant” in this category since “keeping one’s word” and “keeping a covenant” are in the same semantic field as “oath” and “vow.”[31] The same categories are in the first and second editions of Koehler-Baumgartner.[32]

When one turns to the older Oxford Lexicon,[33] the classification is almost the same. Instances of the expression *hēqîm bĕrît* (6d) are classified with the notion of keeping a vow (6e) or one’s word (6f). The definition offered, however, is “*establish* (make, ratify) covenant.” The English word “establish” is confusing at this point since “establish” could mean either to initiate something new or to uphold something already in place. The reason for this confusion is not hard to find. The lexicographers who produced this lexicon were committed to the Documentary Hypothesis and believed that the expressions *kārat bĕrît* and *hēqîm bĕrît* were equivalent in meaning and evidence of different sources. Thus they were combining lexicography with literary criticism.[34]

The eighteenth edition of Gesenius, the most recent Hebrew lexicon, and an excellent one at that, separates cases where *hēqîm bĕrît* means “to keep a covenant” from places where they think it means “to initiate a covenant,” based on a prior commitment to source theory.[35] The new *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* has the same classification as *HALOT*, as does the article on קום in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, in spite of the

fondness in the latter work for the "assured results" of source analysis.[36] Conversely, the *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament,* by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, is influenced by the Documentary Hypothesis in the same way as the authors of the Oxford Lexicon.[37]

What this brief survey shows is that no one is free from presuppositions, but where lexicography is based only on linguistic science (without interference from source theory), all the lexica support the position taken here. Here is the challenge for those who deny the claim we are making for the distinction between *kārat bĕrît* and *hēqîm bĕrît*: How does one explain the distribution in the Hebrew Bible? The majority of the fourteen instances of *hēqîm bĕrît* are found in the flood account and Genesis 17. If one does not explain this on the basis of different sources, what motivates the use of *hēqîm bĕrît*? Surely not stylistic variation, since that does not fit the data at all. To my mind, this challenge is insurmountable.

To view the covenant with Noah as a kind of reinstating and upholding of a covenant or commitment initiated at creation is not equivalent to saying that this is a covenant renewal. Niehaus is correct to call for a clear demarcation between covenants made for the first time and renewal covenants that confirm or ratify covenants initiated previously.[38] It is interesting, however, to note that the distinction in usage between *kārat bĕrît* and *hēqîm bĕrît* does not correlate with this perfectly valid difference between covenant initiation and covenant renewals or renewal covenants. Only *kārat bĕrît* is employed for covenant renewals since a separate covenant is being made to renew a previously existing covenant. This happens in a number of places (Deut. 29:1; Josh. 24:25; 2 Kings 23:3) where a covenant is made to keep a previously initiated covenant in which the loyalty of one of the partners has begun to fail. So in the covenant with Noah, God "affirms his commitment to creation." This might be conceived as ratifying a preexisting covenant but not in the sense in which Niehaus and Williamson have understood Dumbrell.

In summary, based on the expression *hēqîm bĕrît,* linguistic usage demonstrates that when God says that he is affirming or establishing his covenant with Noah, he is saying that his commitment initiated previously at creation to care for and preserve, provide for, and rule over all that he has

made, including the blessings and ordinances that he gave to Adam and Eve and their family, is now to be with Noah and his descendants. This can be substantiated and further supported by noting the parallels between Noah and Adam and between the covenant terms given to Noah and the ordinances given to Adam and his family.

Parallels with Adam and the Creation Narratives

In terms of literary techniques, we note that *key words*, *dominant ideas*, *parallel sequences* of actions, and *similar themes* clearly link the Noah narrative of Genesis 6–9 to the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2.

The Flood Story as a New Creation

First, the flood story is presented in the narrative as a new creation. Just as God ordered the original heavens and earth out of the chaotic deep or ocean (Gen. 1:2; Heb. *tĕhôm*), so here God orders the present heavens and earth out of the chaotic floodwaters. Genesis 8:1 records that God caused a wind (Heb. *rûaḥ*) to pass over the waters of the flood covering the entire earth, which reminds one of the creation narrative where the Spirit (Heb. *rûaḥ*) of God hovers over the waters of the original chaotic deep.[39] In the creation narrative, God gathers the waters together, and the dry land emerges; then he commands the earth to bring forth vegetation. After the flood, the dry land emerges as the waters subside and the earth brings forth vegetation, as we see when the dove returns with an olive leaf in her beak. These parallels indicate that after the flood, we have a new beginning like the first beginning.

Bruce Waltke, following Kenneth Mathews, demonstrates that the flood narrative follows seven progressive phases of renewing creation that are modeled on the progression of the creation week in Genesis 1:[40]

Phase 1: Precreation. Just as God's Spirit hovered over the abyss (1:2), God sends a wind over the engulfing waters to renew the earth:
1:2: "earth," "deep," "Spirit" (*rûaḥ*), "waters"
8:1b–2: "wind" (*rûaḥ*), "earth," "waters," "deep"

Phase 2: Second day. Just as God initially divided the waters (1:6–7), God regathers the waters, reestablishing the boundaries between sky

and earth:

1:6–8: “waters,” “sky”

8:2b: “sky”

Phase 3: Third day. Just as God separated the dry, arable ground from the water to sustain vegetation, so again the dry ground emerges in successive stages:

1:9: “water,” “dry ground,” “appear”

8:3–5: “water,” “tops of the mountains,” “appear”

Phase 4: Fifth day. The sky once again houses the winged creatures, as God first proclaimed it so to be:

1:20–23: “birds,” “above [*‘al*] the ground [NIV, ‘earth’]”

8:6–12: “raven,” “dove,” “from [*mē‘al*] . . . the ground”

Phase 5: Sixth day. The living creatures of sky and land are called out from the ark, as in their first creative calling from the voice of God:

1:24–25: “creatures,” “livestock,” “creatures that move along the ground,” “wild animals”

8:17–19: “creature,” “birds,” “animals,” “creatures that move along the ground”

Phase 6. The reappearance of the nuclear family—all of whom bear God’s image, as the heads and sole representatives of the human race—functions as a reprise of the creation of *’ādām*, male and female in God’s image:

1:26–28: “man,” “image of God,” “male and female”

8:16, 18: Noah and his wife

9:6: “man,” “image of God”

Phase 7. The heavenly King graciously grants his blessing on humanity, feeds them with the fruit of the restored earth, and, renewing the cultural mandate, restores them as lords over the creation:

1:28: “blessed,” “be fruitful,” “increase in number,” “fill the earth,” “rule . . . every living creature”

9:1–2: “blessed,” “be fruitful,” “increase in number,” “fill the earth,” “fear of you . . . upon every creature”

Noah as a New Adam

Second, Noah is presented in the narrative as a new Adam. The blessing and commission given to Noah are the same as those given to Adam (Gen. 9:1 = 1:28a). In this way, the narrator portrays Noah as a new Adam. As we look at the terms of the covenant next, we will see that Noah is recommissioned with all the ordinances given at creation to Adam and Eve and their family.

These literary techniques are important in determining the author's intent in communication. Williamson minimizes them because he does not see a covenant in Genesis 1–3:

> Nevertheless, while the conclusion that Genesis 1–3 must portray an antediluvian covenantal relationship is a non sequitur, Dumbrell and others are obviously correct to recognize several clear echoes of the creation narrative in the Noahic covenant. But these echoes suggest merely that God intended, through Noah, to fulfill his original creative intent; they do not presuppose the existence of a covenant between God and inanimate creation or indicate that the material in Genesis 1–3 must be understood covenantally.[41]

What, in fact, is a non sequitur is saying that in the covenant with Noah God is maintaining his original creative "intent" or "purpose" but denying that the divine-human relationship in Genesis 1–3 is covenantal. This non sequitur should be clear from the subtitle of Williamson's work, which links covenant to divine purpose: "Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose." Furthermore, the flaw lies in exegesis and in an inadequate definition of covenant. The biblical metanarrative constructed by Williamson is one essentially beginning with Noah in which Adam has largely disappeared. This damages the parallels Paul draws between Adam and Christ, as well as diminishes understanding of the covenant with Noah. See, at the end of this chapter, table 5.2, from Warren Austin Gage, which draws out all the parallels between the first creation and the re-creation after the flood.

From the flood narrative in Genesis 6–9, then, both the language used there and the literary techniques indicate a covenant confirmed that had been initiated previously. This covenant entails a divine-human relationship

initiated and specified at creation. Such a covenant could not, by definition, involve a ceremony between both parties, since what was involved was the creation of one of the parties in the relationship. That is a possible reason why the normal or standard language "to cut a covenant" is absent in Genesis 1–5.[42] Another reason is suggested by John H. Stek.[43] He argues as follows:

> Biblical covenants do not belong to the fundamentals of the God-creature relationship. . . . Covenants served rather to offer assurances, bolster faith, and reinforce commitments. In a world not invaded by sin, there would be no need for adding oaths to commitments, no need for "covenants"—no more than in such a world would oaths be necessary to establish the truth of one's "yes" or "no" (see Matt. 5:34–37; Jas. 5:12; cf., Heb. 6:16). Biblical covenants were ad hoc emergency measures occasioned by and ministering to human weaknesses—until the kingdom of God has fully come.[44]

This argument is erroneous and flawed. Biblical covenants are not ad hoc emergency measures. The divine-human relationship is *essentially* and *fundamentally* covenantal, because covenant is intrinsic to the being of God himself.[45] Stek may possibly have a point in arguing that, after the fall into sin, oaths added assurances in relationships. Indeed, oaths will be completely unnecessary in the new creation.[46] Yet Craig Bartholomew notes in answer to Stek that marriage is an example of a covenant that is not just a postfall phenomenon.[47] Thus, Genesis 1–3 may well be described as a covenant between God and his creation, or at least a commitment on God's part to his creation, including conduct stipulated for his creatures. Let us remember, too, that covenants include oaths but that the oath is not the covenant itself. Part of the problem may be the way in which Stek and Williamson emphasize the role of oaths in their definition of covenant. Waltke's definition is simpler: "*covenant* (Heb. *berît*) means 'a solemn commitment of oneself to undertake an obligation.'"[48]

The Terms of the Covenant

In Genesis 9:1–7, God blesses Noah and commissions him as a new Adam, giving him Adam's mandate, modified somewhat to suit the circumstances of a fallen world. Genesis 9:8–17 describes the covenant, its parties, and its sign. The verses in Genesis 9:1–17, then, are an expansion on the statement made to Noah in Genesis 6:18. Let us briefly note the blessing and terms set before Noah in verses 1–7 of chapter 9.

First, Noah is told to "be fruitful," to "increase in number," and to "fill the earth." As already noted, this is the blessing originally given to Adam at creation. This command is repeated in verse 7 with stylistic variation and so provides brackets or bookends—that is, a framework—for the covenant stipulations and terms.

Second, we read in verse 2 that "the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea" (ESV). In Genesis 1, mankind was commanded to rule over the earth and subdue it. God now assists humans in this task in a fallen world by placing the fear of them on the animals, birds, fish, and all creatures that move. Fear of humans may also assist them in catching creatures for consumption and nourishment and so relate to the next stipulation.

Third, the animals are given to the human race for food, just as the plants were given at creation for food (Gen. 1:29–30). There are two important restrictions to this provision. First, humans are not to eat flesh or meat with its blood in it. Later, instructions given in the law of Moses clarify this stipulation. Several passages describe properly draining the blood from meat when animals are slaughtered before the meat can be eaten (Lev. 3:17; 7:26–27; 19:26; Deut. 12:16–24; 1 Sam. 14:32–34). So while God gave the flesh of birds, fish, wild animals, and all creatures that move to sustain human life, he makes a restriction to maintain and preserve respect among humans for all life. God remains the Lord of life. Second, human life is set apart. This prevents not only cannibalism but also homicide. Even animals that kill humans are held responsible.

Fourth, human life is special and of priceless value and worth. God specifies two things concerning homicide. First, the human race is one family. We are all related. When a human life is wantonly taken, we are our

brother’s keeper. This is the first time in the Hebrew text since the story of Cain and Abel that the word “brother” is used (cf. Gen. 4:2, 8 [2x], 9 [2x], 10, 11, 21). This is frequently obscured in modern translations. Genesis 9:5 can be literally translated, “And surely the blood of your lives I will require; from the hand of every creature I will require it and from the hand of humans, that is, from the hand of the man’s brother, I will require the life of humans.” Thus the narrator reminds us of God’s ordinance given originally to the family of Adam that he would require an accounting of life from fellow family members (Gen. 4:9–10). God holds the community responsible. He demands an accounting from society. Second, God requires retributive justice. That is, the penalty for taking a life is paying with a life. Thus God holds the community responsible; he demands an accounting from society. It is clear from the text that retribution is in the hands of the government and not left to the anger and vengeance of an individual; nor are blood feuds authorized.

EXCURSUS: GENESIS 9:6 (שֹׁפֵךְ דַּם הָאָדָם // בָּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשָּׁפֵךְ)

The interpretation of Genesis 9:6 is debated. The translation in the NIV is as follows: “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed.” The expression “by humans” is rendering *bā’ādām*, a prepositional phrase consisting of the preposition *bĕ* plus the article and the collective generic noun *’ādām*, for humans. The preposition is capable of being construed in two different ways: (1) *beth instrumenti*—that is, the preposition signals an instrumental use: “Whoever sheds the blood of mankind, *by means of* mankind shall his blood be shed”; or (2) *beth pretii* —that is, the preposition signals an economic exchange: “Whoever sheds the blood of mankind, his blood will be shed *in exchange for* the [murdered/slain] man.” A thorough treatment is provided in Ernst Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, vol. 1, *Die Präposition Beth* (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 1992), 154. According to the first interpretation, the text is authorizing the agency of humans in administering the death penalty. This interpretation is popular in many modern English translations. Nonetheless, Jenni, in his magisterial treatment of prepositions in Hebrew, argues that the second interpretation is more probable and also fits the *lex talionis*, the fundamental principle of retribution in the Torah. If Jenni’s exegesis is followed, it is important to note that the text does affirm elsewhere that human agency is authorized to administer the death penalty. Genesis 9:5 states, “And surely I shall demand an accounting of your lifeblood, from the hand of every animal I shall demand it, and from the hand of mankind, that is, from the hand of his fellow man I shall demand an accounting of the life of mankind.” Thus God holds the community responsible; he demands an accounting from society.

Fifth, God holds the human family/society responsible to administer retribution when a human life is wantonly taken. This accounting principle is based on the fact that humans, men and women, are made in the image of God. The mention of the image of God is significant. It reasserts the creation standard and the unique status of mankind and explains why human life is specially protected while animal life is not protected to the same extent.[49] Humanity owns the animals and thus can kill them, but

humans cannot be killed because they are owned by God—stamped with his seal of ownership. Furthermore, as we shall see, the mention of the divine image is a direct reference to the covenant between God and creation and God and humanity established at creation.

Table 5.1 outlines the terms of the covenant with Noah and his family and shows how they correspond to, renew, and repeat the terms of God's covenant at creation with Adam and Eve and their family.

Table 5.1 Comparison of the Covenants with Noah and with Creation

Covenant with Noah	**Covenant with Creation**
Gen. 9:1, 7: Be fruitful and increase in number	Gen. 1:28: Be fruitful . . .
Gen. 9:2: Fear of you	Gen. 1:28: Rule over fish, birds, animals
Gen. 9:3: Animals given for food	Gen. 1:29: Plants given for food
Gen. 9:4: Don't eat meat with blood	
Gen. 9:5–6: Your blood . . . his brother's life	See Gen. 4:8–24
Gen. 9:6: In the image of God	Gen. 1:27: In his own image

Genesis 9:8–17 now describes the covenant promise, its parties, and its sign.

The Parties of the Covenant

In Genesis 6:18, the covenant is made between God and Noah and his family. Here in 9:8–17 is an expansion. The partners of the covenant are referred to in six different ways:

9:9–10: "with you and with your seed after you and with every living being that is with you: birds, animals domesticated, animals wild . . ."
9:12: "between me and you and every living being that was with you"
9:13: "between me and the earth"
9:15: "between me and you and every living being among all flesh"
9:16: "between God and every living being among all flesh that is on the earth"
9:17: "between me and all flesh that is on the earth"

The statements in Genesis 9:8–17 are highly repetitive and monotonous to Western ears. This repetition is like a cathedral bell ringing out again and again, reverberating into the future, that God is committing himself to all his living creatures while the earth lasts. There can be no mistaking the parties identified in the covenant.

The Promise of the Covenant

Genesis 9:11 specifies the obligation that God places on himself, the promise he makes to Noah and to the entire human race through him: "Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth" (NIV). God reiterates his promise in 9:15 with stylistic variations. We first learn of this divine decision in 8:21:

> And Yahweh smelled the soothing smell, and Yahweh said to himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of mankind because the inclination of the heart of mankind is evil from his youth."

Dumbrell aptly comments,

> The reference to the heart of man in Gen. 8:21 which remains unchanged by the experience of the flood refers initially to the eight who have been saved and thus throws into clear relief the nature of Noah's righteousness as something extrinsic to him. Since we are virtually being told that a deluge would be an appropriate response by God to the sin of any age, mankind has been preserved by grace alone. Until the end of time the continued existence of the created order will thus be grounded simply in the gracious nature of the divine character.[50]

The references to the "inclination of the heart of mankind" harks back to the previous instance of these words in Genesis 6:5, where we were informed of the cause of the great judgment: "The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" (NIV). The condition of humanity after the cataclysmic judgment remains the same as it was before; so the judgment has not altered or changed the

condition of the human heart. The implication is that God would be completely justified in wiping out every generation of humanity by means of a great judgment. There is only one reason why he does not do so: because of his own grace and mercy toward us. The earth is maintained and preserved in spite of the human situation. Thus the covenant made with Noah creates a firm stage of history where God can work out his plan for rescuing his fallen world.

Dumbrell draws attention to the fact that four of the eight occurrences of the word "covenant" in this narrative have the possessive pronoun "my" attached to it: "I will confirm/uphold *my* covenant with you" (Gen. 6:18; 9:9, 11, 15).[51] We must pause for a moment and consider the force of the "my" involved in the expression "my covenant" in these texts. We have already noted that covenant, on any understanding of the term, has the notion of commitment or obligation built into it. Is this a covenant by which humans are obligated, or does God bind himself and thus make mankind the beneficiary of the obligation so undertaken? Dumbrell rightly suggests that the "my" of "my covenant" indicates that the latter is the correct interpretation. This is a covenant in which God binds himself and obligates himself, and he will maintain the covenant in spite of human failure.

In Genesis 9:18–29, we have the strange story of the drunkenness of Noah and his curse on Canaan. Like the first Adam, the second Adam (Noah) is also a gardener who plants a vineyard. Like the first Adam, the second Adam is also a disobedient *son* whose sin results in shameful nakedness. One of the points this episode is making is that once again the human partner has failed as a covenant keeper and that the fulfillment of the promise will be due solely to the faithfulness and grace of God, who is always a faithful covenant partner. This is the parallel in the Noah story to the fall in Genesis 3.

The Sign of the Covenant

God gives to Noah and to all his descendants, to the entire human race, a physical sign of the covenant. The sign of the covenant with Noah is a rainbow in the clouds. There is, in fact, no word in Hebrew for "rainbow." The word used here is the ordinary term for an archer's bow. The only other

occurrence in the Old Testament where it refers to a rainbow is Ezekiel 1:28, where a circumlocution such as “the bow that will be in the clouds” is required to indicate that a rainbow is in view and not an archer’s bow. I like the comment of Warren Austin Gage:

> The bow is a weapon of war, an emblem of wrath. God will now set it in the heavens as a token of grace. The Lord who makes his bow of wrath into a seven-colored arch of beauty to ornament the heavens is the one who will finally command the nations to beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruninghooks (Mic. 4:3) for the Prince of Peace takes pleasure in mercy (Mic. 7:18) and the Righteous Judge delights in grace.[52]

The rainbow, then, is a physical picture that God has “laid his weapons down,” as indicated in the promise that “never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.” It is interesting that the bow set in the clouds is always aimed at or pointed up to the heavens and never downward at us on the earth. Although not every covenant has a sign, this is the only covenant sign that can be given by the divine partner alone. All the other covenant signs are given by the human partner.

The Place of the Covenant with Noah in the Larger Story

The covenant with Noah is in effect today. The promises and future statements made by God employ the emphatic negative “never again” four times (8:21; 9:11 [2x]; 9:15). His commitment is throughout everlasting generations (9:12). And in 9:16, he calls the arrangement an everlasting covenant. Indeed, the sign of this covenant, the rainbow, remains as a witness to God to the present time. It is still with us today. There is no evidence anywhere in the completed canon of Scripture that this covenant has been annulled or superseded.

Earlier the claim was made that the covenants (plural) are at the heart of the metanarrative plot structure of the Bible. The method that substantiates this claim is twofold: (1) to exegete the main texts for each of the covenants, paying attention to cultural context, linguistic data, literary devices and structures, and the larger story; and (2) to exegete key texts that

explicate the relationship between one or more covenants, so that the metanarrative is constructed from Scripture and not from an external metanarrative (i.e., philosophy or worldview). We would claim that classic covenant theology on the one hand and dispensational theology on the other (whether classic or so-called progressive) entail too much in their metanarratives that is external to Scripture. Moreover, the exegesis offered by these classic systems involves categories that do not sufficiently and accurately explain the meaning of the key texts. Someone once shrewdly stated, "She who marries the spirit of the age will be a widow in the next." Francis Schaeffer noted well that the theology of Thomas Aquinas is a good example of combining biblical metanarrative and pagan worldview.[53]

The relationship of the covenant with Noah and the covenant with creation will become clearer once the covenant with creation is explained in detail in chapter 6. Nonetheless, some of the later passages treating the covenant with Noah can be considered here.[54]

Isaiah 24:3–5

Chapters 13–27 of Isaiah constitute a literary unit consisting of judgment oracles against foreign nations, divided into three sets of five. Chapter 24 marks the onset of the third group of five oracles: all nations and peoples of the earth are indicted; this "city of man" will be destroyed because humans have broken the "everlasting covenant" by disobeying the instructions and violating its statutes:

> The earth will be completely laid waste
> and totally plundered.
> The LORD has spoken this word.
>
> The earth dries up and withers,
> the world languishes and withers,
> the heavens languish with the earth.
> The earth is defiled by its people;
> they have disobeyed the laws,
> violated the statutes
> and broken the everlasting covenant. (Isa. 24:3–5 NIV)

Since the reference is to all humans breaking the "everlasting covenant," the Mosaic covenant given to Israel at Sinai is hardly in view. The most probable referent is the covenant made with Noah, which in reality reestablished and upheld the covenant with creation in Genesis 1, reaffirming the commitment of the Creator to his creation and the responsibilities placed on humans at that time. Isaiah's oracle predicts complete desolation on the earth because its people have violated the instructions and terms of the Noahic covenant.

Isaiah 54:9–10

> "To me this is like the days of Noah,
> when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth.
> So now I have sworn not to be angry with you,
> never to rebuke you again.
> Though the mountains be shaken
> and the hills be removed,
> yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken
> nor my covenant of peace be removed,"
> says the LORD, who has compassion on you. (Isa. 54:9–10 NIV)

This passage is extremely important for letting the biblical text define in its own terms the relationships between the various covenants; it will be considered at length later. Nonetheless, Isaiah compares here the new covenant with the covenant with Noah. What is precisely similar between both covenants is the undeterred, unswerving commitment of Yahweh to carry out the promises enshrined in them. Just as he promised never again to cover the entire earth with floodwaters as a judgment, so he will never be angry with his people and withdraw his loyal love in the covenant of peace.

Jeremiah 33:19–26

In a context where Jeremiah is communicating divine promises to restore the fortunes of Judah and Israel, he also speaks of the fulfillment of the promises of Yahweh to David:

> The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: "This is what the LORD says: 'If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time, then my covenant with David my servant—and my covenant with the Levites who are priests ministering before me—can be broken and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne. I will make the descendants of David my servant and the Levites who minister before me as countless as the stars in the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore.'"
>
> The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: "Have you not noticed that these people are saying, 'The LORD has rejected the two kingdoms he chose'? So they despise my people and no longer regard them as a nation. This is what the LORD says: 'If I have not made my covenant with day and night and established the laws of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and have compassion on them.'" (Jer. 33:19–26 NIV)

The divine oracle affirms that the covenant with David is unbreakable, just as the covenant with the day and the covenant with the night is unbreakable. What is being referred to in the expression "my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night"? Scholars debate whether these words refer to the covenant with Noah or to what is being called here the covenant with creation (in Genesis 1). Since I have argued that the covenant with Noah "upholds" the covenant with creation in Genesis 1, either way the point is the same, and the debate can be evaluated later.

Summary

Later references to the covenant with Noah pick up on features that are clearly expressed within the text of Genesis 6–9. Two of the texts, Isaiah 54 and Jeremiah 33, note the emphatic "never again" element, in which God promises never again to employ floodwaters in judgment to destroy all flesh. Nonetheless, stipulations and terms are given to both animals and

humans. God demands an accounting. Isaiah 54 picks up on the importance of human responsibility.

Theologians have attempted to classify and describe covenants as either conditional or unconditional. That is, are the commitments bilateral or unilateral, and is their fulfillment conditioned (in the case of a divine-human relationship) on the obedience of the human party? These categories are not helpful or fruitful if one desires to accurately represent the biblical text. The covenant with Noah entails divine promises whose fulfillment cannot be thwarted, yet it also calls the community of animals and humans to answer for their actions and stewardship.

The covenant with Noah "upholds" the divine image. This is to be discussed in the next chapter. As we shall see, it entails a covenant relationship between God and humans on the one hand and between humans and creation on the other. The human community must express obedient sonship in faithful, loyal love to the creator God and rule over the creation with humble servanthood and responsible stewardship. Worship is a priority in achieving these purposes. The narratives of Genesis 6–8 begin by depicting Noah as an obedient son and steward of animal life on the earth. He also offers significant worship in a sacrifice that appeases the anger of the Lord and turns away further judgment. Nonetheless, like the first Adam, he ends up as a disobedient son whose nakedness reveals shame rather than full integrity.

As Bruce Waltke aptly notes, the covenant with Noah is instructive because it shows that being given a fresh start and a clean slate is not a sufficient remedy for the human plight:

> The sin of Noah sheds light on the human plight. At one time or another, most people become disgusted with what is going on in the world—the intractable problems among people: hatred, prejudice, and greed that lead to cruelty and war. The problems are insoluble because hatred and prejudice are burdens of our depraved nature and our history. Because we cannot change or forget, our nature and memory doom us. In response, the idealistic ones among us ask: "What if we started over? What if we expunged history and wiped the slate clear?" The account of Noah puts the lie to that solution.[55]

The unmerited favor and kindness of God in preserving his world in the covenant with Noah creates a firm stage of history where God can work out his plan for rescuing his fallen world. It also points ahead to the coming deliverance in Jesus Christ. Williamson's summary of the significance of the covenant with Noah is the same as my view presented here:

> The theological significance of the Noahic covenant is at least twofold. First of all, it is the basis for our present confidence in God as sustainer. It is the Noahic covenant that gives us the assurance that God will sustain the creation order, despite the chaos that continually threatens to engulf it. . . . Secondly, given that the Noahic covenant provides the biblical-theological framework within which all subsequent divine-human covenants operate, its universal scope is undoubtedly significant. As suggested by the allusions to Genesis 1 noted above, the universal scope of this covenant implies that the blessing for which humanity had been created and the creation had now been preserved will ultimately encompass not just one people or nation, but rather the whole earth. Accordingly, while the patriarchal narratives reflect an obvious narrowing in focus, the universal emphasis of Genesis 1–11 is not lost entirely in the subsequent chapters of Genesis and beyond.[56]

Warren Austin Gage helpfully draws the parallels between Adam and Noah together in a table (see table 5.2).

Table 5.2 The History of the World: The Macrocosm[57]

Genesis 1		**The World That Was**		**Genesis 7**
Creation	*Adam*	*Fall*	*Conflict of Seed*	*Judgment*
1. Waters of chaos cover the earth, Gen. 1:1–2	1. Man commissioned in God's image, Gen. 1:26	1. Adam sins in a garden, Gen. 3:2–6	1. Cain condemned to wander, founds wicked city of Enoch, Gen. 4:13–17	1. Days of Noah are upon the earth, Gen. 6:13
2. Spirit hovers over face of the waters, Gen. 1:2	2. Man commanded to fill the earth, Gen. 1:28	2. Adam partakes in fruit of the tree of	2. Seth, with son Enosh, begins to call on name of the Lord, Gen. 4:26	2. God brings cloud on earth to destroy the wicked with a flood, Gen. 7:23

		knowledge, Gen. 3:6		
3. Dry land emerges, vegetation brought forth, Gen. 1:9–12	3. God brings animals to Adam for naming, Gen. 2:19	3. Adam shamefully naked, Gen. 3:7	3. Daughters of men taken as wives by sons of God, Gen. 6:2	3. Old heavens and earth pass away before the present heavens and earth, 2 Pet. 3:5–7
4. Old world finished, God rests, Gen. 2:2		4. Adam's nakedness covered by God, Gen. 3:21		
		5. Adam's sin brings curse upon seed, Gen. 3:15		
Genesis 8		**The World That Now Is**		**Revelation 22**
The New Creation	*Noah, the New Adam*	*The Fall Renewed*	*Seed Conflict Renewed*	*The New Judgment*
1. Waters of Noah cover the earth, Gen. 7:18–19	1. Man recommissioned in God's image, Gen. 9:6	1. Noah sins in a vineyard, Gen. 9:20–21	1. Noah's sons, to avoid wandering, found wicked city of Babel, Gen. 11:4	1. "Days of Noah" again upon the earth, Matt. 24:37–39
2. Dove "hovers" over face of the waters, Gen. 8:9	2. Man commanded to fill the earth again, Gen. 9:7	2. Noah partakes of fruit of vine, Gen. 9:21	2. Shem's descendant Abram begins to call on name of the Lord, Gen. 12:8	2. God comes in clouds to destroy the wicked with a fire, Matt. 24:30; cf. 2 Pet. 3:7
3. Olive leaf betokens emergence of dry land, Gen. 8:11	3. God brings animals to Noah for delivering, Gen. 7:15	3. Noah shamefully naked, Gen. 9:21	3. The harlot Babel seduces the sons of Zion throughout the ages, cf. Isa. 47:1–15; Dan. 1:1; Rev. 17–18	3. Present heavens and earth pass away before the new heavens and earth, 2 Pet. 3:13
4. Present world finished; God receives sacrifice of rest, Gen. 8:21		4. Noah's nakedness covered by sons, Gen. 9:23		
		5. Noah's sin brings curse upon		

		seed, Gen. 9:25		

1. Parts of chap. 5 are adapted from Peter J. Gentry, “Kingdom through Covenant: Humanity as the Divine Image,” *SBJT* 12, no. 1 (2008): 16–43. Used by permission of the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*.

2. Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 286.

3. The approach here contrasts with John Goldingay’s “cosmic mistake” approach, in which it almost seems as if God is a mad scientist, trying to get things right in the laboratory, trying plan B after plan A fails. See John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 161–84.

4. J. W. Olley, “‘Righteous’ and Wealthy? The Description of the *Ṣaddîq* in Wisdom Literature,” *Colloquium* 22, no. 2 (1990): 38–45.

5. Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 97.

1. Some have argued that intermarriage between angels and humans is impossible, citing Jesus’s statement in Mark 12:25: “When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (NIV). What Jesus actually says, however, is that the angels in heaven do not marry, and Jude specifies that the angels who sinned “did not keep their own position of rule but abandoned their own/proper dwelling place” (Jude 6).

2. Second Peter 2:4–8 cites two examples from the history of the Old Testament, not three. The text contains three καί (“and”) conjunctions. The center “and” joins the two examples. Then each example has two parts: (1) the angels who sinned and the contemporaries of Noah, and (2) the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and righteous Lot. Thus the clear literary structure associates the narrative of the angels with the narrative of Noah and must refer to the account in Genesis 6:1–4 rather than to some event not narrated in the Old Testament, such as the fall of Satan.

3. Although this pattern is standard, it is not the only kind of construction, as Genesis 41:31 shows.

4. This is apparently the only occurrence of *’aḥărê-kên* where it is modified by a relative clause. The Oxford Lexicon adduces 2 Chron. 35:20, but the parallel is not exact or compelling. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907, 1953).

6. William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 17.

7. Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

8. Jeffrey J. Niehaus, “An Argument against Theologically Constructed Covenants,” *JETS* 50, no. 2 (2007): 259–73; Niehaus, “Covenant: An Idea in the Mind of God,” *JETS* 52, no. 2 (2009): 225–46.

9. Niehaus, “Argument against Theologically Constructed Covenants,” 265.

10. Ibid., 270.

11. Niehaus, “Covenant: An Idea in the Mind of God,” 235–36.

12. Craig G. Bartholomew, “Covenant and Creation: Covenant Overload or Covenantal Deconstruction,” *CTJ* 30 (1995): 25.

13. See Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 15–26.

14. Umberto Cassuto, *La Questione della Genesi* (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1934), 112–16. See also Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch: Eight Lectures*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 47–48.

15. See especially Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, AB 3B (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2343–46 and bibliography provided there.

16. First in his published doctoral dissertation, Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and Its Covenantal Development in Genesis*, JSOTSup 315 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), and later in a general work on the covenants, Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*.

17. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations*, 196; Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 73.

18. Ezekiel 17:13 and Deut. 29:11 (29:12 EV) employ *kārat bĕrît* and refer to covenants being initiated. (See the discussion below on the relationship of Exodus 19–24 and Deuteronomy.) Ezekiel 16:8 and 2 Chron. 15:12 use *bô’ bĕrît* (“enter a covenant”), an expression equivalent to *kārat bĕrît*. Numbers 25:12 employs the verb *nātan* (“give”). This verb is simply a substitute verb higher in the hierarchical level, like “do,” and is dependent on the context as to whether it may refer to initiating or upholding a covenant. In general, the only occurrences of the collocation *nātan bĕrît* are found in contexts that employ the expression *hēqîm bĕrît* or an equivalent idea (Gen. 9:12, 17:2; Num. 25:12).

19. See Moshe Weinfeld, “בְּרִית *bĕrît*,” in *TDOT* 2:253–79; Roger T. Beckwith, “The Unity and Diversity of God’s Covenants,” *TynBul* 38 (1987): 92–118.

20. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations*, 195–96.

21. I have carefully examined all instances of *bĕrît* and, in particular, all expressions in which *bĕrît* is the modifier of a verb in the Hebrew Bible. This research was performed in two independent and separate studies of all the evidence, conducted ten years apart. For this revised edition, I have carefully considered each instance again and added data concerning all objects of *hēqîm*. Although I have modified my position in the interpretation of some texts (e.g., Ezek. 16:60, 62), the result has cleared up problems and strengthened the general position. The evidence is provided in the revised appendix.

22. It ought to be noted that Dumbrell has revised his original work and defended his position against the criticisms of Williamson. See William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology*, rev. ed. (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2013), 12–20.

23. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 73.

24. Paul R. Williamson, review of *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, by Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *JESOT* 2, no. 2 (2013): 250–52.

25. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations*, 199.

26. In Genesis 26, Yahweh communicates to Isaac in a vision after the death of Abraham, and the covenant promises to Abraham are repeated and affirmed for him. Note that the expression in 26:3 in the Hebrew text is *hēqîm ʻet-hašševuʻāh* ("establish the oath"). This expression is equivalent to *hēqîm bĕrît* and indicates that God is affirming to Isaac his covenant promises to Abraham. Thus God is not initiating another or a different covenant *de novo* with Isaac but only affirming that the promises of the one covenant made to the father are valid also for the son.

27. Williamson's review of *Kingdom through Covenant* insists that Ex. 6:4; Deut. 29:1; 2 Kings 23:3; and Ezek. 16:60, 62 refute our position. The instances in Deuteronomy, 2 Kings, and Ezekiel are discussed below and in chaps. 10 and 12. Dumbrell answers Williamson on Ex. 6:4 in particular in his revised edition. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, rev. ed., 15–20.

28. The evidence is also listed in the appendix.

29. *HALOT*, s.v. קום.

30. The original is in Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, ed. Walter Baumgartner, Johann Jakob Stamm, and Benedikt Hartmann, 3rd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1967–1995), s.v. קום.

31. The parallel between *hēqîm bĕrît* and *hēqîm dābār* is further supported by the fact that *kārat* likewise takes *dābār* (Hag. 2:5), *ʼālâ* (Deut. 29:13 [29:14 EV]), and *ʼămānâ* (Neh. 10:1 [9:38 EV]) as objects with meanings parallel to *bĕrît*.

32. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1958, 1985).

33. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*.

34. See Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis*, who argued that the different expressions correlated instead with different meanings. His approach was strictly linguistic, without interference from presuppositions about the sources.

35. Rudolph Meyer and Herbert Donner, *Wilhelm Gesenius: Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch das Alte Testament*, 18th ed. (Berlin: Springer, 2009), Lfg. 5, s.v. קום.

36. David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 7:231–35; J. Gamberoni, "קום *qûm*," in *TDOT* 12:589–612.

37. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, eds., *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, 3 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), s.v. קום *qûm*.

38. Niehaus, "Argument against Theologically Constructed Covenants," 266–67; Niehaus, "Covenant: An Idea in the Mind of God," 236–37.

39. This connection is stronger in the original text because the term for "wind" or "spirit" in Hebrew is the same word (*rûaḥ*).

40. Taken from Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 128–29.

41. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 75.

42. See Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, rev. ed., 15–26.

43. John H. Stek, "'Covenant' Overload in Reformed Theology," *CTJ* 29 (1994): 12–41.

44. Ibid., 40.

45. Cf. Niehaus, "Covenant: An Idea in the Mind of God," 225–46. Niehaus critiques attempts to base the origin of covenant in the Old Testament on evolutionary or family models and argues that it comes from the mind of God. Although it might be better to say it comes from the *being* of God, the corrective contribution of Niehaus is cogent and necessary.

46. See Don B. Garlington, "Oath-Taking in the Community of the New Age (Matthew 5:33–37)," *TJ*, n.s., 16, no. 2 (1995): 139–70.

47. See Craig G. Bartholomew, "A Time for War and a Time for Peace: Old Testament Wisdom, Creation, and O'Donovan's Theological Ethics," in *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically: A Dialogue with Oliver O'Donovan*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, Jonathan Chaplin, Robert Song, and Al Wolters, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 106; and especially Bartholomew, "Covenant and Creation," 11–33.

48. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 287.

49. One is saddened to live in a country where an eagle's egg has more protection than an unborn human.

50. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 26–27.

51. Ibid., 28.

52. Warren Austin Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology* (Winona Lake, IN: Carpenter, 1984), 135.

53. See Colin Duriez, *Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 168.

54. Passages that some scholars have erroneously connected to the covenant with Noah are appropriately eliminated from consideration here; see the evaluation of Dell by Williamson: Katharine J. Dell, "Covenant and Creation in Relationship," in *Covenant as Context: Essays in Honour of E. W. Nicholson*, ed. A. D. H. Mayes and R. B. Salters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 111–33; Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 65–76.

55. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 298.

56. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 67–68.

57. Adapted from Gage, *Gospel of Genesis* (1984), 16. Used by permission of Wipf and Stock. www.wipfandstock.com.

6

The Covenant with Creation in Genesis 1–3

Whether or not a covenant is entailed in Genesis 1–3 continues to be debated.[1] In his work *Sealed with an Oath*, for example, Paul Williamson argues that a divine-human covenant is introduced for the first time in the flood narrative in Genesis 6:18. He notes arguments *for* a covenant in Genesis 1–3 by William Dumbrell and O. Palmer Robertson. According to Williamson, Dumbrell relies on the interpretation of the pronoun in the phrase "my covenant" (Gen. 6:18; 9:9, 11, 15), the difference in meaning between "cut a covenant" (*kārat bĕrît*) and "uphold a covenant" (*hēqîm bĕrît*), and a divine commitment to achieve the purpose of creation observed in Genesis 1:1–2:4a. Robertson's main proof is based upon Jeremiah 33:20–26, a passage that can be considered after exegesis of Genesis 1–3. Williamson finds these arguments wanting. Before analyzing Genesis 1–3, we can briefly make a few points in response to scholars who argue against a covenant in the creation narrative.

First, Williamson states what for many scholars is apparently a strong argument: "Prior to Genesis 6:18 there is not even a hint of any covenant being established—at least between God and humans."[2] The absence of the Hebrew word for "covenant" in Genesis 1–5, however, cannot constitute an argument to demonstrate the absence of any covenant before Genesis 6:18. It is fully possible in biblical literature to speak of a covenant without actually using the word. To illustrate this important principle of interpretation, consider, for example, Richard Schultz's study of "the king in the book of Isaiah."[3] Naturally, the first step in his investigation is to

carefully analyze all contexts in which the Hebrew root *mlk*—the lexical basis of all adjectives, nouns, and verbs in Hebrew having to do with royal rule—occur in Isaiah. This is only, however, a first step. Wisely, Schultz looks for other ways in which the notion of kingship is communicated. A passage in Isaiah that fairly shouts the kingship of Yahweh without actually employing any word based upon the root *mlk* is 66:1:

> This is what the LORD says:
>
> "Heaven is my throne,
> and the earth is my footstool.
> Where is the house you will build for me?
> Where will my resting place be?" (NIV)

As one might expect, this verse forms an important part of Schultz's treatment of kingship in Isaiah. And just as one can speak of kingship without the word "king," so one can speak of covenant without using that word. Later we will see that the phrase, "I will be their God, and they will be my people" is a frequent method of referring to a divine-human covenant. Furthermore, the word Torah frequently implies covenant as its reflex just as faith implies repentance as its reflex in the New Testament.

These are just a couple of examples. In fact, people who claim that the absence of the word means there is no covenant in Genesis 1–3 are probably unaware of the large number of expressions used both within the Old Testament and in the cultures that surrounded Israel for referring to covenants without actually using the word. These are detailed and listed exhaustively by Paul Kalluveettil in his work *Declaration and Covenant.*[4] But what is irrefutable is that all students of the Bible acknowledge that God made a covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7, though the word "covenant" is nowhere used in that narrative. The absence of the word for "covenant" (*bĕrît*) in Genesis 1–3, then, is no argument at all against the notion that a divine-human covenant is established at creation, if exegesis can demonstrate that the idea is there.

It is legitimate to ask, as Dumbrell indeed does, why the expression "to cut a covenant" does not occur in Genesis 1–3.[5] Probably the answer is simply that the ceremony involving cutting an animal in half to symbolize a

self-imprecatory oath would have been anachronistic and unsuitable as a communicative instrument for the covenant at creation established between God and humans on the one hand and humans and the creation on the other. Exegesis of Genesis 1:26–28 will substantiate this.

Second, some have argued (as, for example, John Stek) that covenants are necessary only after the fall in Genesis 3. Yet marriage is a covenant relationship that existed prior to the fall, as Craig Bartholomew has observed, and so this, too, is no argument against a divine-human covenant in Genesis 1.

Third, although Dumbrell's description of the difference in meaning between "cut a covenant" (*kārat bĕrît*) and "uphold a covenant" (*hēqîm bĕrît*) must be adjusted and his interpretation of some contexts modified, the difference is nonetheless real and substantiated by exhaustive examination of all the data. Williamson relied on Moshe Weinfeld and did not analyze all the data for himself. From the flood narrative we have seen that the language employed there does indeed point to the affirming of a covenant initiated previously between God and humans as well as between humans and creation in which Noah appears as a new Adam. Williamson's argument that there is no covenant in Genesis 1–3 results in an emasculated biblical metanarrative that essentially begins with Noah and greatly endangers the parallels drawn by Paul between Adam and Christ from the larger story of Scripture.

Fourth, the way in which one defines covenant can prejudice one's view on the question of a covenant at creation. Williamson says,

> For Reformed theologians, apparently, any relationship involving God must be covenantal in nature—whether his relationship with creation in general or his relation with human beings in particular. Covenant is seen as framing or establishing any such relationship. This, however, is not in fact what the biblical text suggests. Rather than establishing or framing such a divine-human relationship, a covenant seals or formalizes it.[6]

While no attempt is made here to provide support for classic covenantal theology or classic/progressive dispensational treatments of covenants, the

statement by Williamson seems confused. The covenant with Noah, which Williamson has just expounded as universal in scope, should be sufficient to show that God's relationship to all creatures and humans is covenantal. This is so, as we will see, because covenant is essential to the being of God. Nonetheless, Williamson employs an ill-defined notion of covenant against those who hold that there is a covenant at creation.

Jeffrey J. Niehaus also finds the treatment of Williamson problematic at this point, and his evaluation needs to be cited in full:

> Williamson further uses the understanding that a covenant ratifies or seals an existing relationship as an argument against a creation covenant, and in doing so he notes the background of relationship in the divine-human covenants:
>
> > Leaving aside creation for a moment, just consider the ensuing biblical examples of divine-human relationships that are subsequently sealed by means of a covenant: God was clearly in relationship with Abraham from Genesis 12, yet it is not until Genesis 15 that God formalizes that relationship by means of a covenant. Similarly, God was in relationship with Israel before the covenant he formally established with them on Mount Sinai. Likewise, God was in relationship with David long before he sealed that relationship by covenant in 2 Samuel 7. And a straightforward reading of Genesis 6 suggests that God was in relationship with Noah before sealing that relationship by covenant immediately after the Flood. Thus the question is not whether or not a relationship existed between God and creation or between God and humanity prior to the fall. Undoubtedly, such a relationship existed. However, to insist on calling this relationship a "covenant relationship" is another matter entirely. There is no indisputable evidence in the text for doing so. This is hardly surprising if, as suggested above, a covenant was primarily a means of sealing or formalizing such a relationship; it did not establish it.[7]
>
> The question is not, however, whether a relationship existed between God and Abraham, God and Israel, God and David, and God and

> Noah, before God entered into covenants with them. The question is what sort of relationship existed in each case. The answer is: pre-covenantal (and not a covenantal) relationship. That relationship, which existed before the covenant was actually "cut" or made, would become the stuff of the historical prologue of the future covenant. So, Yahweh commanded Abram to leave his homeland (Gen 12:1), and later, when the covenant was made (Genesis 15), identified himself as Yahweh who brought him up out of Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen 15:7). Likewise, Yahweh delivered Israel out of Egypt, and then, when he began to give them the laws of the covenant he was now making with them, identified himself as "Yahweh, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exod 20:2). The pattern is exactly what we typically see in the late second millennium BC international treaties.[8]

Covenants in both the biblical texts and the ancient Near Eastern culture vary widely, and a definition that is narrower than the evidence permits prejudges the situation in Genesis 1–3, as is illustrated by the skewed definition of Williamson. It is interesting to note that Williamson speaks of "God's universal purpose" in creation and that "God intended, through Noah, to fulfill his original creative intent."[9] These are, in essence, backdoor references to the (covenantal) *commitment* of the Creator to his creation, which Williamson cannot escape.

In the end, exegesis must show—an exegesis not only based on the cultural and linguistic data but also attuned to literary structures and techniques and a canonical metanarrative—whether or not there is a covenant in Genesis 1. It may be that Dumbrell's exegesis is inadequate and so not persuasive for Williamson, but Williamson provides no exegesis of Genesis 1–3 whatsoever.

Exegesis of Genesis 1–3

A covenant initiated at creation is clearly indicated by the text of Genesis 1:26–28, as well as by elements in 2:4–3:24.

Before beginning exegesis of these two texts, let us note an argument that is difficult to refute. In Genesis 1:1–2:3, the first creation narrative, the name for God is always *Ĕlōhîm*. In 2:4–3:24, the second creation narrative,

the name for God is always the double name *Yahweh Ělōhîm* except when Satan is speaking—and then only *Ělōhîm*. Later we shall see that both narratives are written by one author and that this is a normal technique in Hebrew literature where the author seeks to create a "full-orbed idea." Dividing the text into sources and editors is an erroneous method arising in the Enlightenment period, when scholars imposed modern and Western methods of literary analysis on ancient and Eastern texts. The double name *Yahweh Ělōhîm* occurs twenty times in Genesis 2:4–3:24 and only in seventeen instances in the rest of the entire Old Testament.[10] So the double name *Yahweh Ělōhîm* is being employed by the author for a particular reason. Since Yahweh emphasizes God in covenant relationship to his people, it should be obvious that the author's purpose is to show that the transcendent Creator of the first account is also the God in covenant relationship with his people in the second account. These are the twin pillars of all theology in the Old Testament. If there is no covenant at creation, how can one explain the special use of the double name in Genesis 2:4–3:24?

Although centuries of analysis and debate have focused on interpretation of the divine image in Genesis 1:26–28, a significant contribution can yet be made to our understanding of this text by combining biblical theology on the one hand and recent insights into the cultural setting and language of the text on the other. The biblical-theological framework of Genesis 1:26–28 has been provided first from a consideration of the language used in the flood narratives, so now an exegesis of the text itself with close attention to its cultural setting and linguistic and literary features is a desideratum.

The Divine Image in Genesis 1:26–28

Humans Are the Crown of Creation

The first creation narrative, Genesis 1:1–2:3, is divided according to the chronological structure of a week into seven paragraphs. Genesis 1:26–28 describes the creation of humans in a paragraph delimited by 1:24–31, which is devoted to the events of day six. The following considerations may appear to belabor the point unnecessarily, but 1:26–28 is intended to be viewed as the climax and crown of God's creative work.

1. The clauses describing the creation of humans are marked by a notable change in style. To this point the creation has been achieved by a series of divine words always introduced by third-person singular verbs. Surely the first-person plural “let us” catches the attention of the reader and signals something significant. The interpretation of the first-person plural will be discussed later, but whatever the interpretation, the main point is that something special is happening in this section.

2. The paragraph in Genesis 1:24–31 has a different pattern from the other paragraphs. Table 6.1 shows that the paragraphs in this creation narrative follow a standard sequence of (1) announcement, (2) command, (3) action, (4) evaluation or report, and (5) temporal framework, with minor variations. The pattern of events in paragraph six deviates from the norm considerably and thus informs the reader that the topic is important.[11]

Table 6.1 Sequence of Day Six versus the Other Days of Creation

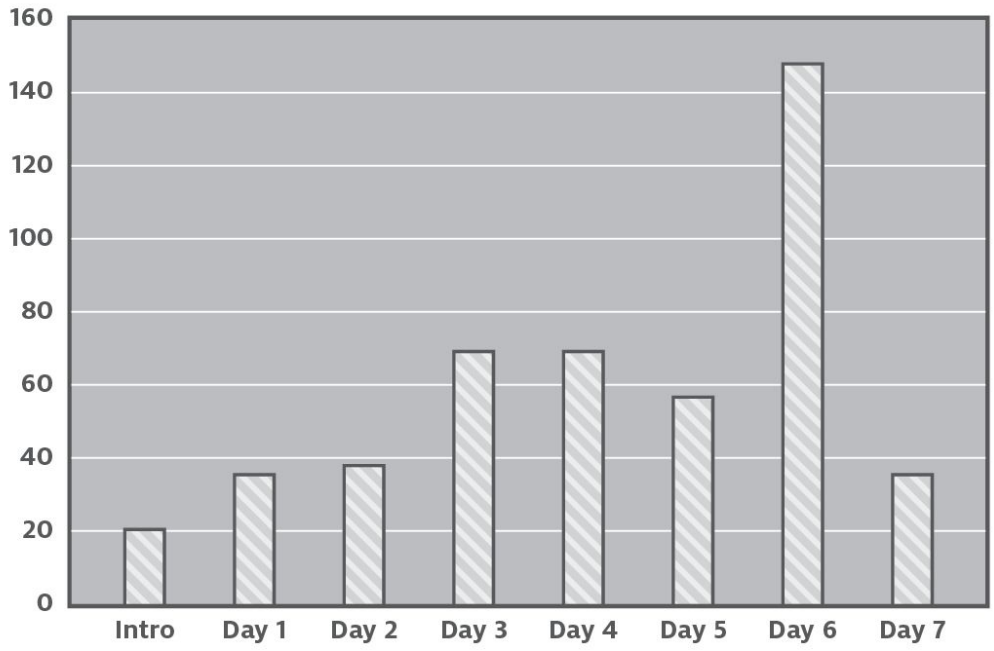
Day One (1:3–5)	**Day Four (1:14–19)**
Announcement Command Report Evaluation Action described Naming Temporal framework	Announcement Command and purpose Report Action and purpose Evaluation Temporal framework
Day Two (1:6–8)	**Day Five (1:20–23)**
Announcement Command Action described Report Naming Temporal framework	Announcement Command Action described Evaluation Blessing Temporal framework
Day Three (1:9–13)	**Day Six (1:24–31)**
Announcement Command Report Naming Evaluation Announcement Command	Announcement Command Report Action described Evaluation Announcement Decision and purpose

Report Action described Evaluation Temporal framework	Action and purpose Blessing and purpose Food provision Report Temporal framework
Day Seven (2:1–3)	
Completion statement Divine rest Blessing of seventh day Consecration of seventh day No temporal framework	

3. In terms of the larger literary structure, the work of creation is accomplished in six days. In such a sequence, day six is clearly the climax of this creation work.

4. Figure 6.1 concisely indicates the number of words per paragraph in the creation narrative. The number of words in paragraph six is far above the norm—another indication of the significance of the creation of humans.[12]

Figure 6.1 Words Describing Each Day of Creation



5. Genesis 2:4–3:24, the so-called second account of creation, does not, in fact, prove that an editor patched together different sources but rather corresponds well to the normal pattern of Hebrew narrative when an author seeks to consider a topic in a resumptive manner. We cannot critique *ancient*, *Eastern* texts using principles of literary analysis based on *modern*, *Western* literature. Instead, the approach in ancient Hebrew literature is to take up a topic and develop it from a particular perspective and then to stop and take up the same theme again from another point of view. The effect of repetition—that is, discussion of the same topic from different points of view—is to present well-rounded ideas, 3-D ideas, so to speak. The first creation story (1:1–2:3) gives a global perspective. The second creation story (2:4–3:24) begins by focusing on the creation of man. Thus, the first focuses on the origin of the universe, the second on humanity. Therefore, 2:4–3:24 is, in fact, devoted to further developing the topics broached in the sixth paragraph of the first account and so adds to the significance of the creation of mankind.

6. The clause marking the temporal framework normally has the pattern "and it was evening and it was morning, a ___th day." Thus, it is striking that, for paragraph six, the definite article is used: "*the* sixth day." The function of the article here has yet to be explained satisfactorily, but it adds to the significance of the creation of humans.[13]

7. The use of *bāra'*, the verb "to create" in Hebrew, is interesting. This verb always and only has God as subject.[14] It occurs seven times in the creation narrative: in 1:1, which some commentators see as the creation of matter *ex nihilo*; in 1:21, at the creation of organic life; in 1:27 (3x), at the creation of human life; and in 2:3–4 (2x), the summary.[15] In between, other synonyms are used. Thus this verb seems to mark important points in the creation work.

8. In 1:26, *'ādām*, a generic term for mankind as both male and female, is created as the image of God. This is another indication of humans as the crown of God's creation.[16]

9. Humans exercise royal rule. This requires some discussion but points to the significance of mankind within creation as a whole.

10. Psalm 8, attributed to David, in verses 5–8 constitutes a word-by-word commentary and meditation on Genesis 1:26–28. The psalmist understands that mankind is at the apex of God's creation, however one understands the disputed verse 5.

In sum, a large number of literary techniques point to the significance of the creation of humans. The interpretation of the creation of man as the divine image will unfold this significance.

The Image of God

Explanations of the divine image during the last two thousand years have been numerous and varied.[17] Since the amount of ink spilled on the subject is enormous, careful exegesis is necessary, as well as humility in interpretation. An extremely brief survey of the different views follows, adapted from the commentary by Gordon Wenham.[18] The present writer, however, is ultimately responsible for the evaluation of each view.[19]

Survey of Views

1. The biblical terms "image" and "likeness" are distinct aspects of man's nature (from Irenaeus, ca. AD 180, onward). The "image" denotes the natural qualities in man (personality, reason, etc.) that make him resemble God, while the "likeness" refers to the supernatural (i.e., ethical) graces that make the redeemed godlike. Lexical analysis of "image" and "likeness" according to the cultural setting of the biblical text shows that this distinction is foreign to Genesis.

2. The divine image refers to the mental and spiritual qualities that man shares with his Creator. The fact that commentators cannot agree in identifying these qualities makes this approach suspect.

3. The image consists of a physical resemblance. In favor of this view, the Hebrew term *ṣelem* does refer to a physical image or statue in a majority of its occurrences. Moreover, in Genesis 5:3, Adam is described as fathering Seth "after his image," which most naturally refers to physical appearance. The Old Testament, however, emphasizes the incorporeality and invisibility of God (Deut. 4:12). Also, if the terminology is related to Egyptian and Mesopotamian thinking, the image of God there refers to the

function of the king and not to his appearance. Furthermore, the Old Testament does not sharply distinguish the material and spiritual realms in the way that we sometimes do. The image of God must characterize the whole man, not simply his mind or spirit on the one hand or his body on the other. Finally, the image of God is what separates man from the animals, and yet the practice of sacrifice must have made the ancient people of Israel well aware of the physiological similarities between humans and animals.

4. The divine image makes man God's representative on earth. Careful exegesis below indicates that the ruling function is a *result* of being made in the divine image and is *not the image itself*.

5. The image is a capacity to relate to God. The divine image means that God can enter into personal relationships with man, speak to him, and make covenants with him. Karl Barth propounded this view, and Claus Westermann further argued that the "image of God" is not so much part of the human constitution as it is a description of the process of creation that made man different. Although this view has much to commend it, in that relationship to God is fundamental to the image of God, nonetheless, passages like Genesis 5:3 and Exodus 25:40 suggest that the phrase "in the image" describes the product of creation rather than the process.

Critique of the Traditional View

The majority of Christians have followed the second view, believing that the image refers to mental and spiritual qualities that humans share with the creator God. Since God is invisible (John 4:24), man resembles God not physically but rather in terms of morality, personality, reason, and spirituality. This interpretation did not originate with the Christian church but can be traced to Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher living from about 30 BC to AD 45 (*On the Creation* §69).

The traditional view is inadequate because it is not the result of grammatical and historical interpretation of the text. Rather, it is based largely on a kind of reasoning from systematic theology. It does not come to grips with the fact that "image" normally refers to a physical statue and cannot be exegetically validated as the author's intended meaning or the

first audience's natural understanding of the text in terms of the ancient Near Eastern cultural and linguistic setting.

Exegesis of Genesis 1:26–28

An attempt to determine the meaning of this text according to the historical setting and linguistic usage of the time in which it was written begins with the literary structure, grammatical and lexical issues, and ancient Near Eastern background.

THE STRUCTURE OF GENESIS 1:24–31. As already noted, the paragraph in the creation narrative devoted to describing events of the sixth day is structured differently from the other paragraphs. The following outline builds upon the work of P. E. Dion as best representing the structure in the text.[20]

The Sixth Day—Genesis 1:24–31

A. Creation of the Animals 1:24–25
   1. Command for creation of animals 1:24a
   2. Confirmation of command 1:24b
   3. Execution of creation of animals 1:25a
   4. Evaluation of execution 1:25b

B. Creation of Mankind 1:26–31
   1. Decision for creation of man 1:26
      a. To make man 1:26a
      b. To give him a certain role 1:26b
   2. Execution of creation of man 1:27–28
      a. Creation of man 1:27
      b. Proclamation of his role 1:28
   3. Food regulations 1:29–30
      a. For man 1:29
      b. For animals 1:30

C. Conclusion 1:31
   1. Evaluation 1:31a
   2. Day notation 1:31b

For the creation of humans, instead of the normal pattern giving a command and indicating a result, there is first a divine decision and then a divine

execution of that decision. Note that the decision has two parts and that the execution of the decision has the same two corresponding parts. This observation leads us to consider two separate grammatical issues before looking at the ancient Near Eastern setting.

KEY GRAMMATICAL ISSUES IN GENESIS 1:26–28. The sequence of verbs in verse 26 is inadequately represented in most modern translations. The first verb in the divine speech is נַעֲשֶׂה. Randall Garr's analysis is both adequate and complete:

> Technically, this form is ambiguous; the imperfect and cohortative of final weak roots are usually not distinguished in the morphology but are expressed by the self-same ending ה ָ-. The interpretation of נעשה, however, is clear enough. Not only does the clause-initial position of the verb suggest the cohortative reading, but a comparison with the jussives that engaged other acts of creation reinforces its desiderative sense.[21]

The first verb, then, is a command form and is correctly rendered "let us make" in all the English versions. The second verb in the sequence is וְיִרְדּוּ. This, too, could be construed as either imperfect or jussive. What is important, however, is that grammarians of Hebrew agree that this particular sequence (cohortative followed by imperfect) marks purpose or result.[22] The correct translation, therefore, is "Let us make man . . . *so that* they may rule . . ." Here many modern versions fail to represent properly the grammar of the Hebrew text. An important exegetical point is at stake: the ruling is not the essence of the divine image but rather a result of being made as the divine image.

Another grammatical issue concerns the clause patterns in verse 27. The verse contains three clauses or sentences: (1) "and God created man in his image"; (2) "in the image of God he created him"; (3) "male and female he created them." The first sentence has a normal clause pattern: verb-subject-object. The conjunction *waw* is used, and the verb is a *waw*-consecutive imperfect—all standard in Hebrew narrative. The remaining two sentences have a different clause pattern: modifier-verb-object. Both are also asyndetic, that is, not connected by the conjunction *waw*; both verbs are

perfects. This is a clear macrosyntactical signal with pragmatic significance: these clauses do not advance the narrative but digress and pause to comment on the first clause in the verse.[23] These two short sentences are grammatically marked as circumstantial information or parenthetical remarks. The author is *digressing from* the narrative in order to stress two particular aspects or features of the creation of man. In other words, the last two clauses are footnotes dealing with the first clause or sentence:

a. human sexuality is binary and entails two distinct genders: male and female
b. humankind resembles God in some way

By pausing to stress these two things, the author prepares us for the two commands given to man in the very next verse:

a. be fruitful (three imperatives in Hebrew)
b. rule over the other creatures (two imperatives in Hebrew)

The actual literary presentation is chiastic in structure: The word *chiasm* comes from the letter in the Greek alphabet known as *chi* (χ), which is shaped like an X. The top half of the letter has a mirror image in the bottom half. If, for example, a literary piece has four distinct units and the first matches the last while the second matches the third, the result is a mirror image, a chiasm. The following diagram illustrates the chiastic structure:

God created mankind in his image
according to his likeness:
a in the image of God he created him
b male and female he created them
==========
b' be fruitful and increase in number
and fill the earth
a' and subdue it
and rule over the fish/birds/animals

Thus, binary sexuality, or duality of gender, is the basis for being fruitful, while the divine image is correlated with the command to rule as God’s

viceroy. These observations from the discourse grammar of the narrative are crucial. They are decisive in showing that the divine image is *not* to be explained by or located in terms of duality of gender in humanity.[24]

The Clause "Let Us Make Man in Our Image, according to Our Likeness"

We are now in a position to explain the meaning of the clause in Genesis 1:26a, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness." The exegetical microscope will be focused on (1) the ancient Near Eastern background to the text, (2) the meaning of the nouns "image" and "likeness," (3) the exact force of the prepositions "in" and "according to," and (4) the referent of the first-person plural pronoun in "let us," in that order.

The Ancient Near Eastern Background

In biblical revelation, God communicates in the culture and language of the people. Yet in employing language people understand, he also fills the terms with new meaning. The key to correct interpretation, therefore, is to *compare* and *contrast* the biblical text and the data from the contemporary cultures. One must notice not only the similarities between the Bible and the ancient Near Eastern background but also the differences, which show the new meaning being revealed by God.

This can be illustrated by examining the tabernacle (Exodus 25–40). If we consider the plan of the tabernacle or the plan of Solomon's temple, there is nothing unusual or unique.[25] Its overall plan was just like any other temple in the ancient Near East. They all had an outer courtyard, an altar of sacrifice, and a central building divided into a "holy place" and a "most holy place." What, then, made the faith of Israel different from the faith of the pagan religions surrounding her? If one were to enter a pagan temple, passing through the courtyard, and through the Holy Place into the Most Holy Place, what would one find there? An image representing one of the forces of nature. But that is not what one finds at the center of Israel's worship. What was in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle? First of all, there was no image or statue there representing God himself, because God

is spirit and cannot be properly represented by man-made images.[26] All there is in the Most Holy Place is just a little box. And what is in that box? The Ten Commandments. Thus, what God is saying to the Israelites is that he cannot be manipulated by magic. If they want the good life, they must conform their lifestyle to his revealed standards of right and wrong. Ethics, not manipulation of the powers that be by magic, guarantees the good life.[27] The meaning is clear when one both compares and contrasts the biblical text with the ancient Near Eastern cultural setting. At the outset, the differences appear to be small and insignificant. Yet in the end, the differences are so radical that only divine revelation can explain the origin of the text.

The Meaning of "Image" and "Likeness" in the Bible and the Ancient Near East

Paul Dion has produced one of the most careful and thorough studies of the ancient Near Eastern background to the image of God.[28] His work can be consulted for the detailed evidence that the following only briefly summarizes. In the ancient Near East we see the flourishing of plastic arts; it was part and parcel of religion. Statues and likenesses of all sorts have been preserved to the present time.

The epithet or descriptive title of the Egyptian king as a "living statue of such and such a god" was common in Egypt from 1630 BC onward and therefore was well known to the Israelites. In Egyptian thinking, the king is the image of god because he is the son of god.[29] The emphasis or stress is not on physical appearance—for example, a male king could be the image of a female goddess. Rather, the behavior of the king reflects the behavior of the god. The image reflects the character traits of the god.[30] The image reflects the essential notions of the god.

Commonly associated with the image is the notion of conquest and power. A clear example is an inscription from the Karnak Temple marking the triumph of Thutmoses III at Karnak, ca. 1460 BC. In the following stanza, the god is speaking in the first person, and the second person refers to the king:

I came to let you tread on Djahi's chiefs,

I spread them under your feet throughout their lands;
I let them see your majesty as lord of light,
so that you shone before them in my likeness.[31]

The god Amen-Re, in giving victory to Thutmoses III, calls the king his son in the prologue of the poem and in this stanza indicates that the extension of the rule of the king entails his shining before his enemies in the likeness of his god.

In the thirteenth century BC, Pharaoh Ramesses II had his image hewn out of rock at the mouth of the Kelb River, on the Mediterranean just north of Beirut. His image—displayed like the presidents at Mount Rushmore—meant that he was the ruler of this area. In the ancient Near East, since the king is the living statue of the god, he represents the god on earth. He makes the power of the god a present reality.

To sum up, the term "the image of god" in the culture and language of the ancient Near East in the fifteenth century BC would have communicated two main ideas: (1) rulership and (2) sonship. The king is the image of god because he has a relationship to the deity as the son of god and a relationship to the world as ruler for the god. These relationships would have been understood as covenantal relationships. We ought to assume that the meaning in the Bible is identical or at least similar, unless the biblical text clearly distinguishes its meaning from the surrounding culture.

Likeness and Image

Careful and exhaustive lexical studies of the Hebrew terms "likeness" (דמות) and "image" (צלם) indicate the possible range of meaning.[32]

"Likeness" (דמות) may refer to a physical entity, such as the model of the altar King Ahaz sent Uriah the priest (2 Kings 16:10b). It may also refer to a likeness that is real yet referentially unspecific or inexact (Isa. 40:18). It can even be nonreferential to express resemblance or relative similarity (Isa. 13:4). Ezekiel 1:26 is instructive since, opposite to Genesis 1:26, which speaks of humanity created in the likeness of God, Ezekiel's vision speaks of God appearing in the likeness of humanity. As Garr notes, either way, God and humanity are morphologically similar.

“Image” (צלם) frequently refers to an object in the real world that can have size, shape, color, material composition, and value. The image erected by King Nebuchadnezzar in the plain of Dura is an example (Dan. 3:1). Yet as Psalm 39:6–7 shows, *ṣelem* can also be abstract and nonconcrete. And as with the word “likeness” (*demût*), “image” can simply be an imprint etched on a wall (Ezek. 23:14b, 15b).

Particularly instructive for Genesis 1:26–28 is the usage of the words “likeness” and “image” in the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription.[33] Inscribed on a large statue of King Hadduyith‘î of Gozan, a city in what is now eastern Syria, is an Akkadian-Aramaic bilingual text from the tenth or ninth century BC. The text is divided thematically into two sections. The first half focuses on the role of the king as a supplicant and worshiper of his god and is headed in the Aramaic text by דמות, the equivalent of the Hebrew דמות. The second half focuses on the majesty and power of the king in his role in relation to his subjects. This is headed in the Aramaic text by the word צלם, the equivalent of the Hebrew צלם.[34] While both terms can and do refer to the statue of the king and are synonyms, each has a different nuance. The term דמות occurs twice and each time nuances the relation of the copy to the original. The term צלם also occurs twice and each time nuances how the copy represents the original to the world.

Akkadian texts containing the cognate for the Hebrew word “image” support the force and meaning of the word in the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription. Three brief examples will suffice to further clarify the use of the term “image”:

> *LAS 125:14b–19 (K 595; from the time of Esarhaddon, 681–668 BC):*
> What the king [my lord], wrote to me: “I heard from the mouth of my father that you are a loyal family, but now I know it from my own experience,” the father of the king, my lord, was the very image of the god Bēl, and the king, my lord, is likewise the very image of Bēl.[35]

The author of the letter is a loyal subject. He proclaims that the king is the image of the god Bel because he is acknowledging the authority and majesty of the king in the king-subject relationship.[36]

LAS 143 o. 14–r. 6 (K 583; from the time of Esarhaddon, 681–668 BC):

> Why, today already for the second day, is the table not brought to the king, my lord? Who (now) stays in the dark much longer than the Sun, the king of the gods, stays in the dark a whole day and night, (and) again two days? The king, the lord of the world, is the very image of the Sun god. He (should) keep in the dark for only half a day![37]

The king is the image of the god Shamash and should be treated as representing his authority and power.

SAA 8:333 (82-5-22,63; from the period 697–665 BC):

> The wisest, merciful Bel, the warrior Marduk, became angry at night, but relented in the morning. You, O king of the world, are an image of Marduk; when you were angry with your servants, we suffered the anger of the king our lord; and we saw the reconciliation of the king.[38]

The king represents the majesty, authority, and power of god to his subjects.

Evidence from the Nebuchadnezzar Inscription of Brisa also offers an important parallel for the biblical texts. Nebuchadnezzar says,

> I let the people in the Lebanon lie in safe pastures; I did not allow an intimidator (against them). So that nobody will oppress them, I installed an eternal image of myself as king to protect (them).[39]

We must now *compare and contrast* the data in Genesis 1:26–28 with these ancient Near Eastern data.

Similarities

As Garr notes, the grammar of the first sentence in Genesis 1:26a is unusual.[40] Following a hortatory predicate (נעשה) and an undetermined direct object (אדם) are two distinct prepositional phrases that are not obligatory either grammatically or semantically. The exact force of each preposition will be discussed shortly. This much is clear: the nonobligatory phrases specify a divine-human relation in the creation of mankind, and the differential marking suggests that each phrase has distinct meaning.

We have seen the normal meanings of “image” and “likeness” in the cultural and linguistic setting of the Old Testament and the ancient Near East. In that light, “likeness” specifies a relationship between God and humans such that *’ādām* can be described as the son of God, and “image” refers to a relationship between God and humans such that *’ādām* can be described as a servant-king. Although both terms specify the divine-human relationship, the first focuses on the human in relation to God, and the second focuses on the human in relation to the world. These relationships would be characterized by faithfulness and loyal love, obedience and trust —exactly the character of relationships specified by covenants after the fall. In this sense the divine image entails a covenant relationship between God and humans on the one hand, and between humans and the world on the other. In describing a divine-human relationship, the terms in Genesis 1:26–28 correspond precisely to the usage of the same words in the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription.[41]

Confirmation of this interpretation of “likeness” and “image” comes from both the context of Genesis 1 and the interpretation of Genesis 1 found later in the Old Testament.

First, the term “likeness” indicates that *’ādām* has a special relationship to God like that of father and son. This is clearly implied by Genesis 5:1–3:

> 1. This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.
>
> 2. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created.
>
> 3. When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth (RSV).

The comment of Stephen Dempster is both adequate and succinct:

> By juxtaposing the divine creation of Adam in the image of God and the subsequent human creation of Seth in the image of Adam, the transmission of the image of God through this genealogical line is implied, as well as the link between sonship and the image of God. As

> Seth is a son of Adam, so Adam is a son of God. Language is being stretched here as a literal son of God is certainly not in view, but nevertheless the writer is using an analogy to make a point.[42]

This idea can be further supported from later texts: Luke 3:38 interprets the "likeness of God" in Genesis to indicate that Adam is the son of God. Israel inherits the role of Adam and Eve and is specifically called the son of God (Ex. 4:22, 23). The song at the sea pictures Israel as a new Adam entering the Promised Land as a new Eden (Ex. 15:17). Later, the divine sonship devolves particularly on the king in the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:14–15): what was true of the nation will now be fulfilled specifically and solely by her king. Recently, a study done by Gavin Ortlund independently of our work demonstrates that Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 strongly support the interpretation of Genesis 1:26–28 proposed here.[43]

Second, the term "image" indicates that *'ādām* has a special position and status as king under God. Humans rule *as a result of* this royal status. The term "to rule" (*rādâ* in Gen. 1:26, 28) is particularly true of kings, as Psalm 72:8 illustrates. Also, the term "to subdue" (*kābaš*) especially speaks of the work of a king (e.g., 2 Sam. 8:11).

Further confirmation comes from Psalm 8, in which verses 5–8 constitute a word-by-word commentary and meditation on Genesis 1:26–28. Psalm 8:5, which says, "You have made him a little less than the gods; you have crowned him with glory and honor," is a commentary on Genesis 1:26a, "Let us make mankind in our image and according to our likeness."[44] Psalm 8:6–8 then details and unfolds the rule of mankind specified in Genesis 1:26b. It is clear and obvious that the psalm writer has the text of Genesis 1:26 before his mind. Note in particular that the terms in Hebrew for "crowned" (עטר), "glory" (כבוד), and "honor" (הדר) are all royal terms. This shows that the psalm writer understood "image" to speak of royal status. Furthermore, the Hebrew word for "rule" (משל) used in Psalm 8:6 is a broad term meaning "have dominion, reign, rule," but it generally speaks of a king (examples of royal uses include 2 Sam. 23:3; Ps. 103:19; Prov. 29:26a; Isa. 14:5; 19:4; Mic. 5:1). The phrase "place under his feet" (שׁית תחת רגליו) is an image associated with royalty. This is clear from 1 Kings

5:17 (5:3 EV), Egyptian texts like the poem of Thutmoses III cited above, Phoenician inscriptions (Karatepe A.i.16), and Assyrian royal texts.[45]

In verses 7–8 of Psalm 8, humans rule over the animals. Paul Dion appropriately suggests that the word "all" in Psalm 8:6b is restricted to the earthly sphere in the light of Genesis 1:14–19, 26–28, where man rules only the earthly sphere.[46]

Differences

Correct interpretation requires one to *contrast* as well as compare the biblical text with the contemporary documents. In Egypt, only the king is the image of god.[47] In the Bible, all humans constitute the image of God. The covenant relationship between God and man is not restricted to an elite sector within human society.

Precise Meaning of the Prepositions "in" (bĕ) and "as/according to" (kĕ)

As already noted, the grammar of the first sentence in Genesis 1:26a is unusual. Two distinct prepositional phrases that are not obligatory either grammatically or semantically follow the predicate (*naʿaśeh*) and direct object (*ʾādām*): "in our image, according to our likeness." The preposition "in" corresponds to the preposition *bĕ* in Hebrew, while "as" or "according to" corresponds to Hebrew *kĕ*. What is the exact semantic value of each preposition?

The phrase "made in his image" has been construed in two different ways. First, the "in" has been interpreted to indicate the norm or standard. This is normal usage of the preposition "in" following the verb "to make." The statement that man is created "in" the image of God would then mean that man conforms to a representation of God.[48] As Gordon Wenham explains, "Man is made '*in* the divine image,' just as the tabernacle was made '*in* the divine pattern.' This suggests that man is a copy of something that had the divine image, not necessarily a copy of God himself."[49] The traditional view, however, does not do full justice to the meaning of the words "image" and "likeness," nor does the explanation of Wenham account for the fact that the prepositions *seem* somewhat interchangeable. The phrase is found in six instances:

Genesis 1:26a *in* our image, *according to* our likeness
Genesis 1:27aα *in* his image
Genesis 1:27aβ *in* the image of God
Genesis 5:1b *in* the likeness of God
Genesis 5:3a *in* his likeness, *according to* his image
Genesis 9:6b *in* his image

It is possible to use "in" with "likeness" as well as "image," and in Genesis 5:3a, the prepositions are exactly the reverse of what we find in Genesis 1:26a. Indeed, in the example of the tabernacle used by Wenham, the expression "made *in* the pattern" in Exodus 25:40 is "made *according to* the pattern" in Exodus 25:9. James Barr has shrewdly observed "that *bĕ*, commonly 'in' *when combined with nouns of the semantic function 'likeness,'* is thereby brought to have almost the same effect as the preposition *kĕ* 'like, as.' It is the semantics of the noun, not those of the preposition alone, which are here decisive."[50] Thus, when the verb "make" is followed by "in" (*bĕ*), *because it is used with nouns indicating likeness*, the "in" likewise receives by this fact a value almost identical to "as" (*kĕ*).[51] This makes the expression in Genesis 1:26a differ somewhat from that in Exodus 25:9, where the object of the preposition is "pattern" (*tabnît*).

It is possible, then, that the preposition "in" could be translated "as" in Genesis 1:26a. The usage shows that *bĕ* (= "in") and *kĕ* (= "as") have roughly the same value in these texts. God indeed created man *as* the divine image. Humans do not conform to a representation of God; they are the divine image. This interpretation is supported by the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 11:7, Paul says that man is the image of God. Why, then, is the statement in Genesis not more forthright in explicitly saying that man *is* the divine image? Why is this notion expressed in a slightly more indirect manner? I suggest that a more indirect expression is used in the cultural and linguistic setting of the ancient Near East to prevent man from being considered an idol and being worshiped as such.

In spite of the fact that the two prepositions are close in meaning, we must not assume that the meaning is identical. This has been discussed extensively in a substantial monograph on the divine image by Randall Garr. Garr is correct to affirm that "the differential marking of each

nonobligatory phrase suggests that each phrase has distinct meaning, at least in relation to one [an]other."[52] His careful and thorough linguistic analysis reveals that the preposition *bĕ* (= "in") emphasizes proximity while the preposition *kĕ* (= "as" or "according to") emphasizes something similar yet distinct and separate. Garr's linguistic analysis is also supported by the exhaustive research of Ernst Jenni, who has produced an entire monograph on each of the three basic prepositions in Hebrew. One volume analyzes all 15,570 instances of the preposition *bĕ*; a second, all 3,000 instances of *kĕ*; and a third, all 20,000 instances of the preposition *lĕ* ("to" or "for") in the Hebrew Bible. Jenni concludes that, in fundamental meaning, *kĕ* stands between the opposition pair *bĕ* (marking an equating relation) and *lĕ* (marking a nonequating relation) as an expression of partial equation (and so also partial nonequation) of the semantic characteristics of two quantifications.[53] Thus, again, *bĕ* indicates something locative and proximate while *kĕ* indicates something similar but distal and separate.

We have already seen that, although the words "image" and "likeness" share similar meanings, each has a different emphasis. In the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription, the word "likeness" focuses on the king as a suppliant and worshiper of his god and communicates sonship. The word "image" focuses on the majesty and power of the king in relation to his subjects. These ancient Near Eastern data confirm and correspond to the use in the biblical text. The word "likeness" in Genesis is closely associated with the creation of the human race, human genealogy, and sonship. It occurs in Genesis 1:26 in the creation of humans and again in 5:1, when this is recapitulated under the heading "Birth History of Humankind."[54] The third use is in 5:3 with the generation of Seth. The word "image" is consistently used of man representing God in terms of royal rule.

Putting the nouns and prepositions together, humans closely represent God in image—that is, they represent his rule in the world. Humans are also similar to God in performing the action of creating human life, *but not in the same way*. Thus *bĕ* emphasizes a way in which humans are closely like God, *kĕ* a way in which humans are similar but distinct. This interpretation also explains the reversal of the prepositions in Genesis 5:3. Seth shares precisely in the matter of generation and sonship ("in his likeness") but is

only similar and not identical in the representation of his father's image ("according to his image").

Summary

Before considering the difficult first-person plural "let us," it may be useful to crystallize, consolidate, and summarize the exegetical results to this point. Humans have been given an absolutely unique place in creation. Ten times prior to Genesis 1:26, we are told that each of the animals and plants are made "according to their kind." But humans are not made according to their kind. They are created in some way according to God. This has huge significance! What does it mean?

As we have seen, Genesis 1:26 defines a divine-human relationship with two dimensions, one vertical and one horizontal. First, it defines human ontology in terms of a covenant relationship between God and humans, and second, it defines a covenant relationship between humans and the earth. The relationship between humans and God is best captured by the term *(obedient) sonship*. The relationship between humans and the creation may be expressed by the terms *kingship* and *servanthood*, or better, *servant kingship*.

This interpretation best honors the normal meaning of *ṣelem* ("image") according to the cultural and linguistic setting. Hans Walter Wolff expresses the matter well:

> In the ancient East the setting up of the king's statue was the equivalent to the proclamation of his domination over the sphere in which the statue was erected (cf. Dan. 3.1, 5f.). When in the thirteenth century BC the Pharaoh Ramesses II had his image hewn out of rock at the mouth of the *nahr el-kelb*, on the Mediterranean north of Beirut, the image meant that he was the ruler of this area. Accordingly, man is set in the midst of creation as God's statue. He is evidence that God is the Lord of creation; but as God's steward he also exerts his rule, fulfilling his task not in arbitrary despotism but as a responsible agent. His rule and his duty to rule are not autonomous; they are copies.[55]

Thus, the image is physical and yet goes far beyond being merely physical. This is an interpretation that allows for the normal physical aspect of

“image” but results in the emphasis that the character of humans in ruling the world is what represents God.

It is important to note that this definition of the divine image is not only a functional but also an *ontological* and structural one. As Wenham points out, the phrase “in the image” describes the product rather than the process of creation, as suggested by the usage in Genesis 5:3 and Exodus 25:40.[56] The grammar reveals that man rules as a result of being made as the divine image; ruling is not the essence of the image itself. Thus, those who define the image merely in functional terms are in error both linguistically and theologically.[57]

Man *is* the divine image. As servant-king and son of God, mankind will mediate God’s rule to the creation in the context of a covenant relationship with God on the one hand and with the earth on the other. Hence, the concept of the kingdom of God is found on the first page of Scripture. Indeed, the theme is kingdom through covenant. God establishes his rule by means of covenant relationship. No wonder the Mosaic covenant, which seeks to implement this relationship in Abraham’s family, can be summarized as providing divine direction concerning (1) how to have a right relationship with God, (2) how to treat each other in genuinely human ways, and (3) how to be good stewards of the earth’s resources.

Theologians have debated the extent to which the divine image was marred or even lost by the fall into sin (Genesis 3). Normally it is argued that the divine image was marred but not lost through the fall (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9). The interpretation given here of the divine image as God establishing his rule in the world through covenant clarifies the matter. The human rebellion described in Genesis 3 violated the love, loyalty, obedience, and trust at the heart of the covenant. God sought to confirm and reestablish this relationship in the covenant with Noah; hence the expression *hēqîm bĕrît*. The story of the drunkenness of Noah (Gen. 9:20–27) shows once more the inability of the human partner in the covenant relationship. God makes a new start with Abraham and his family in the covenant made with him. The Abrahamic covenant is implemented in the Iron Age, with Israel as Abraham’s family, through the Mosaic covenant. Israel—or more particularly, Israel’s king, as the Davidic covenant later

makes plain—will be the instrument for renewing the covenant relationship and establishing the instruction and will (i.e., *tôrâ*) of Yahweh in the hearts and lives of his people and, through them, in the nations. In a long history of apparent failure, Jesus of Nazareth comes as Israel's King to renew the relationship by inaugurating a new covenant and bringing about the rule of God in the lives of those who are part of his new creation. Thus, Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom is nothing less than the message we already find in Genesis 1:26–27.

When we look at the New Testament and the references there to the renewal of the divine image brought about by the work of Jesus Christ, terms are used that emphasize man's *relation* to God. This is clear in the parallel texts in Ephesians and Colossians:

> *Ephesians 4:24*
> . . . and put on the new humanity created according to God in righteousness and holiness, which derive from the truth.

> *Colossians 3:10*
> . . . and have put on the new humanity, which is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created it.

God has planned a new creation—a new heavens and a new earth. Unlike the first creation, where he first made the place and afterward the people to live there, in the new creation he is first making the people and afterward the place where they will live. The new creation begins in the midst of the old: when God raised Jesus from the dead, he was the first man in the new creation. And anyone who is joined to Jesus Christ by faith *is* new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; frequently translated incorrectly as "is a new creation"). This happens first in the inner person and later, at the resurrection, in the outer person. The passages in Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10 call believers to adopt in daily lifestyle all that is entailed in the new creation life within them. The phrase "according to God" in Ephesians 4:24 may be ambiguous by itself but is clarified by the parallel in Colossians 3:10 and means that the new creation is, like the old, according to the image and likeness of God. The words that Paul uses in connection with this are "righteousness"

and “holiness” in Ephesians 4 and “knowledge” in Colossians 3.[58] This has been misconstrued in studies on the divine image in the past. Paul mentions holiness, knowledge, and righteousness, not because one can identify ethical or mental or spiritual qualities as *elements* of the divine image but because these terms are *covenantal* and describe a covenant relationship. Thus, the New Testament supports the explanation of the divine image in Genesis 1:26 advanced here. The divine image indicates man’s relationship and spiritual fellowship with God.[59]

Some readers of the first edition of *Kingdom through Covenant* are still not convinced because the word “covenant” does not appear in Genesis 1–3. We are claiming that “image” and “likeness” describe covenant relationships; they are the covenantal words in this context. Those who reject a covenant in Genesis 1–3 must show that these words would not have been understood in a covenantal sense by the first readers of the text in the ancient Near East.

The Meaning of the First-Person Plural

The interpretation of the first-person plural “let us make” is a difficult problem. The commentary by Kenneth A. Mathews provides an excellent summary of the various views and the impasse in scholarship over this issue:

> Among commentators the plural reference is variously understood: (1) a remnant of polytheistic myth; (2) God’s address to creation, “heavens and earth”; (3) a plural indicating divine honor and majesty; (4) self-deliberation; (5) divine address to a heavenly court of angels; and (6) divine dialogue within the Godhead. It is unlikely when we consider the elevated theology of 1:1–2:3, that any polytheistic element would be tolerated by the author; therefore, the first option can be ruled out. The second option is flatly contradicted by v. 27, where God alone is identified as the Creator. The plural as used to show special reverence (honorific plural) is flawed since the point of the verse is the unique correspondence between God and man, not the majesty of God. The fourth viewpoint considers “Let us make” a plural of self-deliberation, depicting God anthropomorphically as someone in

> contemplation. This is supported by the change to the singular ("*his* own image") in v. 27 which indicates that the figure of "deliberation" is completed. In ancient myths divine deliberation prefaces the creation of humans. Self-deliberation is attested in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps 42:5, 11; 43:5), but there is no attestation that the plural form is used in this way.[60]

Mathews finds the evidence from the Old Testament and from ancient Near Eastern parallels for the view that God is addressing a heavenly court of angels to be impressive but rejects this view on theological grounds: how can humans be said to be created in the image of angels? He then develops the interpretation that it refers to divine dialogue within the Godhead, although he admits that this can be entertained only as a possible "canonical" reading of the text. This admission, in fact, shows how unlikely his final proposal is to be right. The Bible is a divine-human book. A reference to the Trinity may possibly have been intended by the divine author, but this cannot be discovered until one comes to the New Testament. D. J. A. Clines argues that the plural refers to a dialogue between God and "the spirit of God" mentioned in 1:2,[61] but Bruce Waltke shows that this construes "spirit of God" in a New Testament sense.[62] It is virtually impossible that such a meaning was intended by the human author of Genesis 1 or even understood by the original audience. Interpretation that rides roughshod over the human authorship and audience in the text in this way is highly suspect. A canonical reading of the text is imperative, but this appears more along the lines of special pleading.

Is there a way out of this impasse? Evidence for the view that God is addressing his heavenly court is impressive. Some readers may be unfamiliar with this approach. Texts from ancient Canaan and Mesopotamia depict a pantheon in which the high or supreme god operates in an assembly or community of gods. Yet one need not look to the culture contemporary to the Old Testament since evidence abounds within the Old Testament itself. Psalm 82:1 is a case in point:

> God presides in the divine assembly;
> He gives judgment in the midst of the gods.

We also glimpse the divine assembly in Job 1–2; 1 Kings 22; Isaiah 6; and Jeremiah 23:18. They are variously referred to as “messengers”/“angels” (מלאכים), “gods” (אלהים), or “divinities” (בני האלהים = “sons of the gods,” i.e., those of the class of gods or divinities). The angels or gods in the Old Testament are subordinate and subservient to God. They bow down to him (Ps. 29:2), obey him (Ps. 103:20–21), praise him (Ps. 148:2–5), and minister to and serve him (1 Kings 22:19).[63]

John Walton has shown that the first commandment, when interpreted in the context of the ancient Near Eastern setting, is directed against falsely construing these “gods” as sharing power with Yahweh or being worthy of worship in any sense. Although the command “You shall have no other gods before me” is normally understood in terms of priorities, that interpretation is contrary to the linguistic data, where every occurrence of the preposition “before” plus a personal object in the Hebrew Bible is spatial. Walton argues that the correct interpretation entails a reference to the divine assembly. His argument must be cited in full to avoid misunderstanding:[64]

> In the light of even deeper probing of the practices and beliefs that were current in the ancient Near East, Werner Schmidt has proposed a couple of other alternatives. He begins by suggesting that the first commandment prohibited the setting up of the images of other deities in the temple.[65] However, this does not follow the common logic of ancient Near Eastern practices in which temples were typically made to honor a single deity along with his consort.[66] Schmidt advocates another approach that focuses on God’s heavenly rather than His earthly presence. That is, when the first commandment prohibits other gods in the presence of Yahweh, it is ruling out the concept that He operates within a pantheon, a divine assembly, or with a consort. J. Bottéro compares this system to that of a king at the head of the state with his family and functionaries around him operating in a structured hierarchy.[67]
>
> Having this image as background suggests that the Israelites were not to imagine any other gods in the presence of Yahweh. Scholars could have arrived at this meaning by simple lexical study, but without

the benefit of the ancient Near Eastern material, the results of the lexical study made no sense to interpreters. Consequently, they devised alternative explanations, even though when the prepositional combination that occurs in the Hebrew text takes a personal object the meaning is consistently spatial. Using comparative cultural information, we have recovered a neglected sense of the text that was there all the time.

In view of the information provided from outside the Bible, this spatial sense gains credibility. In the ancient Near East the gods operated within pantheons and decisions were made in the divine assembly. Furthermore, the principal deities typically had consorts. For the gods life was a community experience. The destinies of the gods were decreed in assembly, as were the destinies of kings, cities, temples and people. The business of the gods was carried out in the presence of other gods. Lowell Handy helpfully summarizes this system as a hierarchy of authoritative deities and active deities.

> The highest authority in the pantheon was responsible for ordering and maintaining earth and cosmos but was not actively engaged in the actual work necessary to maintain the universe. The next lower level of deities performed this function. Serving under the authority of those who actually owned the universe, the active gods were expected to perform in a way that would enable the cosmos to operate smoothly. Each of the gods at this level of the pantheon had a specific sphere of authority over which to exert his or her control. Ideally, all the gods were to perform their duties in a way that would keep the universe functioning perfectly in the manner desired by the highest authority. Yet the gods, like human beings, are portrayed as having weaknesses and rivalries that kept the cosmos from operating smoothly.[68]

Accordingly, by a comparative interpretation of the first commandment the Israelites were not to construe Yahweh as operating within a community of gods. Nor were they to imagine Him functioning as the head of a pantheon surrounded by a divine assembly, or having a consort. In short, He works alone. The concept of a pantheon/divine assembly assumed a distribution of power among

> many divine beings. The first commandment declared simply and unequivocally that Yahweh's authority was absolute. Divine power was not distributed among other deities or limited by the will of the assembly.
>
> The point of the prohibition of the worship of any other gods "besides" Yahweh was to ensure that Israel's perception of divinity was to be distinct from the peoples around them. This text is readily misunderstood if the interpreter is not aware of the notions being rejected. According to this revised interpretation, the purpose of the first commandment was not simply to promote monolatry; it served the monotheistic agenda another way. Although this text does not explicitly deny the existence of other gods, it does remove them from the presence of Yahweh. If Yahweh does not share power, authority, or jurisdiction with them, they are not gods in any meaningful sense of the word.[69] Thus, the first commandment does not insist on the non-existence of other gods; only that they are powerless. In so doing it disenfranchises them, not merely by declaring that they should not be worshiped; it leaves them with no status worthy of worship.[70]

The approach in the Old Testament to the divine assembly is thus twofold. On the one hand, it acknowledges the existence of beings known as angels or gods who serve God in his presence. On the other hand, it rejects the notion prevalent in the societies around Israel that these gods share authority or power or status worthy of worship with Yahweh.

Evidence that the phrase "let us" refers to the divine assembly is stronger than even Mathews allows as a result of the work of Randall Garr. Garr notes that Genesis 1:26–27 follows the formula or pattern for clauses introduced by *hābâ*. In form, *hābâ* is an extended imperative (*qal* stem, masculine singular) from the root *yāhab*, "to give." There are two distinct uses of this verb: literal and nonliteral. In the literal use, the verb actually means "to give." In the nonliteral use, the verb functions as a manipulative and suasive particle prefixed asyndetically to commands exactly like "c'mon" in English: "C'mon, let's play together." Unlike לְכָה and קוּמָה, however, the imperative *hābâ* is always connected without a conjunction and need not agree in number and person with the command to which it is

prefixed. What is significant is that all clauses beginning with *hābâ* have a fixed pattern as follows:

1. It begins with a directive or assertive utterance (represented by a cohortative or imperfect, respectively),
2. which proposes an activity (event)
3. jointly and cooperatively, between the speaker and a referentially distinct addressee;
4. the speaker's proposal receives the tacit consent of the addressee
5. and is executed by an agent, whether unidentified or identified and salient (e.g., addressee, leader).

This pattern can be observed in all instances: Genesis 11:3, 4, 7; 38:16; and Exodus 1:10. What is noteworthy is the fact that Genesis 1:26–27 has exactly this formulaic pattern, albeit without the introductory particle *hābâ*. Garr explains the absence of the particle *hābâ* in Genesis 1:26 as dialect specific to a particular source, but this approach is unnecessary. During his exhaustive analysis, he also observes that the particle *hābâ* is always used to introduce situations spelling trouble, and there is no sign of trouble in Genesis 1:26. This is a compelling explanation for the absence of the particle *hābâ*. Thus, the formulaic pattern of Genesis 1:26–27 provides a strong argument that God is addressing the heavenly court.

It remains to show what this statement could possibly mean in context. A proposal is at hand from the discussion of the ancient Near Eastern setting described by John Walton. The ancients believed that the ruling of the world was a community effort on the part of the gods. I propose that Genesis 1:26–27 be understood as a polemic to subvert such an idea. God announces to the heavenly court his decision to share rule with humanity. This entails both a negative and positive result. On the positive side, it elevates humanity to a status almost equal to the angels or "gods." Like the angels, humans will in obedience and subservience to Yahweh effect the rule of God in the world. This is exactly the point being made in Psalm 8:5: "You have made him a little less than the gods." There is also, however, a negative side. This decision in effect disenfranchises the gods according to ancient Near Eastern thinking. Yahweh does not share rule with them in the

sense understood in ancient Canaan.[71] This is another way of saying, “You shall have no other gods before me,” and it powerfully makes the point of monotheism.

Clines’s objection to this view that “the *elohim* would be said to have shared in man’s creation” does not give adequate attention to the details of the text.[72] As Garr notes, citing Gemser, “In the plural of vs. 26 a plurality of heavenly beings may be understood, but there is not a hint of diversity of will or purpose. God’s divine court agrees to his proposal.”[73] Garr also points out the contrast between proposal and execution in the text. In the proposal, God involves his heavenly court. Yet in the execution, the sole use of third-person verbs and the significant shift from עשה to ברא show that the execution is absolutely and exclusively reserved for God.[74] The creation of all, including the creation of humans, is solely the work of God.

Some, no doubt, may not be persuaded by the above argument. It is not necessary for the exegesis given of Genesis 1:26–27, but it is in harmony with it because it fits the interpretation of the divine image as expressing the theme of kingdom through covenant. God has communicated to the divine assembly that his rule in the world will be effected largely through humans, not through “gods” or “angels.” This result is completely contrary to the culture of that time.

The Goal of the Covenant: Rest

Day six is the climax of the creation week but not the consummation. The conclusion is day seven. Thus, the account of creation does not conclude with man and his mandate, for humankind is not the consummation of all things, even though he is the agent through whom the aims of creation will be realized. Dumbrell aptly says,

> The symmetry of the eight creative acts spread over the preceding six days, and set in what seems to be an inner parallelism and progression between days one to three and four to six, receives its real significance from the addition of the seventh day. By the divine rest on the seventh day the goal of creation is indicated, a goal which will be maintained notwithstanding sustained human attempts to vitiate it. Not only does the seventh day rest note the goal to which creation points, but it is the

> call to man to begin history holding firmly to the view that the "goal of creation, and at the same time the beginning of all that follows, is the event of God's Sabbath freedom, Sabbath rest and Sabbath joy, in which man, too, has been summoned to participate."[75]

Genesis 1:26–27 in the Context of Genesis 2:8–17

The interpretation advanced here for the creation of humans as the divine image and according to the divine likeness is corroborated by Genesis 2:8–17 and developed further there. Indeed, Genesis 2:4 begins an explanation and exposition of Genesis 1:26–28 in which the creation of man as a species is related and royal rule over the world is conferred upon man.[76] Chapter 2, in effect, tells us how this royal rule that is given to humankind within the covenant structure is to operate. The writer indicates that man was created outside Eden and then placed within the garden. The garden is presented as a center of blessing in the world. In it arose the world river that divided outside the garden into four systems. The garden also functions as a divine sanctuary, the point where the divine presence was experienced and enjoyed in a close and immediate way. Gordon Wenham, followed by William Dumbrell, has described the garden in Eden as a sanctuary and Adam as a priest worshiping there.[77] This may be briefly summarized and related to the divine image.

The Garden as Separate Space

The Hebrew word for garden (*gan*) comes from a root meaning to "enclose," "fence," or "protect." The garden envisaged in Genesis 2:8–17 is an enclosed or protected space. In the Old Testament, walls surrounded both royal gardens (2 Kings 25:4; Neh. 3:15; Jer. 39:4; 52:7) and vineyards (Prov. 24:30–31; Isa. 5:5). The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, employed a loanword from Persian (παράδεισος) in Genesis 2 that means a pleasure garden surrounded by an earthen or stone wall. In our culture and society, we normally think of *gardening* as a lowly task, a job or vocation for a blue-collar worker, something lower on the ladder of success. The culture of the ancient Near East was similar: in addition to royal gardens, temples had gardens owned and worked by entrepreneurs, and

people had private gardens. Gardeners could be considered some of the least valuable members of society. For example, in the substitute king ritual that took place during certain eclipses when Jupiter was not present, the king ritually stepped down from the throne and installed a substitute. After the allotted time, the substitute was killed. Substitutes were drawn from the expendable peoples in society: prisoners of war, criminals condemned to death, political enemies of the king, the mentally deficient, and gardeners.[78] Notwithstanding all this, *kings* in Mesopotamia created and kept extravagant gardens. In fact, "gardener" was a descriptive title or epithet for monarchs in Mesopotamia.[79] This use has a similarity to Louis XIV's gardens in Versailles—it showed that he was able to control nature and form entire trees into topiaries. Thus gardening was a royal vocation. The role of Adam as gardener further portrays him as a *royal figure*.

The role of Adam as gardener comes up much later in Scripture. After the crucifixion of Jesus, on that first Easter Sunday, the disciples (Peter and John) ran to the tomb. They found it empty and returned to their homes:

> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. . . . She turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn't know that it was Jesus. . . . *Supposing him to be the gardener*, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him somewhere, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). (John 20:11–16)

As N. T. Wright notes, "It wasn't, after all, such a silly mistake for Mary to think that Jesus, the true Adam, *was the gardener*."[80]

The Garden as Sacred Space / Sanctuary

Creation accounts in the ancient Near East commonly connected creation and temple building. For example, the temple Esagila was built for Marduk in the creation myth *Enuma Elish*. Genesis 2:8–17 portrays the first man as a kind of priest in a garden sanctuary. In terms of literary structure, 2:8a describes the creation of the garden and 2:8b the placing of the man there. In what follows, 2:9–15 elaborates on 2:8a and 2:16–17 elaborates on 2:8b.

Parallels between the description of the garden in Eden and descriptions of sanctuaries elsewhere in the Old Testament and ancient Near East reveal that the garden is being portrayed as a sanctuary.[81] Some of the evidence is summarized as follows:

1. The garden in Eden is characterized by the presence of God. There God comes to meet man at the cool of the day. The verb *hālak* in the *hithpael* stem ("to walk to and fro," Gen. 3:8) is the same term employed to describe the divine presence in the later tent sanctuaries (Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:15 [23:14 EV]; 2 Sam. 7:6–7).

2. When humans were cast out of the garden in Eden, *kĕrûbîm* ("cherubim," i.e., guardian creatures) were stationed east of the garden to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). This clearly indicates that the entrance to the garden was in the east.[82] Like the garden in Eden, the entrances to the later tabernacle and temple were also in the east and were guarded by *kĕrûbîm* (Ex. 25:18–22; 26:31; 1 Kings 6:23–28, 29). Two guarded the inner sanctuary of Solomon's temple and two more the mercy seat of the ark in the inner sanctuary. Pictures of *kĕrûbîm* decorated the curtains of the tabernacle and the walls of the temple (Ex. 26:31; 1 Kings 6:29).

3. In the center of the garden in Eden is the tree of life. Similarly, in the center of the tabernacle and temple is the menorah (i.e., the branching lampstand), which, as Carol Meyers has shown, is a stylized tree of life.[83] The idea that fullness of life can be found in the sanctuary is basic to the instructions for the sacrifices in the Torah and is a recurrent theme in the Psalms.

4. The responsibility and task given to Adam in the garden is *lĕʿobdāh ûlĕšomrāh* ("to serve/work it and to keep it"). The only other passages in the Torah where the same two verbs occur together are Numbers 3:7–8; 8:26; and 18:5–6, which describe the duties of the Levites in guarding and ministering in the sanctuary.[84] These words are also commonly used in the Old Testament for worship. Thus Adam is portrayed as a kind of Levite who fulfills his role or task by maintaining the priority of worship.

5. According to Genesis 2:10, "A river flows out of Eden to water the garden." This river brings fertility and life to the entire world, as we see in

2:11–14. Similarly, in Psalm 46:5 (46:4 EV), we read of “a river whose streams make glad the city of God,” and Ezekiel 47 describes a great river flowing out of the temple in the new Jerusalem to sweeten the Dead Sea. Such a source of fertility and life is an indication that the divine presence is there. One of these rivers was called the Gihon, which was also the name for the spring under the Jerusalem temple (1 Kings 1:33, 38, 45).

6. The river giving life to the garden divides into four as it issues from Eden. Since water flows downhill, this fact clearly indicates that Eden was an elevated place.[85] In the ancient Near East, temples were situated on mountains because that is where the heavens meet the earth. In Ezekiel 28:13–14, Eden is also described as a mountain sanctuary. Interestingly, some passages in the Old Testament portray Canaan, the Promised Land given to Israel, as a new Eden. These texts speak of the “new Eden” as a mountain sanctuary, the dwelling place of God (Ex. 15:17; Ps. 78:54). After divine judgment brings devastation to the land of Israel, God’s plan of renewal involves restoring the desert so that it is like Eden (Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 36:35). The future new Jerusalem/Zion is likewise a mountain sanctuary (Isa. 2:2–4; 4:5; 11:9; 25:6–8; 56:7; 57:13; 65:11, 25).

7. The garden is the place of divine decrees. After placing the man whom he had formed in the garden (Gen. 2:8, 15), God gave him commands there. The Lord daily met the man there, and as Judge and King he called him to account for his sin in one of these daily meetings. Similarly, the purpose of the tabernacle (and later Solomon’s temple) is to be the place from which God rules as King: “Then make for me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8). The ark in the center of the inner room of the sanctuary is a kind of footstool of God’s throne: “The LORD sits enthroned above the cherubim” (1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2 = 1 Chron. 13:6; 2 Kings 19:15; Ps. 99:1).

8. The tree of knowledge in the garden in Eden was recognized as “pleasant to the sight, good for food, and to be desired to make one wise” (Gen. 3:6). These characteristics are echoed by Psalm 19, where the covenant/Torah/law is described as “making wise the simple, rejoicing the heart, and enlightening the eyes.” Referred to as the “testimony,” the covenant/Torah was kept in the ark in the Most Holy Place, the inner

sanctuary (Ex. 25:16; Deut. 31:26). Touching the ark brought death just as eating from the tree of knowledge did (Num. 4:20; 2 Sam. 6:7).

9. Genesis 3:21 records that "the LORD God made tunics of skin for them and clothed them." In the accounts of the ordination of the priests, Moses also clothed them (Ex. 28:41; 29:8; 40:14; Lev. 8:13).

10. The first branch of the river coming forth from Eden goes round the land of Havilah (Gen. 2:11) and perhaps is reminiscent of the gold in the tabernacle and the temple. There were *šōham* (onyx?) stones in the sanctuary (Ex. 25:7; 28:9, 20; 1 Chron. 29:2). Two such stones were engraved with the names of the twelve tribes and worn by the high priest on his ephod (Ex. 28:9–14). The substance called *bĕdōlaḥ* in Hebrew (= bdellium, a kind of special gum or resin from a tree) was also found in the land of Havilah. The only other occurrence of *bĕdōlaḥ* is Numbers 11:7, where the appearance of manna is compared to this substance. Some manna was kept in the tabernacle (Ex. 16:33–34).[86]

Connections between the Garden in Eden and the Exodus Tabernacle

Other passages in the Old Testament support the cultic connections between the garden in Eden and the later sanctuaries.[87] Wenham notes the following:

> [Genesis] 1:1–2:3 tells of the creation of the world in six days. The parallels in phraseology between the conclusion of the creation account in 1:1–2:3 and the tabernacle building account in Exodus 25–40 have long been noted.[88] Kearney[89] argued that the six commands in the instructions for building the tabernacle corresponded to the six days' creation. More recently Weinfeld[90] argued that God's rest on the first sabbath (2:1–3) corresponds to his resting, i.e. dwelling in the tabernacle.[91]

John Davies also notes these parallels between the creation and tabernacle accounts:

> A stronger point may be made of the use of the sabbatical structure, the six-days-plus-one cycle, which was used as the structuring device for the account of creation in Gen. 1.1–2.3. The pattern of six days

plus a seventh forms an *inclusio* around the entire set of tabernacle instructions. The prelude to the tabernacle instructions is the account of Moses being taken up into the divine cloud on the mountain, where we read, “For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day Yhwh called to Moses from within the cloud” (Exod. 24.16).

Further, just as the first section of the Genesis creation account concluded with the record of the divine rest (Gen. 2.2–3), so the whole *fiat* section of the tabernacle account (including the directives concerning the priesthood) concludes with a summons to its “creators” to imitate the divine rest (Exod. 31.13–17). Batto remarks: “There can be no doubt that the Priestly Writer intends this scene to parallel the opening scene in Genesis with six days of active creation and a seventh day in which God ceased his activity and ‘rested.’”[92] Kearney likewise draws attention to what he considers to be the framework of the P redactor, though in a somewhat more elaborate manner.[93] He detects in the wider framework of Exodus 25–40 a reflection of the thematic structure of creation (chs. 25–31), the fall (chs. 32–33) and the reconstruction (chs. 34–40). The seven separate divine speeches in the first section (commencing at 25.1; 30.11, 17, 22, 34; 31.1, 12) have a thematic correspondence in sequence to each of the seven creation days of Gen. 1.1–2.3. Not all of Kearney’s parallels are equally convincing, though even the fact that there are seven speeches, of which the seventh is a summons to Sabbath rest is instructive. The sabbatical cycle of work and rest is also specifically enjoined on the people in connection with the work to be done in constructing the tabernacle (Exod. 35.2).

Then just as the divine spirit overshadowed the original creative enterprise (Gen. 1.2), so the mountain top is covered by the כבוד (“glory”) of God (Exod. 24.16, 17). The spirit endows gifted craftsmen (31.3; 35.31) for the creative work.[94]

In addition, the sanctuary is described as a place of rest for Yahweh in Psalm 132:14. In Exodus 20:11, we note the same word used to describe the Sabbath—God “rested” on the seventh day. Thus we can see that the

planting of the garden on the sixth day is the construction of a sanctuary, and on the seventh day, God rests—that is, he enters his sanctuary.[95]

Having noted parallels between later temples and the garden in Eden, it is also important to distinguish Eden as a sanctuary from the later temples. Note Dumbrell's apt and important description:

> In the mythical structures of the ancient world, at the very centre of the earth and so controlling it, stood the sacred mountain where the deity of the national fortunes presided and where contact with him could be had. It was at this point that it was believed that the upper and lower waters of the cosmos met, where heaven and earth and the netherworld were connected. The important depiction of Eden as the holy mountain of God, itself a synonym for the temple in the Old Testament in Ezekiel 28:13–14, takes us back to this paramount theological point of the ancient Near East. In the ancient Near East the sacred mountain was the meeting place of heaven and earth where celestial and mundane reality met. There the gods assembled in council, presided over by the principal deity (Anu/El). From this place, world decrees by which creation was to be regulated were promulgated. From this "cosmic mountain" there was frequently thought to issue a sacred stream whose water teemed with supernatural significance. There, at the sacred site, the victory that brought creation into being was won and celebrated. The cosmic mountain lay at the centre of the world, and everything else in creation took its bearings from it. Significant mountains in the ancient world were imagined as basic points of contact between heaven and earth. Eden is presented as the *axis mundi*, the point from which the primal stream from the mountain divides to the four quarters ([Gen.] 2:10–14). In this mountain centre stood the trees of life and of the knowledge of good and evil. They signified the source of life and the manner by which life was to be conducted.
>
> The Garden of Eden, quite unlike the rest of the world in Genesis 2, is best seen as a special sanctuary, not a temple as such since God himself is present. The temple in the Old Testament is designed to remedy for Israel a lack of the divine presence. The narrower view of Eden as a temple is not warranted, however, since the temple motif in the Bible is confined to the needs of communication in a fallen world,

> in which, when renewed and humanity is redeemed, no temple is required (Rev. 21:22). Canaan in the Old Testament is not only paralleled at times to Eden (Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 36:35) but is also fulsomely presented in Deuteronomy as an Israelite correspondence to Eden (cf. 8:7–10; 11:8–17) and is in its totality presented as divine space (cf. Exod. 15:17; Ps. 78:54) in which, as it is now a fallen world, a temple is built to mark the divine rule. However, Eden by the divine presence is clearly considered divine space.[96]

T. Desmond Alexander also follows the work of Beale and Wenham and notes the garden in Eden pictured as a sanctuary. He draws out the implications as follows:

> (1) Since the garden is a place where divinity and humanity enjoy each other's presence, it is appropriate that it should be a prototype for later Israelite sanctuaries. This explains why many of the decorative features of the tabernacle and temple are arboreal in nature. (2) Because they met God face to face in a holy place, we may assume that Adam and Eve had a holy or priestly status. Only priests were permitted to serve within a sanctuary or temple. (3) Although it is not stated, the opening chapters of Genesis imply that the boundaries of the garden will be extended to fill the whole earth as human beings are fruitful and increase in number.[97]

This is good, but it does not explore the implications sufficiently. It reveals the weakness of a biblical theology based on themes instead of one focused on discovering the narrative plot structure through attention to cultural and linguistic data from exegesis and analysis of the literary structures, both macro and micro. We must remember that the pattern of Hebrew literature is recursive, resumptive, and holographic. Genesis 1 goes round the topic of creation, and Genesis 2 goes round the topic again from a different perspective. Put the two together and you have a 3-D presentation of the creation.

Genesis 2:8–17 pictures Adam as a kind of king-priest worshiping in a garden sanctuary.[98] This passage explains how the royal rule given to

humankind within the covenant structure established in 1:26–27 is to operate. Dumbrell begins to draw out the implications of this as follows:

> In short, created in the world with dominion over it, man is immediately abstracted from the world and placed directly in the divine presence. What is being said in all this is surely how the dominion mandate was to be exercised. . . . Man was to control his world, not primarily by immersing himself in the tasks of ordering it, but by recognizing that there was a system of priorities by which all of life was to be regulated. If he were rightly related to his Creator, then he would rightly respond to creation.[99]

Included in the covenant was an ordering of male-female relationships and family life so that part of responding rightly to creation was true humanness defined in proper ways of treating each other.

The relationship between Genesis 2:8–17 and 1:26–27 is significant. Genesis 2:8–17 explains the relationship between "likeness" and "image" in the covenant relationship between man and God. Only when the father-son relationship is nurtured through worship, fellowship, and obedient love will humankind appropriately and properly reflect and represent to the world the kind of kingship and rule intrinsic to God himself. Kingship is effected *through* covenant relationship.

The Demand of the Covenant and Its Breach

There was a real and vital element of condition in the covenant relationship in the garden. Eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was prohibited. We know that the conditions for maintaining love, loyalty, and trust in the covenant relationship were not met. When the fruit of the forbidden tree was eaten, we were all involved somehow, as Romans 5:12–21 makes plain.

A brief comment is necessary to discuss the breaking of the covenant. Just what was involved in this initial transgression? Was the prohibition against eating the fruit of the forbidden tree an arbitrarily imposed means for testing loyalty and obedience? This is surely true, but it does not do justice to what was offered by the snake and confirmed by God after the

fall, that they would be “like gods, knowing good and evil” (see Gen. 3:5, 22).

Some have explained knowing good and evil as a sexual understanding of each other. This is inadequate because it does not make plain how the acquisition of such knowledge would make one like God.

Others have explained good and evil as a way of expressing the totality of knowledge by describing opposite poles. But certainly neither Adam and Eve nor any subsequent humans can claim the totality of knowledge.

The best explanation to date is that of W. M. Clark,[100] who carefully analyzed all the occurrences of the phrase in the Hebrew Bible and showed that the “knowledge of good and evil” has to do with the exercise of absolute moral autonomy. That is to say, knowing good and evil means choosing or determining for oneself what is right and wrong independently of God. The decision of Adam to be self-legislating did make him like God in one sense but also unlike God in that he would not be able to foresee the consequences of his choices long-term or always be certain of the issues before him.

Summary

Careful exegesis of Genesis 1–3 has shown that at creation, God made humankind as his image and according to his likeness. In the cultural and linguistic setting of the fifteenth century BC and according to the literary techniques embedded in the text and the framework provided by the metanarrative, this speaks of man’s relationship to God as son and his relationship to creation as servant-king. In the ancient Near East, both the context of the family and the relationship of king and people are covenantal, requiring loyal love, obedience, and trust. Although the word “covenant” (*bĕrît*) is not in the narrative, the words “image” and “likeness” are understood by the first readers as describing covenant relationships.

Later Texts in the Old Testament

Several texts later in the Old Testament may have a direct bearing on the question of whether or not there is a covenant at creation.[101]

Hosea 6:7

Explicit support for a covenant at creation may be found in Hosea 6:7, although the text is disputed. The Masoretic Text has *wĕhēmmâ kĕ'ādām 'ābĕrû bĕrît*, which may be literally translated, "but they, like Adam, have transgressed the[102] covenant." Williamson notes the problem and argues as follows:

> Although several translations and commentators interpret *kĕ'ādām* in a personal sense, meaning "like Adam," most interpreters emend the key word to read *bĕ'ādām* (in/at Adam), taking the proper noun in its geographical sense—referring to the first town Israel reached after crossing into the Promised Land (Josh. 3:16). Indeed, arguably, a geographical interpretation may not necessitate a textual emendation at all (cf. the similar syntax *kammidbār* [Lit. "as in the wilderness"] in Hos. 2:3; MT v. 5). Further support for this geographical understanding is found in the reference to Gilead (Hos. 6:8) and Shechem (Hos. 6:9) in the immediate context, and especially in the deployment of the locative *šām* (there) immediately after *bĕrît* in Hosea 6:7.[103]

The arguments of Williamson appear to be persuasive. Nonetheless, Davies shows that Hosea 6:7 is probably linked to Hosea 4:4–6:

> Yet let no one contend,
> and let none accuse,
> for with you is my contention, O priest.
> You shall stumble by day;
> the prophet also shall stumble with you by night;
> and I will destroy your mother.
> My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;
> because you have rejected knowledge,
> I reject you from being a priest to me.
> And since you have forgotten the law of your God,
> I also will forget your children. (ESV)

Davies argues convincingly that Hosea is alluding directly to Exodus 19:6 and addressing corporate Israel with the words "O priest." Because the

people have rejected the Torah, God has rejected them as his royal priesthood. Davies further says,

> This understanding might lend support to the unfashionable reading "like Adam" (Vulgate, RV, NASB, NIV) for כאדם at 6.7. If Hosea has as part of his shared presupposition pool with his readers the story of Genesis 2, with Adam as the idyllic priest-king (cf. Ezek. 28.12–15; Jub. 4.23–26), together with the notion that Israel at Sinai was constituted as the new humanity, the true successors of Adam (cf. 4 Ezra 3.3–36; 6.53–59; 2 Bar. 14.17–19), then it makes sense to compare the breach of the Sinai covenant (e.g., Hos. 4.1, 2) with the rebellion in the garden (Gen. 3; cf. Ezek. 28.16–17). The LXX ὡς ἄνθρωπος understands the reference to be to a man. An alternative is to read כאדם as a place reference (cf. שׁם, "there," which seems to call for a place reference), though why the preposition כ should have been chosen (it is usually emended to ב on this understanding), and why the notion of "covenant" should be introduced in connection with the place Adam (RSV, JB, NRSV) or Admah (NEB) is unclear.[104]

The royal priesthood of Israel is an Adamic role assigned to her at the exodus, as indicated by Israel being addressed as the "son of God" (Ex. 4:22), a fact to which Hosea directly refers in 11:1. By violating the Mosaic covenant, Israel has forfeited this role. The connection with Genesis 2 is natural and suitable. Williamson, however, has been less than precise with the linguistic data. It is true that the adverb *šām* ("there") follows *bĕrît* in Hosea 6:7, but it begins a new clause: "There they acted treacherously against me." It is normal that the adverb has a locative and spatial function, as in Hosea 9:15 and 12:4:

> Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal;
> there I began to hate them. (9:15 ESV)

> He met God at Bethel,
> and there God spoke with us. (12:4 ESV)

Yet the anaphoric referent of the adverb may specify a location more indirectly by referring to circumstances. Consider Hosea 10:9 (cf. 9:9):

From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel;
there they have continued. (10:9 ESV)

The phrase “like Adam” in Hosea 6:7 indicates sin in a place, the garden in Eden. The “there” can refer back to these circumstances. If the Masoretic Text of Hosea 6:7 is taken at face value, it seems to imply that the failure of Israel’s role as another Adam was doomed from the garden in Eden because all are somehow involved in Adam’s covenant breaking:

But like Adam they transgressed the covenant;
there they dealt faithlessly with me. (ESV)

Admittedly, the text is difficult and disputed, but Williamson has not shown that a face-value reading of the text is to be rejected. Hosea is a book with many geographical allusions, but nowhere does the Old Testament clearly speak of covenant breaking at the location known as Adam (Josh. 3:16). Such a reference would be more than obscurantist.

Jeremiah 33:19–26

In Jeremiah 33:19–26 the certainty of Yahweh’s covenant with David is correlated with the certainty of his covenant with the arrangement of day and night:

> The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: “Thus says the LORD: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the offspring of David my servant, and the Levitical priests who minister to me.”
>
> The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: “Have you not observed that these people are saying, ‘The LORD has rejected the two clans that he chose’? Thus they have despised my people so that they are no longer a nation in their sight. Thus says the LORD: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of

> heaven and earth, then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his offspring to rule over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them." (ESV)

Apparently, Williamson wishes to argue that this is a reference to the covenant with Noah (Gen. 8:22) and thus does not indicate a covenant in Genesis 1. This, however, is specious reasoning. The covenant with Noah is a renewal of the commitment of the Creator to the ordinances established at creation, so the reference in Jeremiah 33 is to both his commitment to Noah and his original commitment at creation. God's commitment to "the fixed order of heaven and earth" was initiated at creation and upheld in the covenant with Noah. Williamson admits as much when he says, "God intended, through Noah, to fulfil his original creative intent."[105] To aver that this is a reference to the covenant with Noah but not creation is contradictory and results from Williamson's misunderstanding and misuse of the phrases "cut a covenant" (*kārat bĕrît*) and "uphold a covenant" (*hēqîm bĕrît*). A parallel reference is Jeremiah 31:35–37, which surely refers to creation and indicates that God's commitment to Israel is as certain as his commitment to creation. The reason for this is that Israel's doctrine of *salvation* is based on her doctrine of *creation*. Williamson has lost sight of this.

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1. Parts of chap. 6 are adapted from Peter J. Gentry, "Kingdom through Covenant: Humanity as the Divine Image," *SBJT* 12, no. 1 (2008): 16–43. Used by permission of the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*.
2. Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 72.
3. Richard Schultz, "The King in the Book of Isaiah," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 141–65.
4. Paul Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, AnBib 88 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1982).
5. William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 32.
6. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 75.
7. Ibid., 75–76.
8. Jeffrey J. Niehaus, "Covenant: An Idea in the Mind of God," *JETS* 52, no. 2 (2009): 237–38.
9. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 51, 75.
10. Ex. 9:30; 2 Sam. 7:25; 2 Kings 19:19; 1 Chron. 17:16, 17; 28:20; 2 Chron. 1:9; 6:41 (2x), 42; Pss. 59:6 (59:5 EV); 72:18; 80:5 (80:4 EV), 20 (80:19 EV); 84:9, 12; Jonah 4:6.
11. Note that both day three and day six entail a doubling of the pattern.
12. The table is derived from my own research, but compare a table similar to this in Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 57.

13. See David A. Sterchi, “Does Genesis 1 Provide a Chronological Sequence?,” *JETS* 39, no. 4 (1996): 529–36. The connection claimed between anarthrous designations in number and chronology claimed by Sterchi remains to be tested, but he is doubtless right that the article represents something significant.

14. Recent analysis and research on *bāra’* has questioned the meaning “create” or “create *ex nihilo*.” See John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 67–70; Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 38–46; Walton, *Genesis One as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011). Walton affirms that the verb indicates only a divine activity, but he argues for a functional rather than a material meaning. Ellen van Wolde has argued that the word means “to separate spatially” rather than “to create.” See Ellen van Wolde, “Why the Verb ברא Does Not Mean ‘to Create’ in Genesis 1.1–2.4a,” *JSOT* 34, no. 1 (2009): 3–23; Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel, “To Create, to Separate or to Construct: An Alternative for a Recent Proposal as to the Interpretation of ברא in Gen 1:1–2:4a,” *JHebS* 10, no. 3 (2010): 1–21; Ellen van Wolde and Robert Rezetko, “Semantics and the Semantics of ברא: A Rejoinder to the Arguments Advanced by B. Becking and M. Korpel,” *JHebS* 11, no. 9 (2011): 1–39. In my judgment, the concept of creation *ex nihilo* is taught by the text as a whole—“He spoke, and it came into being” (Ps. 33:9; see Heb. 11:1). Van Wolde’s proposal is possible for Genesis 1:1–2:4 but is not satisfactory in all instances in the Old Testament. Her analysis appears to depend heavily on etymology. Yet the usage of *bara’* in Genesis should be consistent with general usage elsewhere in Hebrew as “create.” Since *bara’* occurs at the beginning in 1:1 and at the end in 2:3–4, it may be that this verb ended up with a broader meaning, since it appears to initiate and sum up the account and so come to mean “create” as a general term. Van Wolde admits that *bara’* is fairly interchangeable with *ʿāśâ* (“to make”).

15. See C. I. Scofield, ed., *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 1n4.

16. Usages of the term *’ādām* in the text of Genesis 1–5 move almost imperceptibly from (1) a generic sense of humankind to (2) man, i.e., the primal human being, to (3) Adam as a personal name. See especially Richard S. Hess, “Splitting the Adam: The Usage of *’ĀDĀM* in Genesis I–V,” in *Studies in the Pentateuch*, ed. J. A. Emerton, VTSup 41 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 1–15. Occasionally in this chapter I employ *man* because of this ambiguity in the original text, although I would argue in the strongest terms that the image of God applies generically to all humans, both male and female.

17. For an excellent and impressive survey of views in just the last one hundred years, see Gunnlauger A. Jónsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26–28 in a Century of Old Testament Research*, ConBOT 26 (Lund, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988). Recent work by Jill Middlemas does not advance solid understanding of the divine image: *The Divine Image: Prophetic Aniconic Rhetoric and Its Contribution to the Aniconism Debate*, FAT 2, reihe 73 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

18. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 29–32.

19. Even when material is adapted and borrowed from Wenham.

20. P. E. Dion, “Ressemblance et Image de Dieu,” in *Suppléments aux Dictionnaire de la Bible*, ed. H. Cazelles and A. Feuillet (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1992–), 55:383.

21. W. Randall Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness: Humanity, Divinity, and Monotheism*, CHANE 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 85.

22. See Paul Joüon, *Grammaire de l’hébreu biblique* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1923), §116; and Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), §107.

23. Stephen G. Dempster, “Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative: A Discourse Analysis of Narrative from the Classical Period” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1985).

24. As, for example, in the exposition of M. Smith: “The creation of the human person involves male and female. . . . The imagery of the human in terms of the Divine in Genesis 1 seems to assume a divine couple, male and female, since the human person is created in the image of the Divine, partaking of both maleness and femaleness.” M. Smith, “God Male and Female in the Old Testament: Yahweh and His ‘Asherah,’” *TS* 48, no. 2 (1987): 339. Earlier, Karl Barth promoted an approach to the divine image also based on the duality of gender. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Creation*, part 1, *The Work of Creation*, trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 186; and Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Creation*, part 2, *The Creature*, trans. Harold Knight, G. W. Bromiley, J. K. Reid, and R. H. Fuller (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 203. Note the following description and assessment by Bruce Waltke: “Karl Barth rightly argued from Genesis 1:26–27 that God endowed humanity with the ability to have social interaction with him and each other as male and female, but he went too far when he argued that the image of God is a matter of relationship. The meaning of the phrase elsewhere does not support this notion. Genesis 5:1–3 and 9:6 pertain to the individual, apart from their social relationships, calling Barth’s dogma into question. Each man and woman bears the image of God apart from his or her counterpart.” Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 217. This assessment is confused and only partly true. Waltke is correct to affirm that each man and woman bears the image of God apart from his or her counterpart because the text affirms that *’ādām*, clearly a generic term, bears the image of God. Barth’s attempt, however, to base a description of the divine image as relationship on the duality of gender in humanity constitutes an exegetical error, as he did not observe the macrosyntactic signals in the text. Since Waltke infers that the image entails social relationships because “the image is represented as male and female and God is asexual,” his claim that Barth has argued rightly is incorrect. Waltke’s denial of the divine image as a matter of relationship *as propounded by Barth* is probably right, but as the following exegesis will show, his exposition fails to infer from the data in the text that the image entails a divine-human

relationship and a human-world relationship. Thus, his comment at this point in an otherwise illuminating exposition is unclear and unhelpful.

25. See Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (New York: Seabury, 1978), 151–63.

26. The cherubim would be considered not "images" but guardian figures. In the case of Israel, they are guarding empty space.

27. The divine image is particularly revealed in the living out of the Ten Commandments. This is why there could be no image at the center of Israel's worship—God wanted the commands or instructions in the ark to be imaged in one's actions: this was the divine character embodied in human lives!

28. Dion, "Ressemblance et Image de Dieu," 55:365–403.

29. On the birth of the king in Egypt as divine son, see Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 247–56.

30. Notions concerning the "image of God" in Mesopotamia were similar. M. Stol states, "In Babylonia, being the 'image' of a god does not point to physical resemblance but to abilities (justice, magic) or character ('fierce but merciful'). Most likely, Genesis also transcends the primitive idea of physical resemblance and sees the first human being(s) in terms of their spiritual resemblance to God." See M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting*, CM 14 (Groningen, The Netherlands: Styx, 2000), 151.

31. Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 2:36–37.

32. Numerous studies are available in addition to the lexica. See, e.g., J. Barr, "The Image of God in the Book of Genesis—A Study of Terminology," *BJRL* 51 (1968–1969): 11–26; H. D. Preuss, "דָּמָה *dāmāh*; דְּמוּת," in *TDOT* 3:250–60; F. J. Stendebach, "צֶלֶם *ṣelem*," in *TDOT* 12:386–96. The brief comments here are indebted to the full lexical treatment in Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness*, 117–76.

33. Although I have read and studied the inscription myself, I am indebted for these observations to W. Randall Garr, "'Image' and 'Likeness' in the Inscription from Tell Fakhariyeh," *Israel Exploration Journal* 50, nos. 3–4 (2003): 227–34. Those wishing to read a translation in English may consult T. Muraoka, "The Tell-Fekherye Bilingual Inscription and Early Aramaic," *Abr-Nahrain* 22 (1983–1984): 79–117.

34. The forms in the Aramaic Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription are actually articulate: דמותא and צלמא.

35. Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, part 1, *Texts* (1970; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 98–99 (= LAS).

36. The editor comments as follows: "The king was likened to Marduk (or Bēl) especially when it was appropriate to extol his *goodness* and *mercifulness*, and it would accordingly seem that these indeed were characteristics most popularly associated with Marduk at the period concerned." See Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, part 2, *Commentary and Appendices* (1983; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 112.

37. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars*, part 1, *Texts*, 112–13.

38. Hermann Hunger, *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings*, State Archives of Assyria 8 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992), 188–89 (= SAA).

39. Rocío Da Riva, "A Note to the Nebuchadnezzar Inscription of Brisa," *NABU* (2009, no. 1): 15–16. I am indebted to Charles Halton for drawing my attention to this text.

40. Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness*, 95.

41. For support of this view, see Stephen G. Dempster, "The Servant of the Lord," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 136–39.

42. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 58–59.

43. Gavin Ortlund, "Image of God, Son of God: Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 in Intercanonical Dialogue," *JETS* 57, no. 4 (2014): 673–88.

44. Debate continues over the meaning of *'elōhîm* in Ps. 8:5—does it refer to gods (i.e., angels) or to God? Instances of *'elōhîm* in Judg. 9:9, 13 and Ps. 82:1, 6 show that "gods" is fully possible. This is the interpretation taken by the Jewish Targums, the Septuagint (Greek translation), the Latin Vulgate of Jerome, and the Syriac Peshitta. A valiant effort to support the interpretation of "God" was made by Donald R. Glenn, "Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2: A Case Study in Biblical Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, ed. Donald K. Campbell (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 39–51. His approach is flawed because a sentence such as "you [God—second-person address] have made him a little lower than God [third-person address]" is ungrammatical in Hebrew. He also disengages innerbiblical interpretation by arguing that the context of Genesis 1 is no more determinative for Psalm 8 than for Hebrews 2.

45. Dion, "Ressemblance et Image de Dieu," 55:369, 398.

46. Ibid., 55:398.

47. I am aware of only one exception, in the "Instruction for King Meri-ka-Re," where there is a description of all humanity as the image(s) of God: "Well directed are men, the cattle of the god. He made heaven and earth according to their desire, and he repelled the water-monster. He made the breath of life for their nostrils. They who have issued from his body are his images" (ll. 131–32); see James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. with supplement (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969).

48. In particular, see Barr, "Image of God in the Book of Genesis," 11–26.

49. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 32 (emphasis original).

50. James Barr, "The Image of God in Genesis—Some Linguistic and Historical Considerations," in *Proceedings of the Tenth Meeting (1967) of Die Ou-Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap in Suid-Afrika*, ed. A. H. van Zyl (Pretoria: Craft Press, 1971), 9 (emphasis original). Paul Dion discovered a linguistic phenomenon similar to this in the Elephantine Papyri of the fifth century BC. Cf. Dion, "Ressemblance et Image de Dieu," 55:388–89.

51. Technically, then, this is not a *beth essentiae*, but "as" is an excellent functional English equivalent. See Barr, "Image of God in Genesis," 8.

52. Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness*, 95.

53. Ernst Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, vol. 1, *Die Präposition Beth* (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 1992), 11–40; Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, vol. 2, *Die Präposition Kaph* (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 1994), 11–12.

54. The Hebrew term *tôlĕdôt* is construed as a heading in the text.

55. Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 160–61.

56. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 31.

57. See Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 7–87, who says, "It is a functional statement and not one of essence" (14).

58. Holiness in particular is a concept not well understood by the church today. See especially the illuminating study by Claude-Bernard Costecalde, *Aux origines du sacré biblique* (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1986).

59. The exegesis of "image" and "likeness" presented here, as well as the interpretation of Adam's role in the garden in Eden supplied below, received confirmation from a paper by Catherine McDowell (formerly Beckerleg), "New Light on Genesis 1–3 and Man as the Image of God," at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Providence, RI, November 19, 2008. McDowell explored this topic further in her dissertation, which has been published as *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden: The Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5–3:24 in Light of the "mīs pî pīt pî" and "wpt-r" Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt*, Siphrut 15 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015).

60. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 161.

61. D. J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *TynBul* 19 (1968): 69.

62. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 213. See also Walton, *Genesis*, 128–29, for further treatment showing that understanding the Trinity in Genesis 1 fails the test of proper interpretation. Walton opts for the plural as referring to the heavenly court but does not think humans are created in the image of angels.

63. From Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness*, 69–70.

64. The citation includes footnotes from Walton and excludes a table listing occurrences of the preposition לִפְנֵי plus a personal object: John H. Walton, "Interpreting the Bible as an Ancient Near Eastern Document," in *Israel—Ancient Kingdom or Late Invention?*, ed. Daniel I. Block (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 306–9.

65. Werner Schmidt, *The Faith of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 71.

66. Manasseh set up altars in the temple courtyard to offer sacrifices to other deities and put an Asherah pole in the temple. This object functioned either as a cultic object for the worship of Yahweh or as a symbol of Yahweh's consort (2 Kings 21:5–7; Ezek. 8:5).

67. Jean Bottéro, "Intelligence and the Technical Function of Power: Enki/Ea," in *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), 232–50; the citation is found on 233.

68. Lowell Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 97.

69. The significance of this notion may be extended if we attach to it the idea that in the ancient Near East something was not considered to exist if it had not been assigned a name, a place, or a function. See discussion in John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 87–97.

70. This is close to the view of Christopher Wright, who says, "The fundamental thrust of the verse is not Yahweh's sole deity, but Yahweh's sole sovereignty over Israel." *Deuteronomy* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 68.

71. After arriving at this conclusion independently, I found Garr had already expressed it in print; Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness*, 222.

72. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 67. Construing the "us" in the clause "Let us make man in our image" to refer to God addressing the heavenly court does not require the interpretation that the angels cocreate or join God in making humans. It is the Judge and King of the heavenly court announcing to the angels that their rule of the cosmos will be shared with humans. This is comparable to the chairman and CEO of a corporation announcing to his board of directors/shareholders, "Let us make all employees shareholders."

73. Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness*, 201.

74. Ibid., 203–4.

75. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 34–35. Dumbrell is citing Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.1:98.

76. I am depending here on Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 35.

77. Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 399–404.

78. For the substitute king ritual, see Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars*, part 2, *Commentary and Appendices*, xxii–xxxii.

79. See M. Hutter, “Adam als Gärtner und König (Gen. 2:8, 15),” *BZ* 30 (1985): 258–62.

80. N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 57–59 (emphasis mine).

81. See William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 23–26; Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in Hess and Tsumura, *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood*, 399–404. I lean heavily on both scholars here.

82. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 1:174. There may at the same time be a literary link to Israel’s exile, which was to the east.

83. Carol L. Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah: A Synthetic Study of a Symbol from the Biblical Cult*, ASOR Dissertation Series 2 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976).

84. See John Walton, “Eden,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 206.

85. If “Eden” stems from Sumerian, the term means “plain, steppe, open country.” However, the Hebrew text indicates that God planted a garden *in* Eden—thus Eden was an area larger than the garden. Nonetheless, the term is probably to be derived from another word of similar sound meaning “bliss, luxury.” “Not until the inter-testamental literature is there an explicit picture of paradise as a mountain.” “Paradise as Mountain (1),” The Melammu Project: The Heritage of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East, accessed August 28, 2017, http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/database/gen_html/a0001371.php.

86. See especially Jon D. Levenson, *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40–48*, HSM 10 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 26–36.

87. Parallels between the structure and wording of Exodus 25–40, the account of the building of the tabernacle, and Genesis 1–3, the account of creation, were first introduced to me by Daniel I. Block, “Introduction to the Old Testament, Part I: Pentateuch and Historiographic Literature 20200,” course notes, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004.

88. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1976), 476.

89. Peter J. Kearney, “Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25–40,” *ZAW* 89, no. 3 (1977): 375–87.

90. Moshe Weinfeld, “Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord—The Problem of the Sitz im Leben of Genesis 1:1–2:3,” in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l’honneur de M. Henri Cazelles*, ed. A. Caquot and M. Delcor, AOAT 212 (Kevelaer: Butzon and Becker, 1981), 501–12.

91. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism,” 404.

92. Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1992), 120.

93. Kearney, “Creation and Liturgy,” 375–87.

94. John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, JSOTSup 395 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 146–47 (emphasis original).

95. See Weinfeld, “Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord,” 501–12.

96. William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology*, rev. ed. (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2013), 38–39.

97. T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), 25.

98. The interpretation taken here is supported by the research of McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*.

99. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 35–36.

100. W. Malcolm Clark, “A Legal Background to the Yahwist’s Use of ‘Good and Evil’ in Genesis 2–3,” *JBL* 88, no. 3 (1969): 266–78. See also Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 126–33.

101. No attempt is made here to canvas Second Temple Judaism for its understanding of Genesis 1 and 2. Nonetheless, Sir. 14:17 is noteworthy in that this text clearly refers to Genesis 1–3 and clearly employs the term “covenant”: πᾶσα σὰρξ ὡς ἱμάτιον παλαιοῦται, ἡ γὰρ διαθήκη [covenant] αἰῶνος Θανάτῳ ἀποθανῇ. While this text may not prove a covenant in Genesis 1–3, it indicates the thought of early Judaism on this question.

102. Although *bĕrît* is unarticulated, it is both common and normal to omit the article in Hebrew poetry. Williamson renders the noun as indefinite, “a covenant,” but the reference in context is doubtless to *the* Mosaic Torah.

103. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 55.

104. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 202–3.

105. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 51, 75.

7

The Covenant with Abraham (1)

After the covenant at creation established between God and humans and humans and creation, and the subsequent covenant with Noah upholding the original covenant at creation, next in the grand story comes the covenant with Abraham. Brian Walsh, Christian Reformed chaplain to the University of Toronto in Canada, wrote some time ago of the importance of this grand story to the challenges facing the church in a postmodern age:

> Postmodern culture is deeply suspicious of all grand stories. Again, The Smashing Pumpkins prove to be insightful in this regard. In their infinitely sad song, "tales of a scorched earth," they sing, "we're all dead yeah we're all dead / inside the future of a shattered past." We live inside the future of a shattered past because that "past" told grand stories of Marxist utopia, technological freedom, or capitalist paradise. Yet we have come to see not only that these stories are unfinished, but that they are also fundamentally unfinishable, for the simple reason that they are fundamentally lies. The postmodern ethos insists that stories such as these that have so shaped our lives are not stories of emancipation and progress after all, but stories of enslavement, oppression and violence. And on such a view, any story, any world view, that makes grand claims about the real course and destiny of history will be perceived as making common cause with such violence and oppression. This characteristic of the postmodern shift is, I think, the most challenging to Christian faith. If there is one thing that Christianity is all about it is a grand story. How else can we interpret the cosmic tale of creation, fall, redemption and consummation that the Scriptures tell? Yet it is precisely this story that we must tell in a

> postmodern culture. In the face of the dissolution of all grand stories, Christians have the audacity to proclaim, week after week, the liberating story of God's redemption of all creation. It is, we insist, the one story that actually delivers on what it promises.[1]

Abraham in the Genesis Plot Structure

If we are to construct a metanarrative that is, in fact, the metanarrative of Scripture and not a marriage of biblical data and secular worldviews, we must pay attention to the shape of the text and the literary techniques used by the narrator to locate the narratives concerning Abraham within the larger plot structure of Genesis, the Pentateuch, the Old Testament, and the Bible as a whole. Afterward, we can reckon with the internal movement and literary structure within the Abraham narratives.

N. T. Wright, an evangelical scholar in England, describes the story of Abraham this way:

> Abraham emerges within the structure of Genesis as the answer to the plight of all humankind. The line of disaster and of the "curse," from Adam, through Cain, through the Flood to Babel, begins to be reversed when God calls Abraham and says, "in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed."[2]

Here, after Adam and Noah, God is making another new start. Abram and his family constitute another Adam. Notice the parallels in the biblical narrative: Adam and Eve had three sons (besides other children who are not named in the text, Gen. 5:4). Similarly, the genealogy in Genesis 5 ends with a man who also had three sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth). The genealogy in Genesis 11 ends in the same way: with a man who had three sons (Abram, Nahor, and Haran). This parallel is a literary technique inviting the reader to compare Abram with Noah and Adam.

Other parallels between Genesis 1–3 and Genesis 12 also suggest that we should view Abram as a new Adam, and we will now explore some of them.

Genesis 12 as a New Creation

According to the apostle Paul, God's choosing of Abram involved calling into existence that which was nonexistent. Paul says,

> That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. (Rom. 4:16–17 ESV)

When Paul speaks of Abraham believing in the God who calls into existence the things that do not exist, what does this language bring to our minds? Paul can be alluding directly to only one passage of Scripture: Genesis 1. Over and over again in the creation narrative we read the words, "And God said, 'Let x be.' And x was." God simply speaks his word and calls into existence things that do not exist. Therefore, according to the New Testament, as we read Genesis 12–25, we are to view the call of Abram as a kind of "new creation." Just as the divine word in Genesis 1:3 brings into being and existence things that are not, so in Genesis 12:3 it is the divine word that brings into existence a new order out of the chaos resulting from the confusion and curse of Babel—the condition of the world just prior to Genesis 12.

Note that Genesis 10 and 11 are not presented in chronological order. Genesis 10 constitutes a "Table of Nations," showing the various families and peoples of the world lost and scattered over the face of the earth. Genesis 11 presents the narrative of the "Tower of Babel," which explains how the nations were scattered throughout the world in this way. Just as the first Adam failed as a covenant keeper and his family line through Cain ended up with the corruption and violence displayed by Lamech, a polygamist who murdered a boy and promised severe vengeance for any who would redress his heinous act, so the second Adam, Noah, also failed to produce a covenant community practicing social justice, which resulted in the humanistic hubris of Babel. The earth returns once more to chaos before God begins anew by calling Abram. As one commentator notes, "In

this way the absolutely free and unconditioned nature of the choice of Abram is emphasized, and thus the presence of the divine will as the power which shapes and directs all history is at this point made perfectly clear."[3]

Israel as Last Adam

Other parallels are established by the use of *key words*. Let us now notice how the language of the commission to Adam is repeated throughout the book of Genesis by following the use of "bless," "be fruitful," and "multiply" in the narratives subsequent to the creation narrative.

> 1:28: And God *blessed* them, and God said to them, "Be *fruitful* and *multiply*, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth."
>
> 12:2–3: "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will *bless* you and make your name great; and be a *blessing*! And I will *bless* those who bless you."
>
> 17:2, 6, 8: "I will make my covenant between me and you, and will *multiply* you exceedingly. . . . I will make you exceedingly *fruitful*, . . . and I will give to you and to your seed after you . . . all the land of Canaan."
>
> 22:16–18: "Because you have done this, . . . I will certainly *bless* you, and I will greatly *multiply* your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. . . . and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be *blessed*, because you have obeyed my voice."
>
> 26:3–4: [The Lord said to Isaac,] "I will be with you and will *bless* you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. I will *multiply* your descendants as the stars of heaven and will give your descendants all these lands, and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be *blessed*."

> 26:24: “Fear not, for I am with you. I will *bless* you and *multiply* your descendants, for the sake of my servant Abraham.”
>
> 28:3: [Isaac blessed Jacob and said,] “God Almighty *bless* you and make you *fruitful* and *multiply* you, that you may become a company of peoples. May he give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you, that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham.”
>
> 35:11–12: And God said to [Jacob], “I am God Almighty: be *fruitful* and *multiply*; a nation and company of nations shall come from you, . . . and the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you.”
>
> 47:27: Thus Israel lived in the land of Egypt, . . . and they gained possessions in it and were *fruitful* and *multiplied* exceedingly.
>
> 48:3–4: Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me . . . and said to me, ‘Behold, I will make you *fruitful* and *multiply* you, . . . and will give this land to your seed after you.’”

From tracing this trail of the terms “bless,” “be fruitful,” and “multiply” through Genesis, N. T. Wright concludes as follows:

> Thus at key moments—Abraham’s call, his circumcision, the offering of Isaac, the transition from Abraham to Isaac and from Isaac to Jacob, and in the sojourn in Egypt—the narrative quietly makes the point that Abraham and his family inherit, in a measure, the role of Adam and Eve. The differences are not, however, insignificant. Except for 35.11 f., echoed in 48.3 f., the command (“be fruitful . . .”) has turned into a promise (“I will make you fruitful . . .”). The word “exceedingly” is added in ch. 17. And, most importantly, possession of the land of Canaan, and supremacy over enemies, has taken the place of the dominion over nature given in 1.28. We could sum up this aspect of Genesis by saying: Abraham’s children are God’s true humanity, and their homeland is the new Eden.[4]

The last point made by Wright is forcefully illustrated by Exodus 15:17. At the end of the song sung by Israel after crossing the Red Sea we read,

You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain,
the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode,
the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. (ESV)

In this verse the establishment of Israel in the land of Canaan is pictured as the planting of a tree in a *mountain sanctuary*, exactly the picture of Eden presented in Genesis 2 and Ezekiel 28. The same thought is expressed in Psalm 78:54, which reads as follows:

And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary,
the mountain that his right hand had acquired.

The verse describes the event of the exodus in which the Lord brought Israel to Canaan, but the terms used to describe the Land of Promise depict it in Edenic terms as a mountain sanctuary. This depiction is strengthened by two texts in which, after the Assyrians and Babylonians desolate the land by divine judgment, a restoration is promised wherein the land will once more be like Eden:

The LORD will surely comfort Zion
and will look with compassion on all her ruins;
he will make her deserts like Eden,
her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. (Isa. 51:3 NIV)

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, “This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.” Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it. (Ezek. 36:33–36 NIV)

Thus Abraham and his family, later called Israel, is, as it were, a last Adam. God made a major new start with Noah. Now he is making a new start with Abraham. There are no major new beginnings after this in the

narrative of Scripture (until we come to the new creation at the end of the story).

When we see that Israel is, according to the Old Testament, the last Adam and, as later Jewish tradition understood it, the one undoing the sin of the first Adam,[5] we see the background for Paul's understanding of Christ as the last Adam.[6] As history unfolds, Jesus accomplishes in his person and work what God intended for Israel as a people.

It may be useful to note here that literary structure and plot structure are not the same thing. The literary structure of Genesis is determined by the formula "these are the generations."[7] The repetition of "blessing," "fruitful," and "multiply," however, is key to the plot structure.

Overview of God's Dealings with Abram

It was over a period of forty years that God had dealings with Abram, later called Abraham. During this time there was a call for Abram to leave his homeland and journey to a country unknown to him. Initially, God made promises to Abram (Genesis 12) that were later enshrined in a covenant (Genesis 15 and 17) and were finally confirmed by an oath (Genesis 22). All throughout this period, one can perceive development and growth in the character and life of Abram in terms of faith in God's promises and obedience to his instructions (normally revealed to him by means of visions). The book of Genesis is characterized by a literary structure in which the sections are divided according to "birth/family histories." The narratives concerning Abram fall within the "family history" of Terah (11:27–25:11), which divides naturally into nineteen sections, as shown in table 7.1.

Table 7.1 The Abram Narratives

Birth and Family History of Terah	**Genesis 11:27–25:11**
Terah's family and journey to Haran	11:27–32
Call of Abram and journey to Canaan	12:1–9
Abram and Sarai in Egypt	12:10–20
Abram and Lot separate	13:1–18
Battle with four kings from east	14:1–24

Making of covenant with Abram	15:1–18
Birth of Ishmael by Hagar	16:1–16
Confirming of covenant with Abram	17:1–27
Abraham’s hospitality and social justice	18:1–33
Lot rescued from destruction of Sodom	19:1–29
Lot’s daughters’ incest	19:30–38
Abraham sojourns in Gerar	20:1–18
Birth of Isaac	21:1–21
Covenant with Abimelech	21:22–34
Abraham tested and God’s oath	22:1–19
Nahor’s family	22:20–24
Death and burial of Sarah	23:1–20
A wife for Isaac	24:1–67
Abraham’s remarriage and death	25:1–11

To be sure, the skillful narrator arranges these divisions in a more artful literary structure than the above outline shows, but the outline indicates simply the flow of the plot in the divine dealings with Abram according to its basic divisions.

Three or four episodes in the Abram narrative particularly focus on the covenant that God made with Abraham. First, in Genesis 12, God makes incredible promises to Abram involving progeny and land (i.e., a place where his progeny can live that they can call home). Then, in chapter 15, both of these promises are enshrined in a covenant. Later on, in chapter 17, after Abram and Sarai’s attempt to fulfill the promise of progeny through Hagar and Ishmael, God repeats his promises and confirms his covenant, this time adding the rite or sign of circumcision. Some ten to fifteen years afterward, according to chapter 22, God “tests” Abraham and, upon his obedience, swears by himself in another mighty confirmation of the promises.

Key Points in the Abraham Narratives

1. Giving the promise: The call of Abram (Genesis 12)

2. Making the covenant: The promise of descendants and land (Genesis 15)
3. Confirming the covenant: The sign of circumcision (Genesis 17)
4. Abraham's obedience and confirmation of the promises by oath (Genesis 22)

We might compare the relationship between God and Abraham to a marriage. The giving of the promises in chapter 12 would then represent the betrothal or engagement. The covenant making in chapter 15 and confirmation in chapter 17 would correspond to the wedding vows of the marriage covenant and the reaffirmation on the silver anniversary. After testing Abraham, God reiterates his promises by a mighty oath.

Outline of Genesis 12

Careful consideration of key grammatical issues and the literary structure of Genesis 12 is necessary for a correct interpretation of the promises made by God to Abram and the covenant ensuing from them. In fact, interpretation at this key point affects how one understands the rest of the Bible. Table 7.2 provides a basic outline.

The chapter divides into two sections: 12:1–3 constitutes the divine word to Abram, and 12:4–9 indicates his response to that word. Noting the literary structure of 12:1–3 is crucial. In the Hebrew text, there are two commands (i.e., verbs marked in the Hebrew verbal system as imperatives): "go" and "be." Each of these commands is followed by three prefix forms (which could be construed as either cohortatives or imperfects), and normally prefix forms following commands mark purpose or result. Thus three promises flow from each of the two commands. Since the literary structure is debated, the data must be analyzed in detail.

Table 7.2 The Giving of the Promise: The Call of Abram (Genesis 12)

The Divine Word: Command and Promise	**12:1–3**
Go (Command)	
1. I will make you into a great nation	(Promise)
2. I will bless you	(Promise)
3. I will make your name great	(Promise)

Be a Blessing (Command)	
1. I will bless those who bless you	(Promise)
2. I will curse him who curses you	(Promise)
3. In you all nations will be blessed	(Promise)
Abram's Response: Obedience	**12:4–9**
1. Obedience	12:4–6
2. Confirmation	12:7
3. Obedience	12:8–9

The Imperatives

The divine speech to Abram in Genesis 12:1–3 contains eight verbs (not including verbs in embedded or relative clauses): לֶךְ, וְאֶעֶשְׂךָ, וַאֲבָרֶכְךָ, וְאַגַּדְלָה, וֶהְיֵה, וַאֲבָרֲכָה, אָאֹר, וְנִבְרְכוּ. The first and fifth, לֶךְ and וֶהְיֵה, are formally unambiguous and must be analyzed as *qal* second-person singular imperatives. The remaining verbs are all first-person volitives (i.e., cohortative), determined either from the termination in *-â* or from their clause-initial position.[8] The verb forms with pronominal suffixes (וְאֶעֶשְׂךָ, וַאֲבָרֶכְךָ) naturally cannot have the *-â* termination but are clause initial and in a sequence of volitives and so ought to be construed as such. The prefix forms in Genesis 12:1–3 could also be read as simple future indicatives without altering the meaning significantly. In 12:3, אָאֹר is not prefixed by *waw* and is not clause initial since a clause component is preposed. This clause pattern marks the sentence as part of a matching pair with the preceding clause (i.e., "I will bless the ones blessing you, *but* the one cursing you I will curse" are clauses marked by discourse-grammar signals as a matched pair).[9]

The form most troublesome to scholars in this sequence is וֶהְיֵה. Many prefer to construe it as an emphatic consequence clause, "so that you will be a blessing." Kenneth Mathews explains:

> וֶהְיֵה בְּרָכָה (lit. "be a blessing," v. 2d) is preceded by the cohortative וַאֲגַדְּלָה ("I will make . . . great"); by this sequence of verbs the imperative expresses expected certainty or intention (GKC § 110i).

> The use of the imperative instead of an imperfective verbal form heightens the certainty of the promise (*IBHS* § 34.4c).[10]

Mathews appeals to *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, by Bruce Waltke and Michael O'Connor. The relevant section states,

> The imperative, like the jussive, has uses in which its ordinary force is lost. The figure of *heterosis* involves the exchange of one grammatical form for another; with the imperative, *heterosis* creates a promise or prediction to be fulfilled in the future, made more emphatic and vivid than would be the case were the prefix conjugation used.[11]

Certainly, the line of demarcation between command and future indicative is fuzzy in many languages; one need not appeal to a figure of speech with a pedantic name to substantiate this.[12] The three examples given by Waltke and O'Connor are not particularly convincing (2 Kings 19:29; Ps. 110:2; Isa. 54:14) and can most simply be construed as straightforward commands. Genesis 12:3 is not listed as an example, although elsewhere Waltke appears to agree with the analysis of Mathews.[13] The explanation of Mathews is hardly satisfying. The assumption in our approach is that the choice of every verb form is *motivated*. A consequence clause would be more clearly marked by a prefix form in clause-initial position. If the author intended a consequence, forms such as וְתִהְיֶה or וּתְהִי would have been clearer and more natural than וֶהְיֵה.

While one might construe the imperative following the cohortative as a purpose sequence, as in GKC §110i, such sequences are common with cohortatives and jussives but extremely rare with imperatives, as more recent studies on Hebrew volitives have shown.[14] This is what creates the problem. The alert reader, however, would immediately pair וֶהְיֵה with לֶךְ since both are not only imperatives but are also *second person*, in contrast to the *first-person* forms that dominate the divine speech. This is indeed the author's literary signal that divides the speech into two sections, so that there are just *two* commands, and each is followed by *three* promises.

Such an analysis does not remove the problem for some scholars, since what could the *command* "be a blessing" mean? What we see here, even before the divine-human relationship is solemnized as a covenant in

chapter 15, is that a relationship with God entails commands or obligations to be obeyed and fulfilled but that these are always surrounded and supported by the mighty promises of God. Long ago, Augustine expressed it this way: “Give what you command, and command what you will,” by which he meant, “What God commands, he also enables.”[15] God is promising to do something. But he is doing it in the context of using Abram as an agent of blessing to the world. The three promises that follow begin to explain the command “be a blessing” and unfold how this will work out: “I will bless the ones blessing you, but the one cursing you I will curse, and in you all the clans of the world will be blessed.” Although God commands Abram, God is still the implied agent who will enable Abram to bring blessing to others.[16]

The exegesis of Williamson ought to be cited as well on this important point of grammar in Genesis 12:3:

> As it stands, the traditional Hebrew text (MT) can be interpreted either as an emphatic consequence clause, “so that you will indeed be blessed,” or as a second command, “Be a blessing.” While modern English translations clearly favour the former, most recent studies support the latter. Unfortunately, therefore, this is an area over which scholarly opinion is sharply divided. Indeed, some have even suggested removing the problem altogether through textual surgery—by retaining the Hebrew consonants but supplying different vowel points, the text may be emended to read, “and it [i.e., ‘your name,’ v. 2c] shall be a blessing.” However, such an extreme measure is unnecessary, especially since it is possible to make sense of the text as it stands, and the latter is undoubtedly the harder reading.
>
> Support for reading the verb as a second divine command may be found in Genesis 17:1b, in which a similar construction (an imperative verb string involving *hyh* + X) is found, and here the verb undoubtedly retains its imperative force (“Walk before me and *be* blameless” Gen. 17:1 NIV; my italics). Further support for retaining the imperative reading can be adduced from the fact that both imperatives in Genesis 12:1–3 are directly followed by cohortatives—a construction that normally expresses purpose or result. Since the first of these

> imperative-cohortative clauses expresses a conditional promise, it seems reasonable to conclude that an identical construction in the same text-unit should be similarly interpreted (i.e. as a second conditional promise). Thus understood, Abraham's divine commission was twofold: he was to "Go," and he was to "Be a blessing!"[17]

Apart from the first statement, Williamson's analysis is excellent. Those who consider that the form can be construed as an emphatic consequence clause have misconstrued the text and missed important clues to the literary structure. The verb וְהְיֵה is in sequence with לֶךְ and not with וַאֲגַדְּלָה. A Hebrew imperative followed by an imperative merely shows a logical sequence of commands and does not mark emphatic consequence, purpose, or result as do other sequences of volitives.[18] This analysis alleviates the problem in a possibly difficult text. An imperative of the verb "to be" is not in itself problematic or singular in attestation.[19]

The Promises

As the outline shows, God's six promises to Abram are arranged in two groups of three: (1) the first group promises blessing for Abram as an individual—he will develop into a great nation, be blessed, and be given a great name; and (2) the second group promises blessing (or cursing) for the nations of the world through their relation to Abram. As biblical history unfolds, we will see what this means: the creator God's world has been broken and ruined by human pride and rebellion. God intends to use Abram and his family as the instrument of rescuing and restoring his broken creation.

Bruce Waltke, in his magisterial *Old Testament Theology*, describes the call of Abraham this way: "God makes seven promises to Abraham pertaining to the irruption of his kingdom."[20] God's command, "accompanied by seven promises, pertains to three expanding horizons that *en nuce* present God's salvific program."[21] The expanding horizons are pictured in concentric circles beginning with Abraham in the first circle (2000 BC), the nation of Israel in the second (1400 BC), and all families in the third (present day). The description of a sevenfold promise is an unfortunate mistake. It misses and obscures the literary structure, which

divides the promises into two foci, an aspect corresponding directly to the later distinct and double foci of chapters 15 and 17. Furthermore, “the expanding horizons” obscure the fact that there is a twofold, not threefold, structure. God blesses both Abraham and the nations in relation to Abraham (singular). The picture of concentric circles in three stages is not part of this text.

The First Three Promises: For Abram

The promises given to Abram as an individual focus on nationhood, blessing, and a great name. First, Abram will become a great nation. Now, you cannot have a great nation without land, without territory, without a place for a large number of people to live and call home. So the idea of land is implied in this promise, and the Lord makes this explicit in Genesis 12:7: “The LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’” The promise of land is also implicit in the first command: “Go from your country!” One cannot become a great nation and inhabit territory without first becoming distinct from the land and nation where one starts out.

The confirmation and promise of land or territory for the future nation in 12:7 appears in a chiastic structure showing Abram’s response to the divine promises. On either side of the divinely revealed confirmation in 12:7 is the obedience and worship of Abram. Genesis 12:8 and 9 speak of Abram building an altar and calling out in the name of Yahweh and pitching his tent. The altar and the tent characterize Abram’s activities in Canaan. Note that the altar is mentioned only in connection with sojourning in Canaan (Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:4, 18; 22:9 [2x]). There is no altar during his sojourns in Egypt or in Gerar—only half truths, lies, and troubles. We saw above that Canaan is depicted in Edenic language as a mountain sanctuary. Now we see Abram fulfilling *an Adamic role*: he offers sacrifice as a priest and worships God in this mountain sanctuary. The only occurrence of the word “altar” prior to Genesis 12 is in Genesis 8:20, where Noah, the second Adam, offers sacrifice to the Lord after the judgment of the flood. Therefore the activity of Abraham offering sacrifice on an *altar* in the mountain sanctuary of Canaan reinforces his role as an Adamic figure. The tent

simply emphasizes that the fulfillment of the promises and the permanent situation has not yet arrived.[22]

The second promise given to Abram as an individual is blessing. As the narrative unfolds, we will see what blessing means and will return again to this topic. The third promise is that God will make Abram's name great. There are possible royal overtones to this promise, as Bill Arnold notes:

> Yahweh will make Abram's name "great," which is more than a promise of renown or acclaim. Rather, in contrast to the tower-builders at Babel, who pathetically strove for permanence themselves by building a name in their own strength (11:4), to have a great name given to one by God in the Hebrew Scriptures is to be viewed as a royal figure (2 Sam 7:9).[23]

Arnold is right. The promise to Abram is similar to the one given to David when God makes a covenant with him: "Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth" (2 Sam. 7:9).[24] This fits with the clear and direct reference to kings coming from Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17:6, 16). It also matches the fact that Abram is a royal figure due to his Adamic role. As Alexander notes, Abram is never called a king, but the king of Gerar treats him as an equal, the inhabitants of Hebron designate him a "prince of God" (Gen. 23:6), and his military exploits in Genesis 14 place him on a par with kings.[25] We may also add that in Psalm 105:15 (= 1 Chron. 16:22), Abraham is called an "anointed one"—that is, king.

Genesis 14, in fact, presents a surprising figure, Melchizedek, who is a king-priest, and the narrator describes Abram as identifying with him. The events of Genesis 14 are important to the depiction of Abram and his role as "king-priest." The narrative introduces four major rulers of the east: Amraphel, king of Shinar; Arioch, king of Ellasar; Chedorlaomer, king of Elam; and Tidal, king of Goiim. These kings come to punish Canaanite rulers who have refused to pay the required tribute exacted in conquests fourteen years earlier. They defeat various groups, including five kings ruling cities in the plain south of the Dead Sea: Bera, king of Sodom; Birsha, king of Gomorrah; Shinab, king of Admah; Shemeber, king of

Zeboiim; and the unnamed king of Bela, that is, Zoar. The defeat involves the abduction of Lot, who by this time was living in Sodom. Abraham stages a dramatic rescue, attacking the four kings at night with only 318 men from his household and his Amorite allies, Mamre, Aner, and Eshcol. As Abram returns from his victory over the four kings, he is met by two kings: the king of Sodom and the king of Salem (= Jerusalem):

> After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).
>
> Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying,
>
> "Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
> Creator of heaven and earth.
> And blessed be God Most High,
> who delivered your enemies into your hand."
>
> Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.
>
> The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself."
>
> But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share." (Gen. 14:17–24 NIV)

The two kings represent two different types of kingship.[26] The king of Sodom represents the notion that one acquires goods and rules by might: might makes right. It is the normal pattern of kingship in Canaan—an absolute ruler uses his position to aggrandize himself. Melchizedek, king of Salem, represents a different kind of kingship. He acknowledges a supreme God who is Creator/Possessor of everything. Therefore all rule must acknowledge the sovereignty of the Most High God and must consider that everything one owns is a gift from him. He is a servant of the Most

High God; his kingship is based on the *worship* of this God. Abram does three things: (1) he identifies the Most High God as Yahweh, (2) he gives a tenth to Melchizedek, and (3) he refuses to accept from the king of Sodom any of the goods that are his by right as the spoils of war. In other words, he identifies with the kind of king-priest rule that Melchizedek represents. Abram is thus adopting the king-priest role originally given to Adam and now given to him.

The Second Three Promises: For the Nations

The second group of three promises offers blessing (or cursing) for the nations of the world through their relation to Abram (and his family). First, God promises to bless those (plural) who bless Abram. Second, the same promise is stated negatively: God will curse the one (singular) who slights or treats Abram lightly. Then, in a summary statement, Abram is told that all the clans of the earth will be blessed through him. Blessing both begins the three promises and ends them. Note also that God will bless the *ones* who bless Abram but will curse the *one* who treats him lightly. Why the shift from plural to singular? God is hoping that there will be *many* who bless and *few* who curse Abram. The shift from plural to singular emphasizes the generosity of God in his plan of rescuing and saving a world that has reverted to chaos and death.

Scholars debate the last promise, “In you all the clans of the earth will be blessed.” The exact function of the *niphal* form of the verb *brk* (“bless”) is in question. Two main options are advanced by scholars. One construes the *niphal* form as passive (i.e., “In you all the clans of the earth will be blessed”); the other reckons the *niphal* form to be reflexive (i.e., “In you all the clans of the earth will bless themselves”). Both options are grammatically possible. The *niphal* form of *brk* (“bless”) is found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible only two times (Gen. 18:18; 28:14), both reiterations of the promise in Genesis 12:3. What exacerbates the debate is that two further iterations of the promise in Genesis are constructed with a *hithpael* form of *brk* (“bless,” Gen. 22:18; 26:4), and another two allusions or echoes of Genesis 12:3 elsewhere are also constructed with the *hithpael* form of the verb (Ps. 72:17; Jer. 4:2). Only three instances of the *hithpael*

form of *brk* occur in the Hebrew Bible, and these are entirely independent of Genesis 12:3 (Deut. 29:18; Isa. 65:16 [2x]).

The *hithpael* form in itself may function to indicate a passive, reflexive, reciprocal, or middle (involving speech action, it may be rendered "utter a blessing"). The passive function is relatively infrequent. There may be strong temptation to argue from the instances of the *hithpael*—and especially from the occurrences outside Genesis that are not allusions to or reiterations of Genesis 12:3—that the instances in the *niphal* form should be considered reflexive as well and that the traditional interpretation as passive, reflected by the Septuagint and New Testament (cf. Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8), be abandoned. Another approach is to argue that the *niphal* forms and *hithpael* forms have distinct meanings.

Williamson argues against interpreting the *niphal* forms as reflexive, while allowing the *hithpael* forms their primary reflexive force, as follows:

> The fact that the promises are explicitly related to the person of Abraham rather than to his name constitutes a serious problem for those who wish to interpret the verb reflexively. A further difficulty is that the context anticipates that the nations will participate in Israel's blessing (in v. 3a, what is expected to be the norm is expressed by the plural); thus merely *wishing* for such blessing would be "decidedly anti-climactic" (Dumbrell 1984: 70). Moreover, an exclusively reflexive interpretation of this text would appear to be exclusively ruled out also by the related texts in which the niphal is employed. This is most transparent in Genesis 18:18, where a statement concerning a mere wish expressed by other nations would hardly explain Abraham's international significance. It seems unlikely, therefore, that these occurrences of the niphal form of *brk* should be interpreted reflexively, despite the presence of the hitpael in Genesis 22:18 and Genesis 26:4. But how then are these occurrences of the hitpael to be explained?
>
> One plausible way to account for the latter is by giving the niphal a "middle" sense (i.e. "win/find blessing"). This translation has the advantage of incorporating both a passive and reflexive meaning, which may help explain why the compiler of Genesis allowed both

> forms of the verb to stand unaltered in the final text. Moreover, if a middle rather than a passive sense were intended, this would also explain why the more common passive verb forms (qal passive participle or pual) of *brk* were not employed. Furthermore, as Dumbrell (1984: 71) correctly points out, "Such a sense would also be more congruent with the general Old Testament position on mission, whereby the nations are consistently presented as seekers, coming in to a reconstituted Israel."
>
> However, even if the niphal does carry this idea of "to find blessing," this still leaves unexplained the distribution of the two forms of *brk* in the relevant texts. Why is the niphal used in Genesis 12:3, Genesis 18:18 and Genesis 28:14, but the hitpael in Genesis 22:18 and Genesis 26:4? Rather than assuming that the final editor used these different verb forms arbitrarily, or was somehow reluctant to impose uniformity on his text because of underlying source material, it is worth examining more closely how the niphal and hitpael are used in these particular texts. A close comparison suggests that, rather than being used synonymously, each verb form has a distinct nuance (Williamson 2000a; 227–228). Where the niphal is deployed, a less direct situation is implied: the one through whom the nations will acquire blessing is Abraham (or in the case of Gen. 28:14, primarily Jacob). In contrast, in contexts where the hitpael is found, the channel of blessing is the promised "seed" through whom the anticipated blessing will be communicated directly (cf. Ps. 72:17; Jer. 4:2). Thus the hitpael form of the promise may be understood as action done on one's own behalf (i.e. a "benefactive reflexive," *IBHS*, §26.2e) and translated as "in your seed all the nations of the earth will acquire blessing for themselves," whereas the niphal may be understood as middle, "through you all the families of the earth will experience blessing."[27]

Williamson's arguments against a reflexive value for the *niphal* forms are cogent and sound. His proposition that the choice of the form of the verb is probably not arbitrary is also valid. Nonetheless, the notion that in the instances of the *niphal* the blessing is communicated less directly than in the instances of the *hithpael* is less than satisfying and flounders on the fact

that the “seed” is part of the proposition in Genesis 28:14, despite the caveat of Williamson.

The analysis of Chee-Chiew Lee is better and moreover is, in general, backed up by the exhaustive and exhausting study by Keith N. Grüneberg on Genesis 12:3 and its reiterations in the Old Testament. Lee says,

> I take the Niphal to be passive (“they shall be blessed”) and the Hitpael to be estimative-declarative reflexive (“they shall declare themselves as blessed”) for the following reasons. First, although there is definitely a semantic overlap between the pairs of words (גוי/מִשְׁפָּחָה, אדמה/ארץ, התברכו/נברכו) in Gen 12:3b and its reiterations, it can be established that the variations are intentional and bear a slight difference in nuance. For example, מִשְׁפָּחָה אדמה [sic] is used in Gen 12:3b as a link to Genesis 1–11, especially to Genesis 10–11. מִשְׁפָּחָה occurs five times in Genesis 10, of which it occurs four times together with גוי, portraying how each clan of people eventually evolved into a nation. It is also used in Gen 28:14 as an *inclusio* to Gen 12:3b. To show further the continuity of the later reiterations of this blessing with the Table of Nations (Genesis 10), Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4 use גויי הארץ instead of מִשְׁפָּחָת האדמה. As גוי carries strong political overtones, it is therefore natural to use it with ארץ, which has stronger political connotations than אדמה. Second, the patriarchal narrative repeatedly portrays how other people are blessed or cursed by God on account of Abraham and his descendants (examples include Abimelech, Laban, Potiphar, Pharaoh, and Egypt). Furthermore, Laban declared himself as blessed by God due to Jacob (Gen 30:27). Nowhere in the narrative do we see people actively seeking blessing for themselves by their association with Abraham or invoking his name as a formula and paradigm of blessing as a middle or direct reflexive reading would entail. Therefore the passive Niphal and the estimative-declarative Hitpael best fit the context of Genesis. This understanding of the force of the Niphal and the Hitpael is essential to our understanding of how the motif of the blessing for the nations is developed later.[28]

As in the case of Williamson, Lee's arguments against a reflexive *niphal* are also cogent, but Lee's explanation of the motivation for using either *hithpael* or *niphal* better suits the contextual and linguistic data in the text of Genesis. We conclude, then, that the *niphal* forms are passive ("they shall be blessed") and that the *hithpael* are estimative-declarative reflexive ("they shall consider/declare themselves as blessed").[29]

Blessing

In the first three verses of Genesis 12, the word "blessing" occurs five times. As Dumbrell notes, the choice and use of the term is doubtless deliberate, playing on the notion of the power of the word. His comment is apt:

> In Gen. 12:2a God blesses Abram and here the notion of blessing is bound up with nationhood and fame. As a result Abram is thus to be the embodiment of blessing, the example of what blessing should be (v. 2b). God will bless those who rightly recognize the source of Abram's blessing (3a), and then finally in 12:3b Abram becomes the mediator of blessing for mankind.[30]

What is actually meant by "blessing"? Blessing is connected with life, just as cursing brings death. So what would blessing mean in the ancient Near East in Abraham's time? Does "blessing" mean a full, long life, the good life in the sense of having good health, having a big family to look after one as a senior, attaining business success (i.e., big flocks and herds or crops that are abundant), acquiring land, having power and victory over one's enemies? If we convert these ideas into our modern society, what would blessing mean? Does blessing mean staying healthy, attaining business success, being surrounded by a circle of friends (on Facebook?), having influence and power, having a big house and car, having better sex?

Bruce Waltke explains that "the term 'to bless' (*brk*) with God as subject denotes procreative largesse and victory, accompanied with a sense of loyalty to the future generations (Gen. 1:28; 26:24; 27:27–29)."[31] Significantly, however, he adds that "it also connotes redemption, a relationship with God that transforms the beneficiary and provides

security."[32] Dumbrell notes this important aspect too. As Abraham's life unfolds, we begin to see what blessing means. Blessing operates in the context of a covenant relationship with God. Blessings are the manifestation of faithfulness, fidelity, and solidarity in relationships whereby one's natural and personal capacity to fulfill God's intention and purpose is advanced and furthered.[33] God's word to Abram is powerful, enabling the calling to be fulfilled.

Curse and Blessing

In our study of Genesis 12:1–3, we just noted that the word "blessing" occurs five times in that text (Gen. 12:2 [2x], 3 [3x]). What is interesting and noteworthy is that the antonym "curse" (*'ārar*) occurs precisely five times in Genesis 1–11 (3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25). H. W. Wolff has pointed out the significance of the curse in Genesis 1–11.[34] The curse in 3:14 brought the loss of freedom and power, as well as certain defeat and humiliation (for the serpent). In 3:17, the curse effected an alienation between humans and the soil. Further, in 4:11, Cain was cursed from the land, resulting in estrangement from human society as he became a nomad and wanderer. Noah's curse of Canaan brought further degradation and shame, as Canaan was to be the lowest of slaves. Cumulative deprivation and increasing loss is therefore associated with the word "curse," bringing man from Eden to Babel. The fivefold repetition of the word "blessing" in Genesis 12:1–3 indicates that the call of Abram will change this situation: broken relationships are to be potentially and progressively repaired. The ruptured relationships that had developed between man and God and man and man are to be eventually restored. The new powerful word calling Abram out of Ur is to annul the curse of chapters 1–11.

There is, then, in Genesis 12:1–3 a causal relationship between the first group of three promises and the second group of three promises. God's plan to bless Abram and his family is a means to bring blessing and salvation to all the nations.[35] Paul House comments appropriately on the divine choice of Abram and the decision to bless him and his family: "Election here does not exclude or condemn anyone. Rather it works exclusively as a benefit to a world that has no intention of doing what is right."[36]

Abram and the City of God

The call of Abram in Genesis 12:1–3 consists of two commands ("go" [12:1] and "be" a blessing [12:2]). Each command is followed by three promises. The first promise is "I will make you into a great nation," and the last promise is "All the clans/families of the earth will be blessed in you" (12:1, 3). We need to pay attention to the terms used here to describe both the people of God and the other peoples of the world. God promises to make Abram into a great "nation"; this is the word *gôy* in Hebrew. The other people groups of the world are called "clans" or "families"; here the Hebrew term is *mišpāḥâ*.

First, consider the term *gôy*, or "nation." It is highly unusual for this term to be applied to the people of God. There is in the language of the Old Testament a completely consistent usage: the word *'am* is almost always reserved for Israel. It is a *kinship* term that expresses effectively the closeness of the family/marriage relationship between God and Israel established by the covenant made at Sinai (Exodus 24). On the other hand, the word *gôy* is the standard term for the communities or other societies in the world, excluding Israel. So consistent is this use, that when we see something different, we need to ask why. For example, there are instances where the term *gôy* is applied to Israel in a pejorative sense. Sometimes Israel is called "nation" and not "people" because the author may wish to communicate that because of her wickedness, Israel is behaving as if she were *not* the people of God. Her actions and attitudes indicate that she is like those communities who have no special status as the chosen people of God (e.g., Judg. 2:20).

Why, then, in Genesis 12 does God speak of Abram becoming a great *gôy*, or nation? The basic meaning of *gôy* is an *organized* community of people having *governmental*, *political*, and *social structure*. This word contrasts with the derogatory term for the other nations, *mišpāḥâ*, in Genesis 12. This word refers to an amorphous kin group larger than an extended family and smaller than a tribe.

The background of Genesis 12 is chapters 10 and 11. There we have the history of Babel, where we see a complete confidence and naive optimism about human achievement and effort. Man is at the center of his world, and

he can achieve anything. This philosophy comes under divine judgment in Genesis 11 and results in the nations being lost and scattered over the face of the earth (Gen. 10; 11:9). By contrast, Genesis 12 presents a political structure brought into being by the word of God, with God at the center and God as the governmental head and rule of that community. In other words, we have the kingdom of God brought into being by means of the covenant (i.e., the covenant between God and Abram). Hence, we have *kingdom through covenant*.

The promise in Genesis 12:3 is cited or quoted several times in later texts of the Old Testament. In Genesis 28:14, the nations of the world are also called *mišpaḥôt*, to form an *inclusio* with Genesis 12:3 and mark off a literary section. However, in Genesis 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; Jeremiah 4:2; and Psalm 72:17—the five other texts directly referring to Genesis 12:3—the nations of the world are called by the more common and normal term, *gôyim*. This shows that the author has a real purpose in Genesis 12:3 in using the term *mišpaḥôt*: he wants to indicate that the kingdoms of this world will never amount to anything; only the kingdom of God will last forever. The author's choice of terms emphasizes that the family of Abram is a real kingdom with eternal power and significance, while the so-called kingdoms of this world are of no lasting power or significance.

This interpretation is backed up by the work of Eberhard Ruprecht, a German scholar who has detected in the promises that the Lord made to Abram a royal ideology. What Abram was promised in Genesis 12 was the hope of many oriental monarchs (cf. 2 Sam. 7:9; Ps. 72:17).[37]

The word in Hellenistic Greek that best conveys this meaning is the term *polis*, or "city." In our modern world we tend to think of cities as great centers of population in contrast to the rural areas, which by definition are sparsely populated. In contrast to the modern notion, the term "city" in the first century conveyed the idea of an organized community with governmental headship and appropriate political and social structure—what we normally convey by the English word *state*. Thus the promises of God to Abram really did entail the *city of God*, and the author to the Hebrews is accurately explaining for his readers the author's intended meaning in Genesis 12. Abraham was to go to a country that God would indicate to him

and reside there—even if as an alien and a stranger: he was awaiting "the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10).

In Genesis 15 and 17, the great promises to Abram will be enshrined in a divine-human covenant between God and Abraham. For now, in chapter 12, we note that although the context, expressions, idioms, and language are completely different from the creation narrative and the image of God in Genesis 1:26–28, the *ideas* are identical. Abram (and the nation that comes from him) constitutes an *Adamic* figure, indeed the last Adam, since there are no major new starts after this. God intends to establish his rule over all his creation through his relationship with Abram and his family: kingdom through covenant. Through blessing Abram and his descendants, the broken relationship between God and all the nations of the world will be reconciled and healed. As we will soon see, the covenant entails not only a relationship with God that can be described as sonship but also a relationship to the rest of creation that entails kingship in establishing the rule of God.

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1. Brian Walsh, "The Church in a Postmodern Age: Ten Things You Need to Know," in *Good Idea! A Resource Sheet on Evangelism and Church Growth* 3/4 (Toronto: Wycliffe College Institute of Evangelism, 1996), 1–5.
2. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 262.
3. William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 58.
4. N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 21–23.
5. Genesis Rabbah 14.6.
6. See Romans 5:12–21 and 1 Corinthians 15. In 1 Corinthians 15:45–48, Paul contrasts "the first man Adam" with "the last Adam" and "the first man" with "the second man." Jesus Christ is not the second Adam—that was Noah—but rather the *last* Adam. And in terms of contrasting the new creation with the old creation, he is the second man.
7. See Matthew A. Thomas, *These Are the Generations: Identity, Covenant, and the "Toledot" Formula*, LHBOTS 551 (New York: T&T Clark, 2011); Jason DeRouchie, "The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis," *JETS* 56, no. 2 (2013): 219–47.
8. See Peter J. Gentry, "The System of the Finite Verb in Classical Biblical Hebrew," *HS* 39 (1998): 7–39.
9. See Stephen G. Dempster, "Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative: A Discourse Analysis of Narrative from the Classical Period" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1985).
10. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC 1B (Nashville: B&H, 2005), 107n51.
11. Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 572.
12. Also discussed in Gentry, "System of the Finite Verb," 7–39.
13. Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 149. The issue is not addressed in Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).
14. See Hélène Dallaire, "The Syntax of Volitives in Northwest Semitic Prose" (PhD diss., Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, OH, 2002); Ahouva Shulman, "The Use of Modal Verb Forms in Biblical Hebrew Prose" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1996). The results of these studies supersede the grammar of Waltke and O'Connor in regard to volitives in Hebrew. Another recent study by Joel S. Baden provides analysis based on the author's own research on all volitives in the prose of Genesis–Kings, Jeremiah, Jonah, Zechariah, Malachi, Ruth, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. "The Morpho-Syntax of Genesis 12:1–3: Translation and Interpretation," *CBQ* 72, no. 2 (2010): 223–37. Unfortunately, Baden does not seem aware of the

excellent work of Shulman and Dallaire and does not further grammatical knowledge or contribute much to interpretation of the text, as he misses key literary cues.

15. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 1960), 10.29 (40).

16. The only direct reference to "be a blessing" elsewhere is Zech. 8:13. This reference in Zechariah shows that it is possible to construe the form in Gen. 12:2 as a command: "Be a blessing!"

17. Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 78–79.

18. On the meaning of different sequences of Hebrew volitives, see Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), §107; Allen P. Ross, *Introducing Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), §20.7; Paul Joüon, *Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1923), §116.

19. For וַֽיְהִי, see Ex. 18:19; 1 Sam. 18:17; Isa. 33:2; Pss. 30:11; 31:3; 71:3; Eccles. 7:14; for וְהָיָה, see Gen. 17:1; Ex. 24:12; 34:2; Judg. 17:10; 18:19.

20. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 149.

21. Ibid., 314.

22. After writing this section I came across arguments by Alexander that Abraham functions as a priest. In addition to what I have noted, he states, "Abraham encounters God on various occasions and receives divine communications (Gen. 12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:1, 4–5, 7, 9, 13–16, 18–21; 17:1–22; 18:1–33; 21:12–13; 22:1, 12, 15–18). His special relationship with God suggests he enjoys a status equivalent to that of a priest, although he is never designated as one." T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), 83. While I agree fully with the last sentence, the fact that Abraham receives communications from God could also be construed to show that he is a prophet (cf. Gen. 20:7).

23. Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 132.

24. I am indebted to Stephen Kempf for drawing my attention to this parallel. We may also note that "the men of renown" (אַנְשֵׁי הַשֵּׁם) in Gen. 6:4 have been considered kings by some scholars; see Waltke, *Genesis*, 115–18.

25. For further development of this theme in Genesis, see T. Desmond Alexander, "The Regal Dimension of the תולדות־יעקב: Recovering the Literary Context of Genesis 37–50," in *Reading the Law: Studies in Honour of Gordon J. Wenham*, ed. J. G. McConville and Karl Möller, LHBOTS 461 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 254–66.

26. For this discussion I am indebted to J. Gordon McConville, "Abraham and Melchizedek: Horizons in Genesis 14," in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12–50*, ed. R. S. Hess, G. J. Wenham, and P. E. Satterthwaite, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1993, 1994), 93–118; Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 80–83.

27. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 80–81.

28. Chee-Chiew Lee, "גוים in Genesis 35:11 and the Abrahamic Promise of Blessings for the Nations," *JETS* 52, no. 3 (2009): 472. See also Keith N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in Its Narrative Context*, BZAW 332 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003).

29. Moberly interprets the *niphals* in light of the *hithpaels* in Genesis 22:18 and 26:4; see R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Moberly is followed by Joel N. Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen: Conceptions of Election in the Pentateuch and Jewish-Christian Interpretation*, Siphrut 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 113. Moberly's analysis is rejected by his student Keith N. Grüneberg, who, in *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations*, distinguishes *niphal* meaning from *hithpael* in these texts. Nonetheless, the analysis of Lee (above) is superior.

30. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 67–68.

31. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 316.

32. Ibid.

33. See Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 68.

34. H. W. Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist," *Int* 20, no. 2 (1966): 131–58.

35. One of my professors never understood this, citing the rhyme, "How odd of God to choose the Jews."

36. Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 73.

37. See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 275; Eberhard Ruprecht, "Vorgegebene Tradition und Theologische Gestaltung in Genesis XII 1–3," *VT* 29, no. 2 (1979): 171–88; Ruprecht, "Der Traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund der Einzelnen Elemente von Genesis XII 2–3," *VT* 29, no. 4 (1979): 444–64.

8

The Covenant with Abraham (2)

The larger story of Scripture begins with a creator God who is the Maker of our world and all that is in it. Humans are the crown of his work. Moreover, human creatures differ from all other creatures: we alone have been made as the image of this creator God, entailing a covenant relationship with God and with all creation that results in a particular role and special tasks in the world. The first humans, however, rebelled against the creator God. As a result, there is chaos and discord in the creation at every level, bringing destruction and death.

The destructive path chosen by the first humans led continually downward until divine intervention was required. God judged the human race and made a new beginning with Noah and his family. Noah is portrayed as a new Adam. As soon as the dry land appears out of the chaos of waters, Noah is placed there and commanded to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 9:1); that is, he is given Adam's commission or mandate. Eventually, however, the family of Noah ends up in the same chaos and corruption as the family of the first Adam.

So God makes another new start, with Abram and his family. Abraham and his family, called Israel, are another Adam, who will be God's true humanity. The seed of Abraham, Israel, is in fact the last Adam, because there will be no major new starts for the human race from this point. Israel will display to the rest of the world within its covenant community the kind of relationships—first to God and then to one another—as well as stewardship of the ecosystem, that God originally intended for all humanity. In fact, through Abraham's seed God plans to bring blessing to all the

nations of the world. In this way, through the family of Abraham, through Israel, his last Adam, he will bring about a resolution of the sin and death caused by the first Adam. The fact that the blessing to the nations through Abraham and his family included dealing with the sin and death caused by the first Adam is not *plainly* stated until much later, such as in the passages relating to the suffering servant in Isaiah (Isa. 42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12).

Earlier, we noted four key points in the Abraham narratives:

1. Giving the promise: The call of Abram (Genesis 12)
2. Making the covenant: The promise of descendants and land (Genesis 15)
3. Affirming the covenant: The sign of circumcision (Genesis 17)
4. Abraham's obedience and confirmation of the promises by oath (Genesis 22)

In chapter 7, we considered the call of Abram and the promises given to him, recorded in Genesis 12. Now, in Genesis 15, the divine promises are enshrined in a covenant between Yahweh and Abram that is affirmed and upheld in Genesis 17. We need to trace the development of the covenant relationship between God and Abram and the progress of Abram's faithfulness and love in this relationship.

Making the Covenant: The Promise of Descendants and Land (Genesis 15)

The literary structure of Genesis 15 is clear. The text is divided in half, and each half has an identical pattern and structure. First, the Lord reveals himself to Abram (by vision) and makes promises. Second, Abram responds in complaint, asking about the fulfillment of God's promises. Third, God expands and extends his revelation a second time, affirming and reiterating his promises. Each half, then, has a (chiastic) tripartite structure in which the first and last parts are matching. The promises in the first half are centered on the gift of descendants; the promises in the second half are centered on the gift of land. The covenant, therefore, enshrines the promises given in Genesis 12, with a focus on the fulfillment of the first three

promises in Genesis 12:1–3, that is, a focus on the divine promises particularly to Abram himself.

Outline of Genesis 15

Part 1—Seed/Descendants 15:1–6
- **a** God reveals himself and makes promises 15:1
  - **b** Abram's complaint and question 15:2–3
- **a'** God's revelation and confirmation 15:4–6

Part 2—Land 15:7–19
- **a** God reveals himself and makes promises 15:7
  - **b** Abram's complaint and question 15:8
- **a'** God's revelation and confirmation 15:9–19

God's Promises and Abraham's Faith (Gen. 15:1–6)

Genesis 15 begins with the words "after these things," referring to the victory over the four kings from the east recorded in chapter 14. Thus, sometime following the defeat of these kings, Yahweh communicates to Abram by means of a vision. The translation in the King James Version, followed by such newer versions as the NKJV and NIV, can be greatly improved at this point. The KJV rendering is as follows:

> After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield, *and* thy exceeding great reward. (Gen. 15:1)

First, the italicized "am" indicates a verbless clause in Hebrew, and the italicized "and" denotes a word not in the original text. The KJV construes the original Hebrew as one verbless clause with "I" as subject and "thy shield" and "thy exceeding great reward" as the predicate. This is not a likely or plausible reading of the Hebrew text. The fact that "and" is not in the text signals a new, separate verbless clause in which "your reward" is subject and "very great" is the predicate. The lack of a clause connector (asyndeton) is not unusual in such a sequence of verbless clauses. God commands Abram not to be afraid. This is backed up by two statements: (1) God will protect him, and (2) God will reward him.

Both the command and the promises relate directly to the events of chapter 14. Will the "four big bad guys from the east" be back next year to take their vengeance on Abram? Certainly, the fear of reprisal is both real and significant. Yahweh will be Abram's shield. He will protect Abram from possible retaliation. Second, at the end of Genesis 14, Abram took none of the spoils of the victory that were his by right. He wanted his sources of wealth to come from the Lord and not from the king of Sodom. So Yahweh promises Abram that he will reward him. He is not saying that he, Yahweh, is Abram's reward instead of the spoils of victory. He is saying that he will give something to Abram that will compensate for the fact that he took none of these spoils. That this is the correct interpretation is clear from Abram's response. He says, "What will you *give* me?" not "How will you be my reward?" Abram is exasperated: Yahweh has made big promises, but he is anxiously waiting for the beginning of this great nation to reveal itself by the birth of at least *one baby*.

Yahweh responds to Abram's complaint with another night revelation. Asking Abram to count the stars, if he is able, Yahweh promises that Abram's descendants will be as numerous as the sand on the seashore or the stars of the night sky. At this point, all the Lord is doing is repeating the promise in grandiose terms. Yet Abram is hanging on to this. Genesis 15:6 could be rendered, "Now Abram *was believing* in Yahweh, and he credited it to him as righteousness." Kenneth Mathews describes the discourse grammar involved:

> The syntax of the verb *wĕhe'ĕmin* diverts from the typical pattern found in past tense narrative. The force of the construction conveys an ongoing faith repeated from the past. The author is editorializing on the events reported, not including Abram's faith in the chain of events as a consequence of the theophanic message.[1]

Thus Genesis 15:6 reports that Abram is, as a general rule, still strapped into the roller coaster and hanging on to his ride of faith.

An alternative view is that the *waw*-consecutive perfect *wĕhe'ĕmin*, due to its imperfective aspect, marks prominence pragmatically and so indicates something such as the climax in the narrative sequence.[2] Following this

view, 15:6 would be the climax of the sequence in Genesis 15:1–6. New research on the Hebrew verbal system supports this interpretation even if read as a conjunction plus simple past tense.[3] William Dumbrell speaks of Abram's act/attitude as a response of further trust.[4]

The Covenant-Making Ceremony (Gen. 15:7–19)

Verse 7 begins the second half of Genesis 15, and again Yahweh communicates to Abram, repeating the promise of land made clear and explicit in Genesis 12:7. Again, Abram is exasperated: How will he know for sure that this promise will be fulfilled? So far in his experience, there is no evidence of its reality. Again, Yahweh repeats his promise, but he does so by enshrining it within a covenant.

The ceremony or ritual described here is somewhat strange. Nonetheless, as Genesis 15:18 clearly states, this ceremony formalizes a covenant between God and Abram. The normal or standard terminology "to cut a covenant" (*kārat bĕrît*) is used. The interpretation of this mysterious rite is much discussed. The ceremony of covenant making involves an oath in which the covenant partners bring the curse of death on themselves if they are not faithful to the covenant relationship and promises. Walking between the animals cut in half is a way of saying, "May I become like these dead animals if I do not keep my promise(s) and my oath." Scholars describe this as a self-maledictory oath, that is, an oath where one brings the curse of death on oneself for violating the covenant commitments. The detail with which covenant-making ceremonies are described varies from text to text. The covenant making in Jeremiah 34:18–20 is also explicit about walking between the pieces of the animal sacrificed for the rite:

> Those who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces. The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, I will deliver into the hands of their enemies who want to kill them. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds and the wild animals. (NIV)

In the vision given to Abram, a “smoking firepot and a blazing torch” pass between the dead pieces. What would these represent? When we remember that Genesis was a book given to the Israelite people at the time of entering the land of Canaan, we can see from that perspective—that is, after the exodus event—that smoke and fire are symbols of God’s presence. The angel of the Lord first appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush (Ex. 3:2). During the desert journey, God appears as a cloud of smoke and fire (Ex. 13:21). At Mount Sinai, his presence is manifested by smoke and fire (Ex. 19:18; 20:18). The fact that only God passes between the pieces is quite remarkable and shows that the promise depends on him and him alone.

There may, however, be more to this mysterious rite than that. One commentator, Gordon Wenham, stirred my thinking with the following questions:

> While this interpretation could explain the phrase, “to cut a covenant,” it leaves many features of this rite unexplained. It does not explain the choice of these particular animals. Why are only sacrificial types selected? Why must they be three years old? Why are the birds not cut up? Why does Abram drive off the birds of prey? Finally it must be asked whether a divine self-imprecation is really likely. Is it compatible with OT theology for God to say “May I die, if I do not keep my word”? Divine oaths generally take the form, “As I live, says the LORD” (cf. Num. 14:21).[5]

Wenham further notes that every kind of clean sacrificial animal used in Israel’s worship was involved. He suggests that the animals represent Israel. The birds of prey represent the attacks of foreign nations. Abram defends his descendants against foreign attackers. Similarly, Gideon sacrificed a seven-year-old bull to represent the seven years of Midianite oppression (Judg. 6:1, 25). Later on, the deliverance of the exodus is explained as God keeping his oath to Abraham (Ex. 2:24; Deut. 9:5). The animals are three years old, representing the three generations spent in Egypt. The fire and smoke passing between the animal halves represents God walking in the midst of his people (Lev. 26:12).[6]

Recent scholarship has backed away from viewing the ceremony as a self-maledictory oath. Correlating the rite in Genesis 15 with the rite in Jeremiah 34 led some to date the Genesis narrative to Jeremiah's time rather than to the period appropriate to the patriarchs (ca. 2000 BC). Significant articles by Gerard Hasel and Richard Hess have attempted to show that the account in Genesis 15 corresponds better to cultural evidence known from second millennium BC texts than to that from the neo-Assyrian and Aramaic treaties of the first millennium.[7] This attempt is only partially fruitful, as the data have become somewhat skewed in the ensuing exegesis. Hasel claims,

> Jer 34:18–19, however, is definite and clear on one point: Only one covenanting party, namely, "the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land" (vs 19) passed between the parts of the cut bull-calf. The similarity between Jer 34:18–19 and Genesis 15:17 rests in the fact that in each case one party passed between the pieces.

Unfortunately, Hasel is entirely mistaken. The only parties making the treaty in Jeremiah 34:8–22 are the persons listed in 34:19. This was not a covenant made *between* these parties and God. It was a covenant made by these parties *before* God (34:15), and in failing to release their slaves, they violated the Mosaic covenant. It is the Mosaic covenant that is between the people and God. That is the clear meaning of 34:18. So in Jeremiah 34, all the parties making the treaty pass between the pieces, and in Genesis 15, only God passes between the pieces. The slaves may have been beneficiaries of the covenant made by the leaders and the people, but they were not parties to the covenant. Mathews's commentary is an excellent example of research that builds on the studies by Hasel and Hess but like them ends up "throwing the baby out with the bathwater."

It is necessary and useful to cite Mathews in full and to critique this confusion of the data in important texts dealing with covenants:

> The word "pieces" (*beter*) appears in the similar ritual described in Jer 34:18–19. Often scholars appropriate the rite of Jeremiah 34 as the template for explaining the practice in Genesis 15. Two wordplays

describe the practice in Jeremiah. A calf was "cut" (*kārat*, v. 18) into pieces, formalizing a covenant that was "cut" ("made," NIV, i.e., "to cut a covenant," *kārat bĕrît*) between God and the leadership of Judah regarding the freeing of Hebrew slaves. Because they acted treacherously, the people are deemed "transgressors" (*hā'ōbĕrîm*, NIV "the men who have violated," v. 18) who had "walked between" (*hā'ōbĕrîm*, v. 18) the parts signifying acceptance of the sanctions of transgressing the covenant. The threat of death, like the gruesome results of the slaughtered calf, awaited them (v. 18). The Lord threatens that "the birds [*'ôp*] of the air" will feast on the violaters' dead flesh (v. 20). This imprecatory aspect of the symbolic slaying has parallels with Assyrian and Aramaic vassal treaties of the first millennium. For this reason Genesis 15 is usually dated at the time of Jeremiah or later.

There are, however, significant differences between the practices in the patriarchal account and Jeremiah that make doubtful this conclusion. Although the Jeremiah passage involves the slaughter of a calf and mentions birds, the practice in chap. 15 calls for several animals. Also the description of the ritual cleaving in 15:10 uses the term *bātar* (NIV "cut in two") instead of Jeremiah's word *kārat* (NIV "made") occurring in the idiomatic expression "cut a covenant" (34:18). Also importantly, the threat of curse for failure to observe the covenant is not explicit in chap. 15. When read in light of Jeremiah 34's imprecatory character, it may be implied that God submits to his own self-imprecation by passing through the parts. It is difficult, however, to reconcile this idea of God theologically and impossible to explain how the imprecation could be carried out. More promising are the examples of second-millennium texts from Alalakh involving an oath by a superior that is confirmed by slaying a lamb or sheep. If the Abram incident compares to these promissory oaths, Genesis describes a covenant pledge undertaken by God that is formally ratified by animal slaughter (cp. Ex. 24:3–8).

There are still significant features of Genesis 15 that diverge from the oath rituals at Alalakh. The number and sort of animals and the halving procedure of chap. 15 have no parallel yet found in the ancient Near East. Although the rite of chap. 15 ostensibly affirms the

> covenant oath, the prophecy that follows (vv. 13–16) hints at an emblematic significance attached to the rite's peculiarities. From hindsight we know that the prophecy previews Israel's Egyptian bondage, exodus, and conquest. Most agree that the smoking firepot and burning torch represent the Lord, a picture corresponding to the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire indicating the presence of God in the wilderness (e.g., Ex. 13:21–22). The "birds of prey" Abram disperses indicate a threat against the slaughtered animals. "Birds of prey (*'ayiṭ*) differ from the general terms for "birds" (*ṣippôr*, v. 10; *'ôp*, Jer 34:20) by their ravenous character (Isa. 18:6; Jer 12:9) and are unclean. In the context of the prophecy (vv. 13–16), the animal portions represent Abram's descendants, and the birds of prey are the nation (Egypt) that enslaves them. The appearance of Abram as defender of the animal portions may refer to his obedient piety that confirmed his loyalty and ensured Israel's future (e.g., 22:16–18) or his intercessory function as prophet (e.g., 18:16–33; 20:7, 17). Since Abram does not walk through the pieces, he is not under obligation to the Lord to realize the promises. By the passing of the firepot through the severed pieces, the Lord's presence with enslaved Israel symbolically ensures the preservation and deliverance of Abram's descendants.[8]

An exhaustive analysis of all texts in the Old Testament dealing with covenants (such as the present study) reveals, first, that certain features of covenant making are constant throughout this period of time (2000–400 BC) alongside a changing typology of covenant documents and, second, that alongside the constant and standard features of covenant making, each instance may have its own peculiar variations. In addition, since the authors considered the details of the rituals to be background information that their audiences already understood, no single passage includes all the features of covenant making. Each narrator relates only what is relevant to his purpose in the context of his storyline. A full picture of the constant features of covenant making can be derived only by consideration of all covenant-making contexts.

Abram belongs to ca. 2000 BC and Jeremiah to 600 BC. Standard features are common to both of these covenant-making rituals. An animal is

cut, and covenant-making parties pass or walk between the pieces of the dead animal. Both texts employ the standard terminology *kārat bĕrît*, "to cut a covenant." These commonalties attest to age-old cultural data in the ancient Near East. The Old Testament is part of that cultural data even if no other texts from the Near East specifically mention "halving an animal." Why should the accounts describe what is assumed by the culture and is therefore unnecessary to describe in most instances? The texts from Alalakh discussed by Hess do not provide all the details either. One text mentions cutting the neck of a lamb (rather than halving it and walking between the pieces), but it is clearly a self-maledictory oath. The covenant partner curses himself if he takes back what he is giving in the property grant of the treaty.[9]

In Genesis 21:22–34, Abram and Abimelech make a treaty together, which we have already discussed. The ceremony is not described in detail. We are told, "Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant" (21:27 ESV). Presumably, they cut the animals in half and then walked between the pieces just as in Genesis 15 and Jeremiah 34. (Or maybe they cut the necks as in the Alalakh texts? Either way, the ceremony still involved a self-maledictory oath.) Such culturally understood details need not be described in full for the readers. The animals were not gifts to Abimelech, because Abraham set aside seven ewe lambs as a gift (Gen. 21:28–30). This was unusual, and Abimelech called for an explanation. Abraham told him they were a witness that he had dug the disputed well. So here, too, we see features that are constant to covenant making alongside features that suit a peculiar set of circumstances.

Possibly quite similar to the covenant making of Genesis 21 is a document from Mari, ca. eighteenth century BC. This brief text reads as follows: "I had a donkey foal, the young of a she-ass, slaughtered, I (thus) established peace between the Haneans and the Idamaraṣ."[10] Here a suzerain has sent his lieutenant to supervise a covenant-ratification ceremony between two of the suzerain's vassals. The ceremony or ritual itself is not described in full.[11] Why should it be? Mathews's comment, therefore, that "the number and sort of animals and the halving procedure of

chap. 15 have no parallel yet found in the ancient Near East" has little value. No details are provided in Genesis 21 either, but they are in Genesis 15 *because the fact that only one party passes between the pieces is remarkable*. The details are important in this text and are therefore given in full.

The differences adduced by Mathews between Jeremiah 34 and Genesis 15 only prevent correct interpretation of Genesis 15. The vocabulary differences that he lists are due to the author's wordplay in Jeremiah 34 on the one hand and the prophetic symbolism Yahweh wished to convey by the ceremony in Genesis 15 on the other. Nonetheless, both texts use the same standard covenant-making terminology. A calf in Jeremiah 34 is more suitable to a covenant made at a national level. Similarly, oxen and sheep are used in the ceremony between Abraham and Abimelech in Genesis 21. The animals in Genesis 15, however, are chosen for a specific symbolism, as explained by Wenham and appropriated by Mathews. Thus, the evidence does not indicate that we are mistakenly "appropriating the rite of Jeremiah 34 as the template for explaining the practice in Genesis 15."[12]

That the idea of God taking a self-maledictory oath is difficult theologically only shows that we should exercise restraint in imposing on the text our notions of what is possible and right for God. It is also difficult to reconcile theologically that God asks Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice in Genesis 22. May not a critical approach to the text preclude the narrator's right to build mystery and tension into his storyline?

While Mathews asserts that in Genesis 15 the concept of a self-maledictory oath is not explicit, this argument bears no weight. If one can boldly interpret the symbolism of the special features of the ceremony as Mathews does, why not the standard features that are constant in the Old Testament for more than 1,500 years? It seems that a concern to defend a conservative dating for Genesis 15 against interpretation by more critical scholars has resulted in a skewed picture of its meaning.

Conclusion

Ray Vander Laan has nicely expressed the powerful communication of the covenant-making ritual in Genesis 15:

> What an awesome God we have! What incredible love he has for his creatures!
>
> Imagine! The Creator of the universe, the holy and righteous God, was willing to leave heaven and come down to a nomad's tent in the dusty, hot desert of Negev to express his love for his people.
>
> "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram . . . along with a dove and a young pigeon," God told Abraham. Then, when those animals had been sacrificed and laid out on both sides of their shed blood, God made a covenant. To do that, he walked "barefoot," in the form of a blazing torch, through the path of blood between the animals.
>
> Think of it. Almighty God walking barefoot through a pool of blood! The thought of a human being doing that is, to say the least, unpleasant. Yet God, in all his power and majesty, expressed his love that personally. By participating in that traditional, Near Eastern covenant-making ceremony, he made it unavoidably clear to the people of that time, place and culture what he intended to do.
>
> "I love you so much, Abraham," God was saying, "and I promise that this covenant will come true for you and your children. I will never break My covenant with you. I'm willing to put My own life on the line to make you understand."
>
> Picturing God passing through that gory path between the carcasses of animals, imagining the blood splashing as he walked, helps us recognize the faithfulness of God's commitment. He was willing to express, in terms his chosen people could understand, that he would never fail to do what he promised. And he ultimately fulfilled his promise by giving his own life, his own blood, on the cross.
>
> Because we look at God's dealings with Abraham as some remote piece of history in a far-off land, we often fail to realize that we, too, are part of the long line of people with whom God made a covenant on that rocky plain near Hebron. And like those who came before us, we have broken that covenant.
>
> When he walked in the dust of the desert and through the blood of the animals Abraham had slaughtered, God was making a promise to

all the descendants of Abraham—to everyone in the household of faith. When God splashed through the blood, he did it for *us*.

We're not simply individuals in relationship to God, we're part of a long line of people marching back through history, from our famous Jewish ancestors David, Hezekiah, and Peter to the millions of unknown believers; from the ancient Israelites and the Jewish people of Jesus' day to the Christian community dating from the early church. We're part of a community of people with whom God established relationship in the dust and sand of the Negev.

But there's more. When God made covenant with his people, he did something no human being would have even considered doing. In the usual blood covenant, each party was responsible for keeping only his side of the promise. When God made covenant with Abraham, however, he promised to keep *both* sides of the agreement.

"If this covenant is broken, Abraham, for whatever reason—for My unfaithfulness or yours—I will pay the price," said God. "If you or your descendants, for whom you are making this covenant, fail to keep it, I will pay the price in blood."

And at that moment, Almighty God pronounced the death sentence on his Son Jesus.[13]

Affirming the Covenant: The Sign of Circumcision (Genesis 17)

The covenant between God and Abraham made in Genesis 15 is affirmed and upheld in Genesis 17. The precise relationship between Genesis 15 and 17 is debated. Before this relationship can be adequately articulated, however, we must consider the literary structure of this text, the exegetical details of the text, and its context in the flow of the narratives dealing with Abraham.

Literary Structure

As with Genesis 15, the literary structure of Genesis 17 is clear. Again, the text is divided in half, and each half has an identical pattern and structure. Again, the Lord communicates to Abram, presumably in a vision, although this is not explicit in the text, as it is in Genesis 15. Yahweh begins by expressing his intention to affirm his covenant promise concerning

descendants. Abram responds by falling on his face. God speaks further about his promises of both descendants and land. He prescribes circumcision to Abraham as a covenant sign. Then the pattern is repeated. Yahweh expresses his intention to bless Sarah with progeny. Again, Abraham falls on his face. God speaks further and announces in particular the birth of a son to Sarah in about a year's time. The section ends with Abraham obeying the instructions concerning circumcision for himself, Ishmael, and his entire household.

Outline of Genesis 17

a Yahweh's intention to confirm his oath about progeny 17:1–2
  b Abram falls on his face 17:3
    c God promises descendants and the gift of land 17:4–8
      d The sign of circumcision given 17:9–14
a' Yahweh's intention to bless Sarah with progeny 17:15–16
  b' Abraham falls on his face 17:17–18
    c' God promises a son from Sarah 17:19–22
      d' The sign of circumcision practiced 17:23–27

Exegesis in Context

Just as the covenant making in chapter 15 came in response to the events preceding in chapter 14, so the covenant confirmation in chapter 17 comes in response to the events in chapter 16, where Sarai and Abram seek descendants through Hagar. In Genesis 17:1, Yahweh appears to Abram and says, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless" (ESV, NIV). Our attention is focused on several things in this text.

The Revelation of El Shaddai

First, Yahweh reveals himself as El Shaddai ("God Almighty"). This is the first occurrence of this divine name in the Scriptures. In an attempt to determine the meaning of the Hebrew term *shaddai*, scholars have argued over the origin of the word and have come to a stalemate. Its meaning, however, can be determined quite well from the usage of the word. This name for God is associated especially and particularly in the Old Testament with the lives of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It seems that

this name was given to encourage faith because of the disparity between the covenant promises and the reality of the situation in which they found themselves at that time. Thus, in this context, Yahweh is the God who intervenes powerfully. It is customary in the Greek Old Testament to translate El Shaddai by "almighty" (παντοκράτωρ),[14] and this expresses the meaning very well. As noted previously, the Abram narratives are presented as a new creation. Out of the post-Babel chaos portrayed by the nations and peoples of the world lost and scattered in the earth, and by the deadness and infertility of Abram and Sarai's bodies, the word of God to Abram is a powerful word bringing something out of nothing.

Walking before God

Second, El Shaddai commands Abram, saying, "Walk before me!" (התהלך לפני). What does it mean to walk before someone? John Walton carefully analyzes the use of this expression throughout the Old Testament:

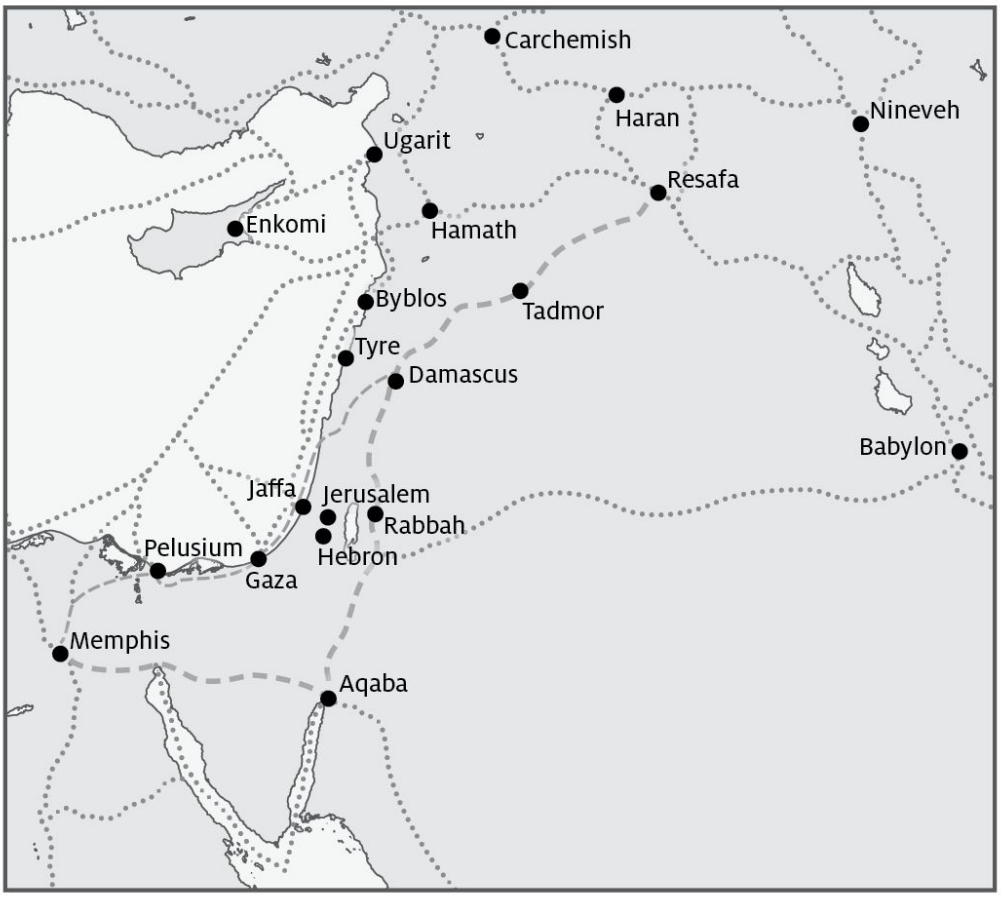
> The Qal (G) stem and Hithpael (HtD) stem occurrences may be considered together because there are related contexts that express the same meaning by using the variant form (cf. Qal usage in 1 Kings 9:4 and Hithpael usage in 2 Kings 20:3). The collocation of verb and preposition occurs nearly thirty times in a wide variety of contexts. These occurrences may be classified as follows:
>
> 1. *People as Object of the Preposition*
>   1. God as pillar of cloud *going before* Israel (Ex. 13:21; etc.) [G]
>   2. God *going before* Israel into the land (Deut. 1:30; 31:8) [G]
>   3. The Army *going before* the priests and the priests before the ark around Jericho (Josh. 6:9, 13) [G]
>   4. Used parallel to "rear guard" (Isa. 52:12; 58:8) [G]
>   5. The purpose of Jacob's gifts to Esau (Gen. 32:21) [G]
>   6. Actual role-conduct of Samuel (1 Sam. 12:2) [HtD]
>   7. Expected role-conduct of new priestly line ("before my anointed" 1 Sam. 2:35) [HtD]
>
> 2. *God as Object of the Preposition*
>   1. Expected role-conduct of Davidic kings (1 Kings 2:4; 8:23, 25; 9:4; 2 Chron. 6:16; 7:17) [G]

2. Actual role-conduct of Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:3; Isa. 38:3) [HtD]
3. Expected-actual role-conduct of the Patriarchs (Gen. 17:1; 24:40; 48:15) [HtD]
4. Expected role-conduct of priests (1 Sam. 2:30) [HtD]
5. Anticipated role-conduct of psalmist who has been delivered (Ps. 56:13 [14]; 116:9) [HtD][15]

The results of Walton's careful study may be summarized as follows. When God walks before someone, this expression means to give guidance and protection. Conversely, when people walk before God, it means that they serve as his emissaries or diplomatic representatives. In Genesis 17:1, God commands Abram to walk before him. Thus, Abram is to be God's agent or diplomatic messenger and representative in the world. When the world looks at Abram, they will see what it is like to have a right relationship to God and to be what God intended for humanity.

To see the significance of the geographical location of the land promised to Abraham and to grasp its importance for the promises given to Abram in Genesis 12, consider a map of the ancient Near East, showing travel routes (figure 8.1):

Figure 8.1 Map of the Ancient Near East



Canaan, the land promised to Abram, is a minuscule piece of property about thirty miles wide and one hundred miles long. The superpowers of the ancient world were on either side: Egypt to the west and Mesopotamia (Assyria and Babylon) to the east. Most of the area between Canaan and Mesopotamia is desert. The only functional routes for commerce and travel between the great superpowers of the ancient world go through the tiny country given to Abram. In modern terms, Abram and his family are to be settled along the *central spine of the internet* in the ancient world. All the communication, commerce, and trade back and forth between Egypt and Mesopotamia will pass through Canaan. And when it does, what are the travelers and traders supposed to see? They are supposed to witness a group of people who demonstrate a right relationship to the one and only true God, a human way of treating each other, and a proper stewardship of the earth's resources.[16] God calls Abram to be a light to the nations. This is the

beginning of his plan to bless all the nations through Abram and his family. Thus the command "walk before me" correlates directly with the command in 12:3 to be a blessing to the nations.

The divine command to Abram in Genesis 17:1 is actually twofold: (1) walk before me, and (2) be blameless. The Hebrew word rendered "blameless" is *tāmîm*. This adjective comes from a root meaning "complete," "entire," or "whole" and denotes a "totality without any diminution."[17] Although the adjective *tāmîm* and the closely related adjective *tām* are not infrequent terms in the Old Testament (*tāmîm* occurs approximately ninety-one times and *tām* fifteen times), use in reference to humans is uncommon since most of the instances concern animals for cultic use. In fact, in all of Genesis, *tāmîm* is found only here (17:1), in reference to Abram, and in 6:9, in reference to Noah—both Adamic figures according to the narrator's literary techniques:

> Noah was a righteous man. He was blameless [*tāmîm*] in his contemporary circles. (Gen. 6:9)

The adjective *tāmîm* is also collocated with righteous (צַדִּיק) in Job 12:4, where Job protests that he, a completely righteous man, has become a laughingstock (cf. Prov. 11:5). Moreover, *tāmîm* is collocated with יָשָׁר ("upright") in Deuteronomy 32:4 and Job 12:4. Thus, God is calling Abram to be morally blameless and impeccable, honest and sincere in the covenant relationship.

As a matter of fact, however, when we consider the narratives concerning Abram to this point, we note that Abram has been less than honest and sincere in his dealings with others. Already in 12:17–20, when Abram and Sarai sojourned in Egypt during a period of famine in Canaan, Pharaoh complained that Abram's ruse calling Sarai his sister was less than truthful. Again, in chapter 16, when the plan to have an heir through Sarai's maidservant Hagar results in contempt for Sarai, Abram tells his wife that this is her problem and that she can deal with Hagar however she wants. Hagar and Ishmael are driven away into the wilderness with scant provision. This conduct, too, is far from impeccable. And the command of God given in chapter 17 does not remove this trait from Abram's

subsequent behavior. In chapter 20, when he sojourns in the country of the Philistines, again he represents Sarah in public as his sister, and Abimelech, the king, charges Abraham with being deceptive in this matter. In chapter 21, Abraham and Abimelech make a treaty. Abraham complains that he has been mistreated by Abimelech's people over the matter of a well he had dug, but Abimelech counters that this is the first he has heard of it. This, too, is not impeccable behavior among the nations. God must have been embarrassed to own Abraham as his emissary and prophet (Gen. 20:7), the one who would intercede for Abimelech so that he would not die as a penalty for his adultery.

The author of Genesis is at pains to show that, in the course of time and in the passing of generations, little things become big things. So later, in Genesis 26:6–11, Isaac also represents his wife Rebekah as his sister; only this time what was a "white lie" or half truth in the mouth of his father (Sarah was, in fact, a half sister of Abraham) becomes a black lie in his mouth. In the third generation, Isaac's son Jacob in turn is a complete deceiver and shyster. And Jacob, who deceived his father by means of a coat and a goat, is in turn deceived by his sons by means of a coat and a goat. To be sure, Abram has had an altar in Canaan and has called out (i.e., proclaimed) in the name of Yahweh. He has been an ambassador for his God, but he has not represented his God with complete integrity.

The circumstances of chapter 16 are important motivation for the covenant confirmation in chapter 17. Genesis 17:2 begins with the verb *wĕ'ettĕnâ*, a form almost certainly to be identified as a first-person singular modal, which in direct sequence with the commands of the previous verse marks a purpose or result clause: "Walk before me and be blameless so that I may make my covenant between me and you." Obedience is expected of Abram in the covenant relationship. Already in Genesis 12, when Yahweh called Abram and gave him such great promises, there were commands: "Go" and "Be a blessing!" Chapter 15 reiterated the great promises and enshrined them in a covenant. Abram has not demonstrated full integrity, and so, in chapter 17, God comes to affirm/uphold his covenant and emphasize, among other things, the need for an obedient son in Abram's Adamic role.

The Giving of the Covenant

Third, an exegetical question related to walking before God that cannot be ignored is the sense of the verb *nātan* ("give," "make") when *bĕrît* is the direct object. The analysis of Paul Williamson must be cited in full since he challenges the view adopted here:

> If one understands Genesis 17 in terms of a reaffirmation of the covenant formally ratified in Genesis 15, the deployment in Gen. 17.2 of the imperfect inflection of the verb נתן [*nātan*] is rather puzzling. As Wenham tellingly admits, "it is not immediately obvious in what sense God needs to give a covenant to Abraham, as it has already been inaugurated (כרת 'cut') in 15.18." Wenham resolves this difficulty by resorting to the most popular synchronic interpretation, suggesting that here (Gen. 17) the concern is the confirmation or ratification of the covenant with stress on the human response (summed up in the phrase "walk before me and be blameless," and explicated in the demand to circumcise every male) rather than merely on the divine initiative. The difficulty of the long delay (ca. 14 years) between the covenant's establishment by God and the stress on its inherent obligations on man has already been underlined. The reason why the obligatory aspects were not clarified much earlier is somewhat obscure; if these two passages simply describe two aspects/stages of the one covenant, why did God wait so long to elaborate upon the human partner's responsibilities? Surely the theological effect would have been the same had Genesis 15 already alluded to the intrinsic responsibilities on Abraham's part? If, on the other hand, a redactor is blamed for this literary enigma, the rationale for separating two such intimately related passages has not been adequately explained. Surely the redactor could have incorporated the Hagar episode into the narrative at a more suitable place—for example, before the latter half of ch. 15—and amalgamated the J and P accounts of the covenant's institution. Thus the anticipated "giving" of the covenant in Genesis 17 does not sit easily with either the standard synchronic or diachronic explanations; the former offers no rationale for the unnecessary delay in revealing the covenant's obligatory aspects, whereas the latter challenges the literary competence of the redactor(s).

Dumbrell understands the sense of נתן (in 17.2) to be "setting the covenant in operation." By this he means the realization of the covenant of Genesis 15 in the form of activated promises. Thus Gen. 17.2 should presumably be understood: ". . . so that I may set in motion my covenant between me and you and greatly increase your numbers." Such a translation is certainly supported by Labuschagne's lexical study of נתן; he contends that the basic connotation of the verb is the act through which an object or matter is set in motion. Further support for this interpretation is found in the fact that נתן, when used in association with promised covenant blessings, heralds their realization or fulfilment. Fulfilment of the gift of "land" is heralded in 12.7; 13.15, 17; 15.7, 18; 17.8, and implicitly in 15.2. In 17.5, 6 and 20 the verb relates to the promise of international (or in Ishmael's case, national) significance. The focus in 17.16 is the promised son. This leaves 17.2, which in the context seems to relate to the promise of Abraham's phenomenal expansion (17.2b; cf. 12.2; 13.16; 15.5); this, as we have seen, is undoubtedly a major theme in Genesis 17. Thus נתן in Gen. 17.2 may suggest the setting in motion of the covenant promise(s) in question: viz. Abraham's phenomenal expansion (as the latter half of the verse seems to imply).

However, even if it is correct to interpret the verb נתן as heralding the implementation of fulfilment of covenant promises, the legitimacy of identifying the covenant announced in Genesis 17 with the covenant already inaugurated in ch. 15 cannot simply be assumed. This still fails to take adequate cognisance of the different promissory emphases of the two chapters. The promissory focus of the covenant established in ch. 15 is the inheritance of the land by Abraham's innumerable offspring—an aspect of the promissory programme which, though reiterated in the context of ch. 17 (v. 8), was certainly not implemented until very much later (and after at least one additional divine-human covenant; viz. the Sinaitic). However, the *primary* focus of the covenant "set in motion" in Genesis 17 does not appear to be Abraham's national inheritance, but rather his international significance. Thus the fact that the prospect of nationhood appears to assume a rather subsidiary position in ch. 17 seriously weakens the case for understanding the "covenant of circumcision" as *merely*

> another step towards the implementation of the covenant promises recorded in ch. 15. At the very least there is a difference in emphasis in these two chapters which any attempt to correlate the two records must take into account and seek to explain.
>
> However, it is possible that, though overstating his case, Dumbrell is correct to see a continuum between Genesis 15 and 17; the emphasis in ch. 17 on Abraham's descendants clearly provides a literary and theological lynchpin. This pericope leaves the reader in no doubt that Abraham's international significance must not be isolated entirely from the prospect of his national inheritance. Both expectations are related in some way; indeed, given the order both here and elsewhere, Abraham's international significance appears to be somehow contingent upon the prospect of nationhood having first been realized.[18]

To determine the sense of *nātan bĕrît*, Williamson rightly wrestles with the relationship of Genesis 15 and 17. Much in his discussion is helpful. He contributes to the discussion by noting the emphasis in chapter 17 on the nations. He correctly notes the prominence in this text; the focus on "becoming nations" is, in fact, in both halves of the chapter, and it relates to both Abraham and Sarah:

> As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. (Gen. 17:4–6 NIV)
>
> I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her. (Gen. 17:16 NIV)

Ishmael is promised both nationhood and royalty:

> And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. (Gen. 17:20 NIV)

In Genesis 17, the royal ideology of the promises in Genesis 12:1–3 comes to the fore, and it seems that not only will Abraham be a blessing to the nations but he will also become more than one nation—in fact, a *multitude* of nations. No wonder Paul speaks of "the promise to Abraham and to his seed that he would be the inheritor of the *world*" (Rom. 4:13). He would inherit more than the land of Canaan; he would inherit the world.

Nonetheless, the exegesis of Williamson is faulty because of inadequate attention to linguistic matters, reliance on secondary sources for lexical studies of strategic words, overreaction to the faults of Dumbrell's interpretation, and his own skewed definition of covenant making.[19] Thus, he argues in the end that chapters 15 and 17 are two separate but related covenants.

Apart from Genesis 17:2, the expression *nātan bĕrît* is found elsewhere only in Genesis 9:12 and Numbers 25:12.[20] According to semantic theory in linguistics, in most languages nouns and verbs not only have a specific field of meaning but also operate in a hierarchy of related words in semantic domains. A verb higher up the hierarchy can usually be used as a substitute for one lower down. Thus *nātan* is employed as a substitute for *hēqîm* in both Genesis 9:12 and 17:2. This substitution is a natural stylistic variant since both the flood narrative and Genesis 17 are dominated exclusively by the expression *hēqîm bĕrît* rather than *kārat bĕrît*. The expression *hēqîm bĕrît* is found in Genesis 9:9, 11, 12, 17; 17:7, 19, 21, whereas *kārat bĕrît* is not found at all in these contexts. Thus Dumbrell's proposal for *nātan* (acceded to by Williamson in the main) is not far off the mark at all, and linguistic principles can account appropriately for both the sense and the usage. The usage in Numbers 25:12 also fits these data. God gives the priesthood to Aaron and his descendants in Exodus 29. Due to the act of Phineas in Numbers 25, God affirms the covenant of priesthood to the grandson of Aaron. So even here, *nātan bĕrît* is an equivalent for *hēqîm bĕrît*.

The first-person pronominal suffix on ברית is also part of the discussion on the relationship of Genesis 17 to 15. Note again Williamson's assessment of the claims of Dumbrell:

> In over half of its occurrences in ch. 17 (including its first occurrence in the pericope) ברית has a first person singular possessive pronoun attached (vv. 2, 4, 7, 10, 13, 19 and 21). It has been inferred, on the basis that the covenant is so introduced in this chapter, that "my covenant" is to be identified with the covenant previously mentioned in ch. 15. This inference, however, does not bear up under close scrutiny. A number of telling criticisms can be levelled against it.
>
> The fact that the Noahic covenant (cf. Gen. 6.18; 9:8–17) is also enigmatically (so McEvenue) introduced in the same manner (i.e. בריתי) seriously undermines the suggestion that the pronominal suffix points to an already established covenant. By analogy the "covenant" referred to in Gen. 6.18 must also be a reaffirmation of an already established covenant. However, prior to this there is not even a hint of a covenant being established in the book of Genesis. The reference to ברית in Gen. 6.18 reflects not just the first occurrence of the noun in the flood narrative, but the first explicit reference to covenant in the Pentateuch as a whole. Thus to what pre-existing covenant could Gen. 6.18 possibly allude?
>
> Dumbrell's conjecture, that the allusion in Gen. 6.18 is to an original covenant with creation, allegedly reflected in the opening chapters of Genesis, lacks firm exegetical support and therefore remains unconvincing. While Dumbrell is undoubtedly correct in recognizing several clear echoes of the creation narrative in the Noahic covenant, his conclusion—that Genesis 1–3 must accordingly portray an antedeluvian covenantal relationship—is a *non sequitur*.[21]

These arguments are, apparently, Williamson's strongest. We have already seen that his analysis of the expressions *nātan bĕrît* and *hēqîm bĕrît* is flawed and, moreover, is based on data from Moshe Weinfeld rather than from his own exhaustive examination of the primary sources. We have also seen—and will see again shortly in considering chapter 17—that there are fundamental ways of describing covenants in the narratives of Scripture without actually using the term ברית. Furthermore, Williamson provides no exegesis of Genesis 1–3 to substantiate the claim that no covenant is found there. Nor does he provide an adequate explanation for the variant

expressions and terms used in Genesis 6–9 and 17. Therefore his claims constitute begging the question.

Dumbrell's proposal that the instances of the pronominal suffix on ברית in Genesis 17 points to an already established covenant is noteworthy. The noun ברית has a first-person singular pronominal suffix in forty-seven instances in the Old Testament. It is remarkable that thirteen of these—more than one-quarter—occur in two texts: Genesis 6–9 and 17.[22] Linguistically, a pronominal suffix makes the noun definite, and the grammatical function may be an anaphoric (i.e., a backward-pointing) reference. Careful examination of all instances in the Old Testament shows that in every case but one the reference is anaphoric and refers to an already established covenant.[23] It seems that Dumbrell's proposal is on solid ground and that the thesis of Williamson flies in the face of the linguistic data.

We may be confident, then, that just as Genesis 6–9 is an affirmation of God's covenant with creation in Genesis 1–3, so Genesis 17 is an affirmation of God's covenant with Abraham initiated in Genesis 15. Genesis 15 and 17 correlate respectively with the first three promises and the second three promises of 12:1–3. Abraham has shown a great deal of interest in God's promises to bless him personally with fame and nationhood, but these promises are foundational to the second three promises to bless all the nations through Abram, and Abraham has not shown any interest in being a blessing to the nations. So Williamson is quite right to note the international emphasis in Genesis 17. Abraham's response to the revelation in Genesis 17 is clear:

> Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" (Gen. 17:17–18 ESV)

Abraham is quite skeptical about the divine plan and urges God to consider his own attempt to implement God's plan in Genesis 16: "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" There is room, indeed, in the blessings promised for Abraham's son Ishmael to develop into a nation that entails great chieftains, but the covenant will be upheld with a son born only to

Abraham and Sarah in about a year's time. Abraham laughs at this. He can see how the divine plan would work through Ishmael, but how would life come out of a couple whose bodies are both dead. Yet this is precisely the theme of chapter 17—"I am God *Almighty*. Walk before me and be blameless." The reason for the fourteen-year lapse between chapter 15 and chapter 17 is that Yahweh wants a covenant relationship in which Abraham really knows and understands who he is and is faithful and loyal in precisely that level of understanding. Not until Abraham has tried everything in his own strength and is completely powerless will he know God as El Shaddai.

In the course of discussing the relationship of Genesis 15 and 17, Williamson notes from T. D. Alexander parallels between Genesis 9 and 17, as seen in table 8.1:

Table 8.1 Parallels between Genesis 9 and 17[24]

Expression	**Noahic Covenant**	**Abrahamic Covenant**
הקים ברית	9:9, 11, 17	17:7, 9, 19, 21
נתן ברית	9:12	17:2
אתה וזרעך אחריך	9:9	17:7, 8, 9, 10, 19
במאד מאד	7:19	17:2, 6, 20
לדרתם	6:9; 9:12	17:7, 9, 12
ונכרתה הנפש ההוא	9:11	17:14
פרה ורבה	8:17; 9:1, 7	17:20
הוליד	6:10	17:20
בעצם היום הזה	7:13	17:23, 26
כל־זכר	6:19; 7:3, 9, 16	17:10, 12, 23

What these parallels show, rather than aiding and abetting the Documentary Hypothesis, is that the narrator is at pains to portray both Noah and Abraham as Adamic figures. The command to Adam to "be fruitful and multiply" is passed on to Noah and becomes for Abraham a promise with the adverb "exceedingly" added to it.

In chapter 17, God renames both Abram and Sarai. Abraham's name is changed from Abram, "exalted father," to Abraham, "father of a multitude"

(of nations). Sarai's name is changed to Sarah. Although both are dialectical variants meaning "princess," as Waltke notes, "Sarai, her birth-name, probably looks back on her noble descent, whereas Sarah, her covenantal name, looks ahead to her noble descendants."[25] Williamson believes this is cause for distinguishing Genesis 15 and 17 as separate covenants:

> One of the most obvious aspects distinguishing the two covenant chapters is the introduction of new names for both Abraham and Sarah in ch. 17. It is significant that not only are these name-changes unmentioned in Genesis 15, but also that their non-usage prior to Genesis 17 is perfectly matched by the consistency of their usage after their introduction in the latter chapter.
>
> In that these new names are given covenantal significance in ch. 17, their non-introduction in ch. 15 would imply that the covenant recorded there served a different purpose—or at least had a distinct emphasis. Again, this inference is confirmed by a careful analysis of each chapter. Genesis 15 stresses Abraham's role as the progenitor of a single nation who would inherit the Promised Land, whereas Genesis 17 stresses Abraham's role as the "father" of a multitude of nations who would inherit the promised blessing (cf. 17.4–6, 16). Thus the name-changes in ch. 17 subtly alert the reader to the fact that the scope of the two covenant passages in the Abrahamic narrative is not the same.[26]

The scope of chapter 17 is bigger than chapter 15 because it is characteristic of the Abraham narrative as a whole for God to answer every question with bigger promises. God also uses cultural means to communicate to his people who he is and what he wants in the relationship, such as a covenantal name change. But this need not be seen as any reason to consider Genesis 15 and 17 as different covenants.

The Covenant Beneficiaries

Fourth, in verses 7b and 8b of chapter 17, note that the covenant is with Abraham and his descendants:

> And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting

> covenant, *to be God to you and to your offspring after you*. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, *and I will be their God*. (ESV)

Yahweh will be the God of Abraham and the God of his descendants. He will be their God. The italicized words constitute the first instance in Scripture of the Covenant Formula (at least the first half of it). We find the full formula first in Exodus 6:7:

> I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. (NIV)

Attention was first drawn to the formula by Rudolf Smend.[27] Elmer Martens's book *God's Design* is a wonderful exposition of this phrase in the Scriptures.[28] As the scholarly study of Rolf Rendtorff has shown, sometimes only the first half of the formula is found (A), sometimes only the second half (B), and sometimes the entire formula (C).[29]

Formula A: I will be your God
Formula B: You will be my people
Formula C: I will be your God, and you will be my people (= A + B)

Rendtorff concludes his analysis of the Covenant Formula as follows:

> It therefore emerges under the most diverse aspect that in important sectors of the Hebrew Bible the covenant formula is an element of theological language which is introduced in a *highly conscious manner*. It expresses in an extremely pregnant way God's relationship to Israel and Israel's to God. At the same time, it combines with other terms, above all "covenant" and "choose," as well as other elements of theological language. . . . In many cases it binds these elements together and interprets them afresh, or creates new theological coherences through their association.[30]

Thus, at the heart of the covenant is this relationship: "I will be their God, and they will be my people." Although this phrase occurs here in

Genesis 17, where the term ברית abounds, in many passages of the Bible the identical phrase or words occur where the term “covenant” is not found, and it always signals covenant as the subject and topic of discussion. Significant examples are 2 Corinthians 6:16 and Revelation 21:3:

> What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said:
>
> “I will live with them
> and walk among them,
> and I will be their God,
> and they will be my people.” (2 Cor. 6:16 NIV)
>
> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “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.” (Rev. 21:3 ESV)

Neither Paul nor John employs the word “covenant,” but the Covenant Formula communicates this idea powerfully as they describe and discuss the new covenant in these texts.

The Covenant Sign

Fifth, Abraham is given a covenant sign. In the Old Testament, it is common for a covenant to be accompanied by a physical sign, although by no means is a physical sign a necessary or obligatory part of covenant making. We saw that the rainbow was the sign of the covenant with Noah, and later the Sabbath is the sign of the covenant with Israel at Sinai. Abraham is commanded to practice circumcision as the physical sign of the covenant that God was confirming between him and his descendants (Gen. 17:9–14).

The central question here is, What does circumcision indicate or signify? According to Genesis 17:14, this sign defines membership in the covenant community: “Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (NIV). The question remains, however: How does circumcision signify or symbolize belonging to the covenant community?

Unfortunately, the Christian church has had largely mistaken ideas and understandings of the rite of circumcision, mainly because the proper background to the meaning of this rite was not adequately researched. O. Palmer Robertson, for example, in his otherwise helpful work on the covenants, proposes that circumcision means cleansing. This is based on the gratuitous assumption that for the people in question, "the hygienic act of the removal of the foreskin symbolized the purification necessary for the establishment of a covenant relation between a holy God and an unholy people."[31] Other cultures circumcised children at puberty as a rite of passage from childhood to manhood. Abraham and his descendants are to circumcise children at eight days old. Correct understanding must be illuminated by the background of the ancient Near East and—in view of the connection between Abraham and Egypt and between Israel and Egypt—by the Egyptian background in particular.

The best research to date on this topic has been advanced and summarized by John D. Meade.[32] After demonstrating that the most plausible background—the common milieu criterion—for understanding both Abraham's and Israel's circumcision is Egypt, Meade draws his conclusion, which should be cited in full:

> First, and most importantly, God adds the rite of circumcision to an already existing covenant relationship (cf. Gen. 15:18, where the Hebrew verb כרת means to initiate a covenant). What does circumcision contribute to this covenantal relationship? The answers to this question have ranged between viewing Abraham's circumcision as a reminder to God to keep his promise of posterity to a multi-valent meaning including malediction and consecration. This study accedes with the latter of these conclusions. . . . Egyptian circumcision was an initiation rite for priests.
>
> Second, just as the king-priest was the son of the god in Egypt, and was consecrated to him through circumcision, Israel as the first born son of Yahweh (Ex. 4:22–23) has undergone and will undergo circumcision (Josh. 5:2–9) in order to be consecrated to his service. We cannot delve into the biblical language of sonship and image in this paper, but it is interesting to note that the Egyptian background would

reveal to Israel that they indeed belonged to Yahweh as his first born Son, since they had undergone circumcision just as the Pharaoh.

Third, only the priests were obligated to be circumcised in Egypt, but in Israel *every* male was to be circumcised on the eighth day (Gen. 17:12), signifying that Abraham's family consists of priests. Later in the story Israel is called a *kingdom of priests* and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6). The phrase "holy nation" also means consecrated to God or belonging to God and would complement the meaning of kingdom of priests. As a kingdom of priests, circumcision is the appropriate sign for the people of Israel, for it will remind every male Israelite that he is a priest, specially consecrated to Yahweh and his service.

[Thus] circumcision in Egypt means affiliation or identification with the deity and consecration to his service. The rite was obligatory for all priests to the deity, while the evidence suggests that circumcision was not forced upon the laity. . . . although formal differences existed between the Egyptian rite and the Israelite rite, these differences actually functioned as the grounds for significant theologizing in Israel. In Israel every male baby is consecrated or devoted to God at eight days old. The family of Abraham and Sarah were to be signified as the priesthood of Yahweh from birth.[33]

The comment of Henry Morris is also helpful:

Furthermore, it was primarily a sign only to the individual concerned, his parents, and his wife. It was not a sign to be shown to people in general, but was uniquely personal. To his parents it would confirm that they had been faithful in transmitting the seed to the son with whom God had blessed their union, and that they were trying to follow God's will in training him. To his wife, it would give assurance that he indeed was a descendant of Abraham, to whom she could joyfully submit in the marriage relation, in faith that God would bless their home and their children. To the man himself, it would be a daily testimony that he and his family were consecrated to the God of Abraham and that they shared in his calling and ministry to the world.[34]

Contrary to the culture in the ancient Near East, where males were circumcised as adults or at puberty, males in Abraham's family were to be circumcised just after birth, at eight days old. Mathews connects this with the day of atonement:

> In the cult seven days of uncleanness were counted for the new mother, followed by the infant's circumcision on the eighth day and the thirty-three days of purification of the mother (Lev 12:2–4). The eighth held special meaning as the day of atonement or dedication to the Lord (e.g., Exod 22:30; Lev 9:1; 14:10, 23; 15:14, 29; 22:27; 23:39; Num 6:10; Ezek 43:27).[35]

This explanation is inadequate. The eighth day derives its significance from the account of creation, where God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Since the seventh day is indefinite, the eighth day is the beginning of the new creation, and this fits with the new creation imagery connected with Abraham as a new Adam.

Meredith G. Kline has proposed a negative meaning for this rite. Like the dismembering ritual in Genesis 15:7–18 (cf. Jer. 34:17–20), circumcision graphically portrayed the covenant curse of excision and threatened the cutting off of descendants (Gen. 17:14). Although other nations besides Israel practiced circumcision, the Israelites were the only nation to completely cut off and remove the foreskin. Thus the negative meaning is that circumcision symbolizes being cut off from the covenant community for disloyalty to the covenant demand to "walk before me and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1).[36] This negative aspect of circumcision is clearly supported in the text by 17:14, already cited.

Thus, circumcision was a ritual required by Abraham and his family signifying membership in the covenant community. Negatively, the person who remained uncircumcised would be cut off from the covenant community. Positively, circumcision symbolized complete devotion to the service of God as a priesthood. The covenant sign underlines Abraham's Adamic role as a priest in his calling to bring blessing to the nations. Paul, in Romans 4:11, rightly sees the obedience of Abraham described in Genesis 17:23–27 as an expression of the righteousness of faith that

according to 15:6 characterized his relation to Yahweh. And Robert D. Bergen rightly notes, "With the sign of the covenant now on his body, Abraham was qualified to father the covenant child."[37]

One Covenant or Two?

The *NIV Study Bible* has a table entitled "Major Covenants in the Old Testament" (p. 19), which lists the divine dealings with Abraham as two covenants, described as Abrahamic A and Abrahamic B. Abrahamic A corresponds to Genesis 15 and is characterized as a royal grant; Abrahamic B corresponds to Genesis 17 and is characterized as a suzerain-vassal treaty. Support for this view has been provided by the doctoral dissertation of Paul R. Williamson.[38] Williamson has also written a more general work on all the biblical covenants,[39] where he condenses the technical treatment given of the Abrahamic covenant in his doctoral thesis. Williamson summarizes previous analyses of Genesis 15 and 17 as follows:

> Scholars operating from a diachronic perspective generally consider the "stages" of the Abrahamic covenant to be a literary construct as opposed to chronologically distinct events. This literary construct, it is suggested, has developed from the amalgamation of different sources or traditions that allegedly lie behind the final form of the Abraham narrative. Thus understood, Genesis 15 and 17 are simply variant accounts, from different periods, of what is essentially a single event or episode in the Abraham saga. The idea of distinct or chronologically separate stages in the establishment of the Abrahamic covenant has been introduced artificially by the editorial process that took place during the compilation of the Abraham cycle. Thus what originally were two separate accounts of a single Abrahamic covenant now appear as two chronologically distinct stages in the covenant relationship.
>
> However, as well as involving several unwarranted presuppositions with respect to the literary and theological differences between Genesis 15 and 17 (see Williamson 2000a: 81–95), such diachronic analyses fail to explain the inclusion of these two covenant pericopes in the final form of the Abraham narrative. The latter must be

addressed, for—unless one uncritically assumes a somewhat piecemeal and incoherent process of final redaction—each of these chapters makes its own distinct theological contribution to the narrative as a whole.

From a synchronic perspective, those who hold to a single Abrahamic covenant typically understand its staged revelation in terms of Abraham's developing relationship with Yahweh. Opinion is divided over when the covenant is initially established (i.e. whether in Gen. 12 or Gen. 15), but it is agreed that subsequent chapters focusing on God's promises to Abraham simply confirm and amplify the same covenant. Thus understood, Genesis 17 is not an alternative account of the establishment of the Abrahamic covenant, but is either a renewal of the previously established covenant, or the next phase of its development, in which its promissory aspects are supplemented with important, but previously undisclosed, obligatory dimensions.

However, the problem with these suggestions is that they fail to explain the long time lapse between these two "stages" of covenant-making, or to account adequately for the significant differences between Genesis 15 and 17—both in terms of their covenantal framework and their promissory emphases.[40]

Two approaches are described: diachronic and synchronic. Those who follow a diachronic approach are critical scholars whose methodology includes form, redaction, and source criticism. Those who follow a synchronic approach accept the text in its canonical form. Williamson's description (although not the precise terms *diachronic* and *synchronic*) is indebted to John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*,[41] but his use of *diachronic* and *synchronic* as technical terms may be confusing. As a technical term, diachronic study is a purely genetic study of the compilation of sources. In literal, ordinary usage, diachronic means "development through time" while synchronic means "at the same time." Thus, in the nontechnical use of the term, the idea of God responding to Abraham's developing faith and understanding of the divine revelations given to him would better be described as diachronic. Williamson's problem with the

long lapse between these two "stages" of covenant making or the differences between Genesis 15 and 17 will be addressed shortly.

After discussing Genesis 15 and 17 separately, Williamson concludes with the following summation:

> It is clear from the above analysis that the covenants mentioned in Genesis 15 and Genesis 17 are manifestly different in both nature (temporal/eternal; unilateral/bilateral) and primary emphases (national/international). The suggestion that they are simply two stages of the one covenant is seriously undermined by the inexplicable gap of some thirteen years between them, and by the consistent projection of the covenant in Genesis 17 into the future (lit. "I will give my covenant" [Gen. 17:2]; "I will establish my covenant" [Gen. 17:7 my trans.]). Both these anomalies, as well as the significant differences between the two covenant chapters, suggest a more plausible synchronic explanation: these chapters focus on two distinct, but related covenants (Williamson 2000a: 212–214).
>
> Such a conclusion is further suggested by the fact that the different emphases in Genesis 15 and 17 mirror the two separate strands set out in the programmatic agenda of Genesis 12:1–3. Genesis 15 concentrates on the divine promise to make Abraham a "great nation" (Gen 12:2), whereas Genesis 17 focuses more on the divine promise that through Abraham "all the families of the ground will experience blessing" (Gen. 12:3 my trans.). Thus understood, two distinct covenants were established between God and Abraham. The first (established in Gen. 15) solemnly guaranteed God's promise to make Abraham into a "great nation." The second covenant (anticipated in Gen. 17, but not yet established) similarly guaranteed God's promise to bless the nations through Abraham and his "seed."[42]

Williamson's arguments that Genesis 15 and 17 constitute separate covenants appear to be more weighty than they actually are.

The reading of the Abraham narratives that we have just presented (Genesis 12 = the giving of the promise; Genesis 15 = the making of the covenant; and Genesis 17 = the affirming of the covenant) is not possible for Williamson for a number of reasons. First, he does not allow the

expressions “cut a covenant” (*kārat bĕrît*) and “affirm/uphold a covenant” (*hēqîm bĕrît*) to have distinct meanings, as explained here and also substantiated in usage. His analysis is based on data from Weinfeld (instead of his own analysis of primary sources) in reaction to Dumbrell’s interpretation, which does require modification. This is a fundamental linguistic point that affects one’s interpretation. Williamson offers no satisfactory explanation of why the phrase “to affirm a covenant” occurs consistently in chapter 17 as opposed to the more usual expression elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. In fact, Williamson’s arguments frequently work against him:

> It may be argued that the allusion in Exod 6.4 (in the case of Abraham) is actually to Gen. 17.8, an explicit confirmation of the covenant/promise ratified formally in Gen. 15.18. However, this patently fails to take adequate account of the particularly striking allusions to Genesis 15 in the sixth chapter of Exodus.[43]

It is strange that Williamson does not see that if Genesis 15 and 17 are one covenant, his counterargument has just been removed.

Second, in both of Williamson’s works his analysis is focused on exegesis of chapters 15 and 17, and he does not adequately discuss the flow of the plotline in the Abraham narratives as a whole. The different divine revelations to Abraham are given in direct response to Abraham’s developing and growing faith, obedience, and understanding over the years of God’s commands, promises, and revelations. This is a genuine diachronic approach and should not be confused with Williamson’s use of the term “diachronic approach” for critical reconstructions of the editorial history of the text.

There is a chronological growth and progression in Abraham’s faith, obedience, and understanding of God’s dealings with him. The argument that Genesis 15 concentrates on the divine promise to make Abraham a “great nation” (national), whereas Genesis 17 focuses more on the divine promise that through Abraham “all the families of the ground will experience blessing” (international) is part of a real contribution made by Williamson, but the differences may be overstressed. Both chapter 15 and

chapter 17 speak of “land” and “seed.”[44] It is interesting to note that chapter 17 speaks in a number of places about giving the land to Abraham and giving him a son (17:8, 16), which belong to the blessing to Abram and not to the blessings through him to the nations.

Since the promises God makes in chapter 12 focus first on blessings to Abraham and then on blessings through him to the nations, it is logical that in Abraham’s own life he would be interested in seeing how the first part would be fulfilled before he would demonstrate interest in knowing how the second part would be fulfilled. Thus chapters 15 and 17 develop the promises in chapter 12 in the same order in which they were given to Abraham.

Williamson argues that “the suggestion that [chapters 15 and 17] are simply two stages of the one covenant is seriously undermined by the inexplicable gap of some thirteen years between them.”[45] This is an astonishing statement. The thirteen-year gap between Genesis 15 and 17 is supplied by chapter 16, the narrative of the attempt by Abraham and Sarah to achieve the fulfillment of God’s promise through human efforts and machinations. The story of Hagar is an adequate reason for a delay in confirming and bringing into Abraham and Sarah’s experience the historical reality of what was promised. It also shows the need to broaden Abraham’s horizons beyond himself and his family to his calling to bring blessing to the nations. Abraham’s failure in this respect is characteristic of the rest of the history of Israel right down to the time of Jesus’s own disciples.

The argument that chapter 15 is a temporal covenant and chapter 17 an eternal covenant is based on an argument from silence. Chapter 17 says that the covenant is eternal (17:7, 13, 19), but no such thing is said in chapter 15. This is also begging the question because if chapters 15 and 17 are referring to the same thing, then the statement in 17 about the covenant being eternal would also apply to 15. Note that in chapter 15 the covenant grants “land” to Abraham (15:18–21), and in chapter 17 this is referred to as an “eternal possession” (17:8). God’s promises get bigger and better all the way through the Abraham narratives, but this is no reason to argue for separate covenants.

The argument that the covenant in chapter 15 is unilateral and the one in chapter 17 is bilateral is based on a misunderstanding. The traditional language describing covenants as being either unconditional or conditional is inadequate. We would argue that God guarantees the faithfulness of both partners in the Abrahamic covenant but still requires faithful obedience on the part of Abraham to bring the blessing to the nations promised in the covenant. The biblical metanarrative is about God seeking in Adam an obedient son from beginning to end. Chapters 15 and 17 are one and the same covenant, and together these texts present a full-orbed holographic image of the one covenant.

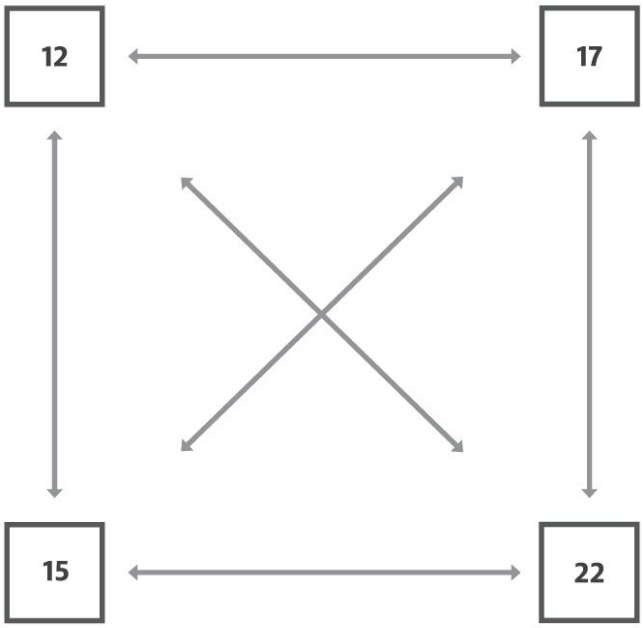
Reading chapter 17 from Williamson's perspective also presents other difficulties. If the covenant there is not the one in chapter 15, then the occurrences of the word "covenant" are referring to the covenant God is about to establish. In 17:9, God asks Abraham to keep his covenant. In 17:10, he explains that the covenant involves circumcision. Then in 17:11, he says that this is for a covenant sign. This seems to reduce the covenant keeping to a covenant sign. If chapter 17 is affirming the covenant in chapter 15, then a sign is supplied for the Abrahamic covenant in general. If, however, chapter 17 is instituting a separate covenant, then the human obligation is reduced to being a covenant sign. This reading does not provide a satisfactory understanding of the text.

Williamson's approach is flawed because later texts in both Old and New Testaments never refer to God's dealings with Abraham as "covenants"—*in the plural*. Never in all the historical summaries in the Old Testament (e.g., Nehemiah 9) is there a reference to two Abrahamic covenants. There is only one covenant with Abraham, confirmed to Isaac and Jacob.

The final *coup de grâce* for the double-covenant theory is provided by the literary structure of the Abrahamic narratives. First, we must note that T. D. Alexander's doctoral dissertation proposed a literary structure of chapters 12–20 of Genesis in which the narrative was split in two (12–15 and 17–20) on the basis of chiasm.[46] This literary structure is key to interpreting the narrative in terms of two covenants with Abraham. Byron Wheaton has shown that the analysis of Alexander was incomplete. There are unique features in the narrative binding chapters 12 and 15, 12 and 17,

and 12 and 22. Similarly, unique features connect 15 and 12, 15 and 17, and 15 and 22; unique features connect 17 and 12, 17 and 15, and 17 and 22; and finally, unique features connect 22 and 12, 22 and 15, and 22 and 17, as shown in figure 8.2.

Figure 8.2 Relationships of Genesis 12; 15; 17; and 22



An example of a unique feature is the fact that the image of offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven is shared only by chapters 15 and 22 (15:5; 22:17).[47] What Wheaton has shown is that the analysis of Alexander is incomplete and that the four chapters are completely interlocked as one. One cannot separate chapters 12–15 from 17–20 or 22. The promises in chapter 12, the covenant in chapter 15, the affirmation of the covenant in chapter 17, and the confirmation by mighty oath in chapter 22 are all one covenant, and the narratives cannot be bifurcated as Alexander claimed or as his doctoral student Williamson attempted to further prove.

Abraham's Obedience and God's Mighty Oath

Genesis 18–19

A short time—no more than two to four months—after the covenant confirmation in Genesis 17, Abraham is visited by three men at Hebron.[48]

Turns out that the mysterious strangers are Yahweh and two of his agents or messengers; the text describes this visitation in the same way that we find in earlier communications from God ("The LORD appeared to Abram"). In Genesis 15, the communication came by way of a vision. In Genesis 12:1, 7, and 17:1, the manner of divine revelation is left unspecified. Here God appears to Abraham as a human.

Abraham urges the strangers to accept hospitality, and they accede to his request. While the men are eating and Abraham is serving them, they ask him where Sarah his wife is at that moment. Abraham answers curtly, "Here in the tent." No doubt, cultural protocol in the ancient Near East would not allow men to address a man's wife directly. A conversation of sorts can be arranged with her behind the door of the tent. Suddenly, the verb of speaking switches from third-person plural to third-person singular, and the speaker repeats the promise (of becoming [a] great nation[s]) made particular and specific in Genesis 17 of a *son* given *through Sarah* within a year. Sarah laughs at this. The narrator informs us that she is not only postmenopausal but is no longer enjoying physical relations with her husband: they are just that *old*.[49] Yahweh asks Abraham why Sarah laughed, since nothing is impossible for him, and again he repeats his promise of a son born through her. Although the question is directed to Abraham, it is really intended for Sarah, who, out of fear, denies that she laughed. Thus, here Sarah lies out of fear, just as her husband, Abraham, lied out of fear when he entered Egypt and falsely declared that Sarai was only his sister.

The interchange between the Lord and Sarah is important background to the next scene in this episode. The visitors depart, heading for an "overlook" of Sodom with a Scots send-off by Abraham (i.e., he walks with them partway). Again, Yahweh opens the conversation, this time with these words:

> The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?" (Gen. 18:17–18 ESV)

Yahweh opens with a rhetorical question—should he hide (lit. “cover”) his plan (of judging the cities of the plain) from Abraham? Of course not! Verse 18 expresses the motivation or reasons why Yahweh needs to be open and transparent. First, the statement that Abraham will become a great nation corresponds to the first set of promises in Genesis 12:1–3; second, the statement that all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him corresponds to the second set of promises in Genesis 12:1–3. The first set of promises was enshrined and solemnized in the covenant made in Genesis 15, while the second set was emphasized in the covenant confirmation of Genesis 17. Thus these two statements circumscribe the fact that God has a covenant relationship with Abram, and this type of relationship especially requires integrity, that is, openness and transparency in the context of faithfulness and loyal love. These are the precise characteristics that Abraham and his wife, Sarah, have not shown in relationship with fellow humans or God, as is evidenced by the call to be blameless in Genesis 17:1 and by the lie of Sarah in Genesis 18:15. The rhetorical question, then, shows that Yahweh is modeling for Abraham and Sarah the kind of covenant relationship he would like to have with them.

This interpretation is clear as Yahweh goes on to explain his motivation for revealing to Abraham his plan (still veiled, as far as the reader is concerned):

> “For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.” Then the LORD said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know.” (Gen. 18:19–21 ESV)

Several points in these verses must be either clarified or stressed. Normally in Hebrew prose, when the words “justice” and “righteousness” are coordinated, they form a single concept or idea: social justice. This is a figure of speech known as a hendiadys, one concept expressed through two

words. The word pair becomes an idiom expressing a single thought that is both different from and greater than just putting the two words together. One cannot determine the meaning of this expression by analyzing “justice” and “righteousness” individually. Later on in the Old Testament, this word pair becomes a way of summarizing the requirements and stipulations of the Mosaic covenant, which in turn are an expression of the character of Yahweh. This context defines what is meant here by social justice, in contrast to how the term might commonly be used today.

According to the syntax of the clause in Genesis 18:19, “practicing social justice” is the manner in which Abraham and his family are “to keep the way of Yahweh.” And this “way of Yahweh” has already been clearly shown to Abraham. Yahweh began by modeling for Abraham the openness and transparency that is necessary in a covenant relationship, namely, what it means to be blameless (“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?”).

In the flow of the narrative plot structure, as Abraham begins to plead with Yahweh not to destroy the righteous with the wicked in an attempt to avert destruction of the cities of the plain—and save Lot—he is taking his very first steps in practicing social justice, and this is also the beginning of being a blessing to the nations. Thus, the instruction of Genesis 17 is effective in shifting his focus from the first three promises of Genesis 12:1–3 to also give attention to the second three: “In you all the nations of the earth will be blessed.”

The reader is invited to compare and contrast Genesis 14 and 18, since in both of these events Abraham is seeking to rescue his nephew Lot, who is in trouble. Genesis 18, however, differs significantly from Genesis 14, where Abraham with his 318 household servants rescues Lot from the marauding kings. Here Abraham faces not the big bad boys from the east but Yahweh himself, God Almighty. It is God who is determined to judge the wicked cities. To rescue Lot this time, Abraham must abandon his own shrewd schemes of subterfuge (surprise attack by night, Gen. 14:15). Instead, he must buy into the “way of Yahweh”—that is, the character of Yahweh himself—in the covenant relationship. He must embrace “the way of Yahweh” and practice social justice. He cannot call for mercy on Lot

solely on the basis that he is a relative. He must plead for "the righteous" as a group and call on God as a just Judge who would not destroy the righteous along with the wicked. Thus he intercedes *as a priest for the nations* on the basis of God's own character. Yahweh is patient as Abraham intercedes and gradually reduces the required number of righteous people in the city six times from fifty to just ten. Apparently, there were only six people who might deserve to be called righteous: Lot, his wife, and his two daughters and their fiancés (for the divine agents of judgment sought to extract them from the city before the destruction). As the sorry story of Lot at the end of Genesis 19 shows, Abraham succeeded in saving two entire (future) nations: Moab and Ammon. Abraham is beginning to be a blessing to the (other) nations.

Genesis 22

Another episode emphasizing the connection between Abraham's obedience and the fulfillment of the covenant promises is Genesis 22:15–18. After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, Abraham sojourns for a time in Gerar, a Philistine territory, and the events recorded in Genesis 20 are almost identical to his sojourn in Egypt in Genesis 12:10–20. Finally, in Genesis 21, a son is born to Sarah, named Isaac in memory of the fact that both parents laughed at the promises of God. Abraham also makes a covenant, or treaty, with Abimelech concerning ownership of wells in Genesis 21 (which was discussed earlier).

Then in Genesis 22, Abraham is tested by God and asked to offer Isaac, the son of promise, now an adolescent or young man,[50] as a sacrifice. This is a difficult request to understand, whether for Abraham or for the reader of the narrative. Isaac is now the center of his father's affections and love. Timothy Keller considers Genesis 22 "the second call of Abraham" (in relation to Genesis 12 as the first call):[51]

> Abraham got another call from God. And it could not have been more shocking.
>
> > *Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one*

of the mountains I will tell you about. . . .

> This was the ultimate test. Isaac was now *everything* to Abraham, as God's call makes clear. He does not refer to the boy as "Isaac," but as "your son, your only son, whom you love." Abraham's affection had become adoration. Previously, Abraham's meaning in life had been dependent on God's word. Now it was becoming dependent on Isaac's love and well-being. The center of Abraham's life was shifting. God was not saying you cannot love your son, but that you must not turn a loved one into a counterfeit god.[52]

Keller hits the nail on the head. Abraham is blessed by God, but his covenant relationship with God must be more important than the blessings of God; that is, he must desire God himself and not simply desire God for his gifts or promises. He must seek God as a greater treasure than what he gives or promises.

In the course of the Abraham narratives, the narrator is redefining what blessing means. The narrative plot structure invites us to compare and contrast Abraham and Lot in the matter of blessing. By the cultural standards of their time, both men are blessed. They have children and families. Abraham was satisfied, in fact, with just Ishmael as the beginning of becoming a great nation (Gen. 17:18). They have flocks and herds and camels. Lot becomes an alderman on the town council of Sodom, the leading city of the five in the plain. Abraham and, vicariously, Lot have victory over their enemies. Yet the narrator makes plain that Lot's path is spiraling downward: (1) Lot lifted up his eyes (13:10); (2) Lot chose for himself (13:11); (3) Lot moved his tent toward Sodom (13:12); (4) Lot was dwelling in Sodom (14:12); (5) Lot sat in the gate of Sodom (i.e., he was an alderman on the town council, 19:1). Lot is successful by the standards of the time, but he is unaware that by his choices he is destined for destruction. Such "blessings" are empty without a covenant relationship with God.

When Abraham is prepared to sacrifice Isaac, at the moment he is ready to slay his son, Yahweh's messenger stops him in the act. Then Abraham notices a ram caught in the bushes and offers it instead.

> And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring [seed] shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” (Gen. 22:15–18 ESV)

As Keith Grüneberg notes, “Gen 22:16–18 is the only promise to Abraham explicitly containing a divine oath.”[53] In addition, the verbs in the promises are both emphasized by free infinitives, rendered in English by “surely.” By a mighty oath God affirms his promises given in Genesis 12, solemnized by covenant in Genesis 15, confirmed in Genesis 17, and also mentioned in Genesis 18:19. If anything, this is the strongest statement of a guarantee by God. Yet the fulfillment of these promises is clearly connected to the obedience of Abraham. Again, the comments of Grüneberg are apt concerning the obedience of Abraham:

> Only evidence that Abraham will give up what is most precious in response to God’s call when there seems no advantage to him in so doing will establish that he has pure motives in his response to God. . . .
>
> Abraham’s obedience is not blind, a matter merely of outward performance or of submission to arbitrary divine whims. It rather stems from his relationship with a God who does provide (v14) and remains faithful to his promises (vv16–18), who is working for good even when demanding something painful or puzzling. . . .
>
> Human obedience does not enable something other than can come from God’s promise; rather Abraham’s actions become a further grounding for the promise alongside God’s free decision.[54]

Abraham’s obedience is the obedience of faith, that is, obedience as faithful, loyal love in the context of a covenant relationship. God has made commitments, obligations, and promises, but these are not to be fulfilled without an obedient son in the covenant relationship.

Genesis 22:17 deals a decisive blow to Williamson's proposal that Genesis 15 and 17 represent distinct and separate covenants, the former unilateral and the latter bilateral, since this verse specifically connects the promise that Abraham's seed will be as myriad as the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore with Abraham's obedience. Grüneberg notes, "The promise that Abraham's offspring will be as numerous as the stars is found at 15:5 and 26:4 (and also Ex. 32:13); comparison with the sand of the shore is found at 32:13 [12]. The double comparison in 22:17 is unique."[55] The focus on seed in Genesis 22:16–18 is similar to Genesis 17, but the promise of seed as numerous as the stars connects specifically with Genesis 15. Thus, there is only one covenant, and one cannot simplistically say that this covenant is unilateral. The traditional terminology of conditional versus unconditional covenants needs to be overhauled. One must pay attention to the flow of the plot in the Abraham narratives. In Abraham's roller coaster of faith, just as the events of Genesis 16 motivate the covenant confirmation in Genesis 17, so the abysmal sellout of his wife, Sarah, in Genesis 20 precipitates the need for the test and the affirmation by mighty oath in Genesis 22.

Included in the mighty oath is a reiteration of the last promise of Genesis 12:1–3, "And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice," this time tying it to Abraham's obedience. Three grammatical issues in the Hebrew text require attention:

וְהִתְבָּרֲכוּ בְזַרְעֲךָ כֹּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ

wĕhitbārăkû bĕzar'ăkā kōl gôyê hā'āreṣ

all the nations of the earth will be blessed through your seed (Gen. 22:18)[56]

First, what is the semantic value of the *hithpael* of *bārak*? There is an ancient tradition—as old as the Septuagint—that construes the form as passive. More recent scholarship, however, such as one finds in the exhaustive study of Grüneberg, argues for a "speech action hithpael," meaning "utter blessing." Nonetheless, Benjamin Noonan has demonstrated that the linguistic foundation of the research by Grüneberg is unsound.[57]

There is no evidence from other languages related to Hebrew to support Grüneberg's contention that the *hithpael* of *bārak* functions as a speech-action middle. The clear meaning of the *hithpael* would be a reflexive of the declarative-estimative function found in the base form, the *piel*. Thus, the *hithpael* of *bārak* should mean, "to consider or declare oneself blessed," and this semantic value works well in this context.

Also significant is determining the exact function of the *beth* preposition on the suffixed noun "your seed." Ernst Jenni has written a magisterial work analyzing all 15,570 instances of *beth* according to linguistic principles.[58] Fundamentally, "the *beth* preposition indicates two correlates, x and y, such that x refers to y."[59] The first correlate *x* is related to the second correlate *y*; therefore *y* is the point or standard of reference. The particular function of *beth* in this text is what Jenni calls a *beth communicationis*, a subcategory of the *beth realization*.[60] What this jargon means in simple terms is that *y* is a person, animal, or thing (*beth realization*), and that *y* speaks indirectly for *x* (*beth communicationis*). Thus, the "seed" of Abraham will speak indirectly for the nations—that is, the nations will utter blessing through, or better, "in the name of," the "seed" of Abraham. This analysis appears to assume a speech-action middle. With the analysis of the *hithpael* given by Noonan, the *beth* is simply instrumental: the nations consider/declare themselves blessed by or through Abraham's seed. In this way, the passive and "declarative-estimative hithpael" are virtually the same thing. The overall thrust of Genesis 22:16–18 is nicely summed up by Grüneberg:

> 22:18 does not deny that the nations will gain blessing: by implication it affirms it. But its main thrust is to stress Israel's own prosperity. This prosperity, it suggests, is grounded in three things: the divine promise, Abraham's faithful obedience, and Israel's own ongoing commitment to Yhwh—maintaining his law, worshipping at Jerusalem, and acknowledging herself entirely dependent on him for her life.[61]

His conclusion is also based on the focus on Moriah (= Jerusalem) in Genesis 22 and the mention of *tôrâ* in Genesis 26:5.

Third, what is the referent of “your seed” in Genesis 22:17–18? The problem arises from the fact that, like the noun in English, the noun “seed” in Hebrew can be construed as either a collective singular (a bag of seed) or a unitary singular (a seed as opposed to seeds). Jack Collins made an exhaustive analysis of all the data and discovered the following principles in determining whether the intended meaning is a collective or a unitary singular: (1) when זֶרַע serves as a collective for “offspring or posterity” in general, the verbs are commonly singular, although the plural is found a number of times; (2) when זֶרַע denotes “posterity,” the pronouns (independent pronouns, object pronouns and suffixes) are always plural; and (3) when זֶרַע indicates a specific (individual) descendant, it appears with singular verb inflections, adjectives, and pronouns.[62]

According to these grammatical principles, the final clause of Genesis 22:17 appears to be set apart from what proceeds. T. D. Alexander comments as follows:

> A striking feature of the final clause is the way in which it does not begin with a *vav*-consecutive; rather it is introduced by the imperfect verb יִרַשׁ preceded by a non-converting ו. This syntactical arrangement leaves open the possibility that the זֶרַע referred to in the final clause differs from that mentioned in the first part of the verse. Whereas the first זֶרַע obviously refers to a very large number of descendants, the second would, following Collins’ approach, denote a single individual who is victorious over his enemies.
>
> This latter reading of 22:17 has implications also for 22:18a which states: וְהִתְבָּרֲכוּ בְזַרְעֲךָ כֹּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ (“and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through your offspring”). If the immediately preceding reference to “seed” in 22:17 denotes an individual, this must also be the case in 22:18a, for there is nothing here to indicate a change in number. The blessing of “all the nations of the earth” is thus associated with a particular descendant of Abraham, rather than with all those descended from him.[63]

The same syntactical arrangement can be noted in Genesis 24:60. There is also an allusion to Genesis 22:17b–18a in Psalm 72:17: “May all nations be blessed through him.” According to the context of the psalm, the individual

mentioned here through whom all nations shall be blessed is a royal figure. Alexander explains:

> While the psalm's title associates it with Solomon, its contents clearly envisages a king whose reign surpasses by far that of Solomon. Indeed, this future monarch is described as ruling the entire earth, bringing deliverance to the oppressed by defeating their enemies (*cf.* Ps 72:4–14).[64]

So Paul's argument in Galatians 3:16 that the text speaks of "seed" and not "seeds" appears to be based upon solid exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures.[65]

Genesis 26

The last of the six promises of Genesis 12:1–3 is again repeated in 26:1–5, and here, too, as in 22:18, it is connected with Abraham's obedience:

> Now there was a famine in the land—besides the previous famine of Abraham's time—and Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions." (Gen. 26:1–5 NIV)

After Isaac has obtained land, wealth, and water, Genesis 26:24 repeats the connection with Abraham:

> From there he went up to Beersheba. That night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham."
>
> Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well. (Gen. 26:23–25 NIV)

In Genesis 26, the narrator depicts Isaac following in his father's footsteps.[66] While he does not go down to Egypt, he does—like his father—sojourn in Gerar (Philistine territory), lie about his wife, gain victory in the matter of wells, and conclude a treaty with Abimelech at Beersheba. As Janzen notes, "The compact rehearsal of Isaac's life in this chapter shows his vocation to be largely one of consolidating the trail Abraham has blazed by retracing many of its episodes."[67] Four times Yahweh links the promises to Abraham (26:3, 5, 24 [2x]).

In the divine revelation in Genesis 26:2–5, Yahweh promises to "be with Isaac," that is, to protect him and give him success in his undertakings. This is the first time God makes such a promise to a patriarch, although Abimelech observed this of Abraham in 21:22, and (another?) Abimelech observes it of Isaac in 26:28. The promises of blessing, descendants, and land made to Abraham are given to Isaac. Note that the promise of lands chiastically surrounds the promise of descendants in an a-b-a pattern.

Yahweh promises to "affirm the oath" that he swore to Abraham. The expression is *hēqîm šĕvuʿâ* and is directly equivalent to *hēqîm bĕrît*—only, the object is "oath" and not "covenant." The use of "oath" is probably a direct reference to the oath in 22:16–18, which confirms in a mighty way the covenant established in chapter 15 and upheld in chapter 17. The "oath" therefore stands for the covenant but refers especially to Genesis 22:16–18. The reference to descendants as numerous as the stars is a direct reference also to 15:5, although this is taken up in 22:17, and the promise that "through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed" connects with the emphasis of Genesis 17 and its modification in 22:18.

This last of the six promises of Genesis 12:1–3 is given five times in the narratives of Genesis: 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14. In 12:3, the prepositional phrase is "in you"; in 18:18, the prepositional phrase is "in him." Both pronouns refer directly to Abraham. In 22:18 and 26:4, the prepositional phrase is changed to "in/through your offspring." Abraham has been faithful, loyal, and obedient in the covenant relationship. Henceforth, the blessing of the nations depends on the prosperity of Israel. In 28:14, God is speaking to Jacob and says "in you and in your offspring." Genesis 28:14 is the only other place apart from 12:3 that speaks of the

peoples of the world as *mišpaḥôt* (“clans”); all other reiterations use the term *gôyîm* (“nations”). This is because 28:14 forms a kind of *inclusio* with 12:3 in the narrative structure.[68] Conversely, Chee-Chiew Lee says, “To show further the continuity of the later reiterations of this blessing with the Table of Nations (Genesis 10), Genesis 18:18; 22:18; 26:4 use גויי הארץ instead of משפחת האדמה.”[69] Genesis 28:14 is also the only place in which we have “in you and in your offspring”—both the pronoun referring to the patriarch and the term “offspring,” or “descendants”—because, as a patriarch, Jacob is the last person to whom the promise can be both through him and also through his family. After the patriarchs, the blessing comes through the nation descended from them: Israel.

The repetition of the promises to Isaac is concluded by connecting their fulfillment to the obedience of Abraham in 26:5, as we also see in 26:24. This text is clear: “Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, *because* Abraham obeyed me and kept my charge (i.e., his obligations to me), my commands, my decrees, and my laws.” The four terms *mišmartî*, *miṣwōtāy*, *ḥuqqôtāy*, and *tôrôtāy* are all characteristic of the Mosaic covenant *because this narrative was written* (by Moses) *to instruct Israel*: blessing for the nations depends on their obedience.

Genesis 35

Before concluding our discussion on the connection between fulfillment of the promises and Abraham’s obedience, we may observe how a remarkable twist is added when the promises are later repeated to Jacob. After his exile with Laban, he returned to the land of Canaan and lived at Beersheba, where Abraham and Isaac had lived. From there God called him to go north toward Haran to revisit Bethel, where God had first revealed himself to him in the dream of the ladder to heaven. As Gordon Wenham comments,

> Just as Abraham’s three-day pilgrimage to sacrifice on Mount Moriah climaxed in the most categorical reaffirmation of the promises in his career, so, too, Jacob’s sacred journey is crowned with the strongest statement of the promises that he ever heard. And it is to this revelation that Jacob looked back at the end of his life when he blessed Ephraim and Manasseh in 48:3–4.[70]

The content of the revelation is expressed in Genesis 35:9–13:

> After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, “Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.” So he named him Israel.
>
> And God said to him, “I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you.” Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him. (NIV)

The command to be fruitful and increase shows that Jacob, like Abraham and Isaac, inherits the role of a new Adam and that Canaan is a new Eden. Then, the promises of descendants and land are specifically and strongly vouchsafed to him. There is an interesting twist, however, to the promises. Jacob is told that a nation and an “assembly,” or “congregation,” of nations will come from him. We already know that a nation will come from him. But what could it mean that “a company of nations” will come from him? This cannot refer to the “tribes” of Israel, for this would not satisfy the Hebrew term *gôyîm*, which refers to the groups of peoples in the world as politically and socially structured entities with government. Nor could it be a reference to the later development when Israel was split into two kingdoms. Two kingdoms are not exactly a company of nations. In the context of the later narrative, it can only portend the inclusion of the Gentiles in the community under the blessing promised through Abraham. As Lee notes in a careful exegetical study of this text,

> Paul Williamson argues that the metaphorical usage of אב “father” to portray the idea of counselor, protector, or benefactor in the Hebrew Bible suggests that Abraham’s fatherhood here goes beyond genealogical linkage and implies that Abraham shall be a spiritual benefactor of many nations, “the mediator of God’s blessing to them.”[71] The nuance between the promise made to Abraham in Gen 17:4–5 and its reiteration to Jacob in 35:10–12 is as follows: while

> Abraham becoming “the father of many nations” may still be fulfilled through other physical descendants of Abraham, Jacob becoming “a nation and a company of nations” can only be fulfilled beyond his physical descendants.[72]

It could be reasonably argued that the promise of Abraham becoming the “father of many nations” is fulfilled by the nation of Israel, the descendants of Ishmael (Gen. 25:12–18), the descendants of Abraham’s second wife, Keturah (25:1–5), and the descendants of Esau (36:1–19, 31–43), Moab (19:37), and Ammon (19:38). This is a common understanding, as Lee points out,[73] but the statement in Genesis 35:11 does not permit this. What we can observe is that there appears to be a pattern in God’s dealings with the patriarchs. God makes big promises. He promises that Abraham will become a great nation and have Canaan as his possession—this much is already revealed in chapter 12. Abraham would have been happy to begin the great nation with Ishmael, fathered through Hagar, and wait for future descendants to gain possession of the land. Yet God had to make plain to him in Genesis 17 that the nation would come from his union with his wife, Sarah. The pattern, then, is that the human perception of God’s promises, great as they are, almost always forms a stunted vision of what God really has in mind and in store for his people.[74]

It should also be noted in passing that Genesis 35:11 repeats the promise of Genesis 17:6 that kings as well as nations will come from Abraham and now Jacob. This thread will be picked up later, but it is the divine intention for Abraham and his family, and only human perception will stunt this vision for the future as well.

Two further texts in the Old Testament may possibly be considered either citations or allusions to the last promise of Genesis 12:3—Jeremiah 2:4 and Psalm 72:17. If they are genuine allusions, they connect the Abrahamic covenant to the Davidic covenant and the new covenant, respectively. Thus they will be discussed later when the Davidic and new covenants are considered.

Tensions in the Metanarrative

Significant tensions have been introduced into the plot structure of the metanarrative in the unfolding of Abraham's story. The larger story began with creation and the first man in covenant with the Lord God as obedient son and royal vicegerent over the world. Human disobedience brought chaos and death. God made a new start after the flood with a brand new world and a second Adam. Here, too, we saw that the human partner was unfaithful in the covenant relationship. Divine grace alone preserves the world.

So out of the chaos that led to Babel, God begins another new creation with another new Adam, Abraham and his family. Abraham is depicted in the narratives as a new Adam placed in Canaan, a new Eden. From the metanarrative to this point, we now know that the human partner not only will not but cannot be faithful in the covenant relationship. We also now know that a fresh, new start is a nonsolution to the original problem of human disloyalty and disobedience that resulted in the arrival of death in the creation.

Nevertheless, God calls Abram and makes huge promises concerning blessing in his life and salvation for the entire world through him. Later, in Genesis 15, these big promises are strengthened by a covenant, although Abram still has nothing to show from God's word. Although this covenant is patterned in general after ancient Near Eastern treaties, strangely, God undertakes the self-maledictory oath for both partners in the covenant. This is completely unheard of in Abraham's world and introduces another tension. Since we know that the human partner will not demonstrate complete devotion and full obedience within the covenant relationship, God seems to be guaranteeing only his own death at this point. How can God die? We understand how this works from the end of the story, but at this stage, we must allow this tension in the narrative.

Yet as Genesis 17:2 shows (as well as subsequent texts, such as Gen. 18:19; 22:18; 26:5, where God upholds his covenant [later confirmed by a mighty oath]), God still requires an obedient son in the covenant relationship and bases fulfillment of the promises not only on himself but also on Abraham's obedience and, indeed, on the future obedience of Abraham's family, Israel. In sum, Abraham was an imperfect covenant

partner and badly represented Yahweh to the world of that time in a number of ways. His lack of complete devotion and obedience points to the fact that another is coming who will be obedient in every respect.

There are theological tensions as well as tensions in the narrative plot structure. We wonder how another divine-human covenant relationship can survive, given that disloyalty is *endemic* in the human partner—that is, the human partner is unfaithful *by nature*. The narrative assures the reader that this covenant is undergirded by the mighty promises of the Almighty. God guarantees the covenant promises, and yet he also requires an obedient son in the covenant relationship.

All these tensions are important to the later plot structure of the metanarrative, and we must not attempt to remove them through eisegesis. They must be allowed to stand. We must let the text stand over us; we must not stand over the text to judge what can and cannot be allowed in the story.

The Purpose of the Abrahamic Covenant: How the Grand Story Unfolds

Why did God make a covenant with Abraham? And how is this covenant, made so long ago, relevant to us today? Exegesis of the relevant texts has shown that although the cultural-historical setting and language differ from Genesis 1–3 to Genesis 6–9 to Genesis 12–25, the main idea is still that God is establishing his rule in the context of a covenant relationship. Abraham and his descendants will be a light to the nations in this matter.

Looking backward and forward in the canon of Scripture, two things must be said about the covenant with Abraham. First, the covenant with Abraham is the basis for all God’s dealings with the human race from this point on, and the basis of all his later plans and purposes in history. Thus, the covenants (with creation, with Noah, with Abraham) are the backbone of the metanarrative plot structure. A quick overview of the Old Testament demonstrates this.

The book of Genesis ends with Israel, the family of Abraham, becoming a great and numerous people. The promise of descendants and posterity is being fulfilled.

The point of the book of Exodus will be to add, by way of redemption from slavery, the gift of the land. So the covenant with Abraham is the basis for delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt. Israel becomes a great nation, and God makes a covenant with the nation at Sinai (Deut. 7:7–9).

The Mosaic covenant at Sinai is, in turn, the basis for God's covenant with David. The king of Israel is the administrator and mediator of the Mosaic covenant, representing God's rule to the people and representing the people as a whole (2 Sam. 7:22–24).

As the story unfolds, however, it is marked by divine faithfulness on the one hand and human unfaithfulness on the other. At every point along the way, it seems that God's plan is doomed to failure. Israel is a major bottleneck in the plan of God to bless the nations. How can blessing flow through her to the world when she is just as riddled with sin? Paul explains this dilemma in Galatians 3:8–14:

> Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.
>
> For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith." The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The person who does these things will live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (NIV)

When we come to the time of Jesus, Israel is under a curse because they have been unfaithful to the Israelite covenant. Do they want to be an instrument of blessing to the nations? No, they want to raise an army of guerrillas that will conquer and smash the might of Rome, drive the nations away, and bring glory to Israel by setting her over the world. And so God

sent Jesus to fulfill his promises. First, Jesus had to deliver Israel from the curse and put her back into a right relationship with God. Then, as King of Israel, he had to do what the nation as a whole had failed to do: bring blessing to the nations. He accomplished both by dying on the cross.

Several texts in the New Testament specifically connect the coming of Jesus Christ with the Abrahamic covenant. First, Luke 1:54–55 reads,

> He has helped his servant Israel,
> remembering to be merciful
> to Abraham and his descendants forever,
> even as he said to our fathers.

Here Mary's song of praise describes the birth of her son as God "remembering mercy." Behind the Greek word that is rendered "mercy" is the Hebrew term *ḥesed*, which has to do with fulfilling covenant obligations. The covenant promises being fulfilled are the ones made to Abraham, according to Mary.

Then, in Luke 1:69–75, we read,

> He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
> in the house of his servant David
> (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
> salvation from our enemies
> and from the hand of all who hate us—
> to show mercy to our fathers
> and to remember his holy covenant,
> the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
> to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
> and to enable us to serve him without fear
> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Here at the birth of John the Baptist, Zechariah, the father, regains speech and opens his mouth in a prophecy. He speaks here of God fulfilling his promises to Abraham in bringing help to Israel.

Then, in Acts 3:24–26, Peter says,

> Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, "Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed." When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.

After the beggar is healed on the porch of Solomon, Peter preaches at the temple and announces good news through God's servant Jesus, crucified and risen from the dead. The good news is that God has fulfilled his promises to Abraham and sent Jesus "to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." Thus it is clear, from even a few texts in the New Testament, that the covenant with Abraham is the basis and foundation for the gospel message announcing forgiveness of sins and justification through Jesus Christ.

No doubt the claim that the covenants, and in particular the Abrahamic covenant, form the backbone of the metanarrative will be criticized. One problem faced by many biblical theologies is that they comprehend the history and the prophets but do not fit the Psalms and Wisdom texts into the picture. Yet books like the Psalms are founded on the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic and Davidic covenants flowing from it. One example may suffice at this point.

Psalm 47 is a brief psalm inviting the nations to rejoice because Yahweh is the supreme sovereign over all peoples and has subdued them under Israel. At the end, the lyrics read as follows:

> God reigns over the nations;
> God sits on his holy throne.
> The princes of the peoples gather
> as the people of the God of Abraham.
> For the shields of the earth belong to God;
> he is highly exalted! (Ps. 47:8–9 ESV)

Note how "the princes of the peoples [plural] gather as the people [singular] of the God of Abraham." Non-Israelite nations are included in the one people of God. The mention of the "God of Abraham" is sufficient to

remind those singing this psalm that the inclusion of the Gentiles into the one people of God can be possible only through Abraham becoming father in a spiritual sense—namely, the model of faith, for a company of nations, as Genesis 35:11 intends.

Psalm 117, although the shortest in the entire Psalter, the hymnal of ancient Israel, is perhaps the most profound because it functions like a dissertation abstract, encapsulating in as few words as possible the burden of the entire book of Psalms:

> Praise the LORD, all nations!
> Extol him, all peoples!
> For great is his steadfast love toward us,
> and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.
> Praise the LORD! (ESV)

The word pair "steadfast love" (*ḥesed*) and "faithfulness" (*'ĕmet*) is actually a summary of the behavior required by both parties in the Mosaic covenant/Torah. This, the shortest hymn in Israel's hymnal, sums up the whole Psalter: Yahweh is to be praised by the nations for his covenantal faithfulness and love. The key exegetical issue is identifying the referent of the pronoun "us" in verse 2. Norbert Lohfink and Erich Zenger express themselves strongly on this matter in a footnote:

> Ps 117:2 is meant to be inclusive: YHWH's steadfast love and faithfulness hold sway powerfully "over us," that is over Israel and the nations. That is to be maintained against the majority of interpreters, also against Mathys, *Dichter*, 292–97. That Psalm 117 was created for the Hallel, Psalms 113–118, precisely with a "theology of the nations" in mind is shown by the Münster dissertation of Jutta Schröten, *Entstehung, Komposition und Wirkungsgeschichte des 118. Psalms*, BBB 95 (Weinheim: Beltz Athenaeum, 1995).[75]

Lohfink and Zenger demonstrate in their work the importance of interpreting a psalm not as a stand-alone text but in the context of the editorial work of Israel's hymnal—the Psalms. If, however, the standard view is taken, the command to the nations to praise the Lord is given by Israel. The "us" would then be taken to refer to Israel. Faithfulness and

loyal love is what Israel has experienced in covenant relationship with God. But then, due to God's faithful, loyal love, the blessing flows to the nations by virtue of the Abrahamic covenant. This indeed seems to be Paul's point in Romans 15:11.[76] Thus, in the end, there hardly seems to be much difference between the two positions.

The second point to note about the covenant with Abraham is that the purpose of the covenants is for God to reveal himself. After the covenant with Noah we know that everything depends on divine favor. Humans will not and cannot demonstrate faithfulness in the covenant relationship with God, which is fundamental to life in this world. So, one of my friends, Don Wood, asked, "If everything depends on God's grace, then why such a long story?" Why doesn't God just zap us with his grace in Genesis 12? We know for sure by this point in the metanarrative that chaos and death will be overcome only by divine grace. The answer to this question is that God wants to reveal himself. John Walton explains:

> God has a plan in history that he is sovereignly executing. The goal of that plan is for him to be in relationship with the people whom he has created. It would be difficult for people to enter into a relationship with a God whom they do not know. If his nature were concealed, obscured, or distorted, an honest relationship would be impossible. In order to clear the way for this relationship, then, God has undertaken as a primary objective a program of self-revelation. He wants people to know him. The mechanism that drives this program is the covenant, and the instrument is Israel. The purpose of the covenant is to reveal God.[77]

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1. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC 1B (Nashville: B&H, 2005), 166–67.

2. Cf. Robert E. Longacre, "Analysis of Preverbal Nouns in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: Some Overriding Concerns," *JOTT* 5, no. 3 (1992): 218; Longacre, "*Weqatal* Forms in Biblical Hebrew Prose," in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*, ed. Robert D. Bergen (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994), 50–98. It is also possible to construe the *weqatal* form as a variant of the preterite *wayyiqtol*; see Rudolf Meyer, "Auffallender Erzählungstil in einem angeblichen Auszug aus der 'Chronik der Konige von Juda,'" in *Festschrift Friedrich Baumgärtel zum 70. Geburstag*, ed. J. Herrmann and L. Rost (Erlangen, Germany: Universitätsbund Erlangen, 1959), 115–22; Stephen G. Dempster, "Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative: A Discourse Analysis of Narrative from the Classical Period" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1985), 266.

3. See Elizabeth Robar, *The Verb and the Paragraph in Biblical Hebrew: A Cognitive-Linguistic Approach* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 153, 178.

4. William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1984), 54.

5. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 332.

6. Ibid., 333.

7. See Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Meaning of the Animal Rite in Genesis 15," *JSOT* 6, no. 19 (1981): 61–78; Richard S. Hess, "The Slaughter of the Animals in Genesis 15: Genesis 15:8–21 and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context," in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12–50*, ed. R. S. Hess, G. J. Wenham, and P. E. Satterthwaite, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1993, 1994), 55–65.

8. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 171–72.

9. Designated AT 456, this text from the early second millennium BC states, "Abba-AN swore an oath of the gods to Yarimlim and he cut the neck of one lamb (saying): (May I be cursed) if I take what I have given to you." See Hess, "Slaughter of the Animals in Genesis 15," 57.

10. Cited from A. Leo Oppenheim et al., eds., *The Assyrian Dictionary*, vol. 1, part 2: A (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1968), 482. See Charles-F. Jean, *Archives Royales de Mari*, vol. 2, *Lettres* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1950), 37:11.

11. What is interesting in the text from Mari is that the suzerain's lieutenant takes with him a puppy dog, a bird, and a donkey for the covenant-making ritual/sacrifice. The parties would not accept the puppy dog or the bird; only the donkey would do. This confirms the pattern in the Old Testament that bigger animals are employed in covenants or treaties at the level of a large group of people(s) or nations.

12. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 170–72.

13. Ray Vander Laan with Judith Markham, *Echoes of His Presence: Stories of the Messiah from the People of His Day* (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family, 1996), 8–9.

14. In the Septuagint, the rendering παντοκράτωρ is not employed by the Genesis translator, but is popularized rather by the Job translator.

15. John H. Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 72–73.

16. Little space is given in this work to the way in which the Abrahamic narratives address the issue of proper stewardship of the land and the earth's resources. This is developed in great detail in Byron L. Wheaton, "Abraham, Land, and Stewardship: Reading the Abraham Narratives for Their Contribution to Israel's Land Ethic" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001). The comments made herein are dependent on his work.

17. B. Kedar-Kopfstein, "תָּמַם *tāmam*; תָּם *tām*; תְּמִים *tāmîm*; תֹּם (תֻּם) *tōm* (*tom-*); תַּמָּה *tummâ*; תֻּמִּים *tummîm*," in *TDOT* 15:72.

18. Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and Its Covenantal Development in Genesis*, JSOTSup 315 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 203–5 (emphasis original).

19. See especially "Initiating versus Affirming or Upholding a Covenant" in chap. 5 .

20. Williamson lists only Gen. 9:12 and 17:2, although elsewhere he criticizes Wenham for missing Gen. 9:12 and discusses Num. 25:12 without mentioning the verb *nātan*. *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations*, 204n63, 201n52, 200.

21. Ibid., 190–91.

22. Williamson's list, cited above, is missing Genesis 17:9.

23. The forty-seven instances are as follows: Gen. 6:18; 9:9, 11, 15; 17:2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 21; Ex. 6:4, 5; 19:5; Lev. 26:9, 15, 42 (3x), 44; Num. 25:12; Deut. 31:16, 20; Josh. 7:11; Judg. 2:1, 20; 1 Kings 11:11; Pss. 50:5, 16; 89:35; 132:12; Isa. 59:21; Jer. 11:10; 31:32; 33:20 (2x), 21, 25; Ezek. 16:60, 62; 44:7; Hos. 8:1; Zech. 11:10; Mal. 2:4, 5. In Ps. 50:5, the first-person pronominal suffix means "the covenant with me," and the occurrence in Ezek. 16:62 may possibly be a covenant cataphoric or proleptic.

24. Adapted from © Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and Its Covenantal Development in Genesis*, JSOTSup 315 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 86, who cites it from T. D. Alexander, "A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis" (PhD diss., The Queen's University of Belfast, 1982), 179. Used by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

25. Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 262.

26. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations*, 106.

27. Rudolf Smend, *Die Bundesformel*, ThSt 68 (Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1963).

28. Elmer Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981).

29. Rolf Rendtorff, *Die "Bundesformel": eine exegetisch-theologische Untersuchung* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1995).

30. Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*, trans. Margaret Kohl, OTS (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 92 (emphasis mine).

31. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 150.

32. John Meade, "The Meaning of Circumcision in Israel: A Proposal for a Transfer of Rite from Egypt to Israel," *Adorare Mente* 1 (2008): 14–29. See now John D. Meade, "The Meaning of Circumcision in Israel: A Proposal for a Transfer of Rite from Egypt to Israel," *SBJT* 20, no. 1 (2016): 35–54. David A. Bernat's *Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision in the Priestly Tradition*, AIL 3 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009) is a book-length study devoted to the topic of circumcision. The author's commitment to source theory and lack of attention to ancient Near Eastern cultural setting provide results that are not illuminating.

33. Meade, "Meaning of Circumcision in Israel," *Adorare Mente*, 27–29.

34. Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976), 334.

35. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 204.

36. See Jason S. DeRouchie, "Circumcision in the Hebrew Bible and Targums: Theology, Rhetoric, and the Handling of Metaphor," *BBR* 14, no. 2 (2004): 175–203.

37. Robert D. Bergen, in *Holman Study Bible*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Jeremy Royal Howard (Nashville: Holman Bible, 2010), 40.

38. Now published as Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations*.

39. Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

40. Ibid., 85–86.

41. John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

42. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 89–90.

43. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations*, 199–200.

44. Bruce Waltke's outline of Genesis 12–50 entitles 15:1–16:16 as "Land covenant with Abraham and annunciation of Ishmael" and 17:1–18:15 as "Seed covenant with Abraham and annunciation of Isaac." Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 311. This approach does not square with the facts in the text, as both "land" and "seed" are in focus in both Genesis 15 and 17. Later, on p. 318 of Waltke's work, an outline of Genesis 15 acknowledges as much.

45. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 89.

46. As discussed in Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 263.

47. For full details, see Byron Wheaton, "Focus and Structure in the Abraham Narratives," *TJ*, n.s., 27, no. 1 (2006): 143–46.

48. In Genesis 17, Yahweh promised that Sarah would bear a son within a year. In chap. 18, she is not yet aware of any pregnancy, so this visit must be within a period of just two to four months after the revelation of Genesis 17.

49. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 218.

50. We do not know the age of Isaac precisely, since the narrator does not tell us. Nonetheless, the boy was old enough to carry wood and ask questions, as Grüneberg notes. Keith N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in Its Narrative Context*, BZAW 332 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 228.

51. A connection between the call of Abram in Gen. 12:1–3 and the call in Gen. 22:1–18 is established by clear literary markers. Grüneberg notes, "First, the phrase לך־לך is found only in these two places in the Hebrew Bible. Second, on each occasion Abraham is told to go to a place not yet completely specified." See Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations*, 222. This justifies Keller's perception of Genesis 22 as a "second call."

52. Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Dutton, 2009), 7 (emphasis original).

53. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations*, 228.

54. Ibid., 223, 224, 226.

55. Ibid., 229.

56. This is just a literal working translation for purposes of discussion.

57. Benjamin J. Noonan, "Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Reexamination of the Niphal and Hitpael of ברך in the Patriarchal Narratives," *HS* 51 (2010): 73–93.

58. Ernst Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, vol. 1, *Die Präposition Beth* (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 1992).

59. Ibid., 1:64.

60. Ibid., 1:64.

61. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations*, 235.

62. Jack Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3.15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?," *TynBul* 48, no. 1 (1997): 142–44. Extensive further research by Jason DeRouchie and Jason C. Meyer has confirmed and extended the insights provided by Collins. See Jason DeRouchie and Jason C. Meyer, "Christ or Family as the 'Seed' of Promise? An Evaluation of N. T. Wright on Galatians 3:16," *SBJT* 14, no. 3 (2010): 36–49; Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis," *JETS* 56, no. 2 (2013): 219–47; DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective," *JETS* 58, no. 3 (2015): 445–85. See also the discussion below on Genesis 35.

63. T. Desmond Alexander, "Further Observations of the Term 'Seed' in Genesis," *TynBul* 48, no. 2 (1997): 365. See also Alexander, "Genesis 22 and the Covenant of Circumcision," *JSOT* 8, no. 25 (1983): 17–22.

64. Alexander, "Further Observations," 365.

65. See C. John Collins, "Galatians 3:16: What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?," *TynBul* 54, no. 1 (2003): 75–86.

66. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations*, 235.

67. J. Gerald Janzen, *Genesis 12–50: Abraham and All the Families of the Earth*, ITC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 103.

68. See Chee-Chiew Lee, "גוים in Genesis 35:11 and the Abrahamic Promise of Blessings for the Nations," *JETS* 52, no. 3 (2009): 472.

69. Ibid.
70. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC 2 (Waco, TX: Word, 1994), 325.
71. Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel and the Nations*, 158–60.
72. Lee, "גוים in Genesis 35:11," 473–74.
73. Ibid.
74. For a further excellent study on this text, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "Father of a Multitude of Nations: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 7–38.
75. Norbert Lohfink and Erich Zenger, *The God of Israel and the Nations: Studies in Isaiah and the Psalms* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 182n44.
76. I am indebted to Stephen G. Dempster for drawing my attention to Paul's use of Psalm 117.
77. Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan*, 24.

9

The Mosaic Covenant

Exodus/Sinai

Central to the book of Exodus—and indeed, to the entire Pentateuch—is the covenant made between Yahweh and Israel at Sinai, comprising chapters 19–24.[1] The eighteen preceding chapters describe the release of Israel from bondage and slavery in Egypt and the journey through the wilderness to Sinai. Chapters 25–40 are devoted to the construction of a place of worship as the appropriate recognition of the divine kingship established through the covenant.

A much bigger claim, however, can be made for Exodus 19–24. This unit is entitled "the Book of the Covenant" by Moses himself (Ex. 24:7). The Book of the Covenant, along with the book of Deuteronomy as an addition or supplement to it (cf. Deut. 28:69 MT [29:1 EV]), forms the heart of the old covenant. And it is the interpretation of how the old covenant relates to the new that is the basis of all the major divisions among Christians; that is, all denominational differences derive ultimately from different understandings of how the covenant at Sinai relates to us today.

This brief treatment of Exodus 19–24 seeks to base accurate exposition of this text on (1) closer attention to the larger literary structure; (2) exegesis based on the cultural, historical, and linguistic setting of the text; and (3) consideration of the larger story of Scripture (metanarrative) and explicit indications of how this text fits within this larger story.

Where and how Exodus 19–24 fits into the larger story of Scripture will be briefly detailed at both the beginning and the end of the section—

framing all analysis of the covenant at Sinai as bookends.[2] In between, attention will be given to the literary structure of Exodus 19–24, and exegesis will be focused on the divine purpose of the covenant in Exodus 19:5–6, the first three of the Ten Commandments, and the ceremony of covenant ratification in Exodus 24:1–11.

Exodus 19–24 within the Larger Story of Scripture

The biblical narrative begins with a creator God who is the Maker of our world and, indeed, of the entire universe. We humans are the crowning achievement of his creative work. There is a difference, moreover, between humans and animals—in fact, between us and all other creatures: we alone have been made as the image of this creator God and have been given special tasks to perform on behalf of the Creator.

According to Genesis 1:26–28, the divine image defines human life (ontologically—not just functionally) in terms of a covenant relationship with the creator God on the one hand and with the creation on the other. The former may be captured by the term *sonship* and is implied by Genesis 5:1–3. The latter relationship may be reflected in the terms *kingship* and *servanthood*. We noted previously that in the ninth-century Aramaic Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription, *ṣalmā'* ("image") refers to the king's majestic power and rule in relation to his subjects, while *demûthā'* ("likeness") refers to the king's petitionary role and relation to the deity.[3] Thus the ancient Near Eastern data confirm, correspond to, and illustrate precisely the terms used in the biblical text. Furthermore, as Genesis 2:4–25 shows, the Adamic son is like a priest in a garden sanctuary. He must first learn the ways of God in order to exercise the rule of God as God himself would.[4]

The biblical narrative, then, is focused at the start on establishing the rule of God through covenant relationship: *kingdom through covenant*.

The first humans, however, rebelled against the creator God. As a result, chaos, discord, and death infect the creation at every level.

The destructive path chosen by the first humans led to a downward spiral of corruption and violence until divine intervention was required. God judged the human race by a flood and made a new beginning with Noah and his family. Noah is presented in the narrative as a new Adam. As soon as

the dry land appears out of the chaos of the floodwaters, Noah is placed there and commanded to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 9:1); that is, he is given Adam's commission. The correspondence to Genesis 1 is striking. Eventually, however, the family of Noah ends up in the same chaos and corruption as the family of the first Adam. With the Tower of Babel, the nations are lost and scattered over the face of the earth.

So God made another new start, this time with Abraham. Abraham and his family, called Israel, are another Adam, who will be God's true humanity. God makes great promises to Abraham in Genesis 12. These promises are enshrined eventually in a covenant made with him and his descendants in chapters 15 and 17 and confirmed by a mighty oath in chapter 22.

The first of God's promises to Abram, "I will make you into a great nation," employs the term *gôy* in Hebrew, while the last of God's six promises, "All the clans/families of the earth will be blessed in you," employs instead the term *mišpāḥâ*. This contrast in terms carries forward the focus on kingdom through covenant.

Thus, Abraham and Israel have inherited an Adamic role.[5] Yahweh refers to the nation as his *son* in Exodus 4:22–23. The divine purpose in the covenant established between God and Israel at Sinai is unfolded in Exodus 19:3–6. As a kingdom of priests, they will function to make the ways of God known to the nations and also to bring the nations into a right relationship to God. Israel will display to the rest of the world within its covenant community the kind of relationships, first to God and then to one another and to the physical world, that God intended originally for all humanity. In fact, through Abraham's family, God purposes and plans to bring blessing to all the nations of the world. In this way, through the family of Abraham, through Israel, his last Adam, he will bring about a resolution of the sin and death caused by the first Adam. Since Israel is located geographically on the one and only communications link between the great superpowers of the ancient world (Egypt and Mesopotamia), she will, in this position, show the nations how to have a right relationship to God, how to treat each other in a truly human way, and how to faithfully steward the earth's resources. This is the meaning of Israel's sonship.

The promises of God to Abraham focused on two things: descendants and land. When we come to the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy, which constitute the Mosaic covenant, or covenant with Israel, we have the fulfillment of these promises. First, God has greatly increased the descendants of Abraham so that they are innumerable, like the sand on the seashore or the stars of the night sky. Second, he has given them the land of Canaan.

God's plan and purpose, however, have not changed. He wants to bless the descendants of Abraham and, through them, all the nations. In fact, his plan is to restore his broken and ruined creation through Israel. As they come out of Egypt and before they enter the land, God makes an agreement with Israel. The purpose of this agreement or covenant is to enable them to enjoy the blessings he wants to give them and to be the blessing to the other nations. This covenant will show them how to be his true humanity. It will direct, guide, and lead them to have a right relationship with God and a right relationship with everyone else in the covenant community. It will also teach them how to have a right relationship to all the creation, to be good stewards of the earth's resources. We might say, then, that the Mosaic covenant is given at this time to administer the fulfillment of the divine promises to Abraham and to the nation as a whole, and through them to the entire world.

Labeling Covenants

Frequently, this covenant is entitled "the covenant at Sinai," but what is the biblical terminology? From the point of view of the New Testament—which is the latinized English for "new covenant" (Lat. *novum testamentum*)—it is called the "old covenant" in 2 Corinthians 3:14 (cf. 3:15). Hebrews 8–9 also uses the term "first" for this covenant. In the Old Testament, however, it is commonly called the Torah (law) or the Torah (law) of Moses (Ex. 24:12).

In Scripture, covenants are normally named according to the human partner. The covenant in Genesis 6–9 is between God and Noah. This is expanded to include his family and, through them, all humanity. It is fair to call this "the covenant with Noah." The covenant in Genesis 15 and 17 is called the "covenant with Abram" (Gen. 15:18). Since it is passed directly

on to Isaac and Jacob, it is called the covenant with Isaac and also the covenant with Jacob in Leviticus 26:42. Later we find the term "the covenant with the fathers" (Deut. 4:31), referring to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Note that the term "covenant" is always singular. It is never "the covenants with the fathers." We can conveniently and legitimately call it the "covenant with Abraham." The covenant made at Sinai is simply called "the Book of the Covenant" in Exodus 24:7. In Exodus 34:27, this same covenant is with Moses and with Israel. Hence, some scholars have called it the Mosaic covenant. It could just as well be called the Israelite covenant or the covenant with Israel. In Deuteronomy 29:1 (28:69 MT), it is called the covenant at Horeb in order to contrast it with the covenant "in the land of Moab" (i.e., Deuteronomy). Horeb is another name for Sinai. Later, when God makes a covenant with David, it is called just that, his "covenant with David" (2 Chron. 13:5; 21:7, Ps. 89:3; Jer. 33:21). Finally, God makes what is called a "new covenant" in Jeremiah 31:31.

The Literary Structure of Exodus 19–24

One of the reasons why both popular and scholarly discussions of the relation between the Old Testament and the New have resulted in futile debates over false dichotomies and issues is directly due to a failure to consider properly the literary shape of this text. Instead, what is foisted on the text is a framework or structure that it neither indicates for itself nor possesses.

Outline of Exodus 19–40

1. The background Exodus 19
2. The Ten Words Exodus 20
3. The Judgments Exodus 21–23
4. The ceremony of covenant ratification Exodus 24
5. Worship—the recognition of divine kingship Exodus 25–40

The broad outline and shape of the text is indicated by *headings* and the use of specific *terms*. At the heart of the text are two sections: (1) the "Ten Words" in chapter 20, and (2) the "Judgments" (or "laws"/"ordinances") in chapters 21–23. *These are the actual headings in the Hebrew text*. Exodus

20:1 introduces the matter simply: “And God spoke all these words.” While Christians commonly refer to this section as the “Ten Commandments,” the commands that form the basis of the covenant are referred to in the Hebrew as simply the “Ten Words” in Exodus 34:28 and Deuteronomy 4:13 and 10:4. The precise expression “the Ten Commandments” occurs nowhere in the Old Testament, although in a general way the Ten Words are included when reference is made to the commands of Yahweh. They are frequently referred to as commandments in the New Testament (Matt. 5; 19:17; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Rom. 7:7–8; 13:9; 1 Tim. 1:9–10), and that is why the preferred term today is the Ten Commandments. So first we have just the “Words.” Then in chapters 21–23 we have the “Judgments.” Exodus 21:1 is clearly a heading for this entire section.

Not only the headings but also the contents clearly distinguish the two sections. The Ten Words are presented as absolute commands or prohibitions, usually in the second-person singular. They are general injunctions not related to a specific social situation. They could be referred to as prescriptive law since no fines or punishments are specified. As an example, “You (singular) shall not steal!” The construction *lô’* + the imperfect in Hebrew is durative and nonspecific. You shall not steal today, not tomorrow, not this week, not this month, not this year—as a general rule, never! By contrast, the Judgments are generally presented as case laws. These are presented as if they were court decisions functioning as precedents. They are normally in the format of conditional sentences. Here the fundamental principles in the Ten Words are applied to specific social contexts. They could be referred to as descriptive law since they impose fines and punishments. As an example, in addressing the case where a bull gores a human, Exodus 21:28–32 looks at whether this was the animal’s habit and whether the owner had been warned in order to determine the owner’s guilt. More will be said about these case laws later. For now, it suffices to note that chapter 20 and chapters 21–23 constitute specific sections of the covenant, simply labeled “the Words” and “the Judgments”:

Commandments: The Ten Words (Ex. 20:1; 34:28; Deut. 4:13)

- Absolute commands—usually second-person singular prohibitions

- General injunctions not related to a specific social situation
- Prescriptive law—no fines or punishments mentioned

Ordinances: The Judgments (Ex. 21:1; Deut. 4:14)

- Case decisions, case laws, judicial precedents
- Applications of the fundamental principles in the Ten Commandments to specific social contexts
- Descriptive law imposing fines and punishments (usually in the form of "if . . . then" statements or conditional sentences)

These two distinct sections to the covenant are clearly referred to in chapter 24, which describes the covenant-ratification ceremony. Note carefully the particular terms used in 24:1–8 as follows. According to the clause pattern in the Hebrew text, as well as the topic, Exodus 24:1 connects and follows 20:21–22. In 20:21–26 and 24:1–2, Yahweh speaks to Moses from the cloud on Mount Sinai and gives instructions concerning altars and who will ascend the mountain for the covenant-ratification meal. In 24:3, Moses comes and gives a report to the people: "And Moses came and reported to the people all the words and all the judgments, and all the people responded with one voice, 'All the words that Yahweh has spoken we will do.'" Note that Moses reported "all the words" and "all the judgments." These two terms clearly refer to the "Ten Words" in 20:2–17 and the "Judgments" in chapters 21–23. When the people say, "All the words that Yahweh has spoken we will do," the term "the words" is an abbreviated form of the expression "all the words and all the judgments" occurring earlier in the verse. Similarly, in the next verse, 24:4, we read, "And Moses wrote all the words of Yahweh."[6] Here, again, "the words of Yahweh" is a short way of saying, "the words and the judgments." The shortening of long titles is typical in this culture. Much later, the Hebrew canon, whose full title is "the Law and the Prophets and the Writings," may be shortened to simply "the Law." For example, Paul says that he is quoting from "the Law" and then cites a passage from Isaiah (1 Cor. 14:21). So "Law" must be short for "Law and Prophets." Alternatively, since the "Judgments" are simply unfolding the "Ten Words" in practical situations,

the expression “the words” in 24:3–4 may refer to the whole (Words and Judgments) by specifying just “the words.” So the two parts or sections of the covenant are written down by Moses. And this is called “the Book of the Covenant” in 24:7.

Exodus 19 and 24 form the bookends to this “Book of the Covenant.” At the beginning, chapter 19 provides the setting in space and time, the divine purpose of the covenant, and the preparation of the people for the revelation of Yahweh at Mount Sinai. At the end, chapter 24 describes the ceremony of covenant ratification. Following this, chapters 25–40 describe the construction of a place of worship, showing the proper response to the divine kingship established among the people by means of the covenant. Just as Genesis 1 establishes divine rule via covenant, followed by the priority of worship in sanctuary in Genesis 2, so the book of Exodus establishes God as King in the midst of Israel via covenant, followed by the priority of worship for the nation as God’s Adamic son.

The shape and structure of Exodus 19–24, then, is clearly marked in the text. Chapters 20–23 constitute the Book of the Covenant, consisting of “the Words” (chap. 20) and “the Judgments” (chaps. 21–23). Chapters 19 and 24 frame the Book of the Covenant as bookends, with chapter 19 providing the background and setting and chapter 24 describing the ceremony of covenant ratification.

As has been noted by scholars for some time, the structure of this text is parallel in broad outline to the form and structure of international treaties in the Near Eastern culture of the fifteenth–thirteenth centuries BC. Parallels between the book of Deuteronomy and the Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties are more striking than between the Book of the Covenant in Exodus and the Hittite treaties, but the parallels are noteworthy nonetheless. International treaties followed a specific form: (1) preamble (author identification), (2) history of past relationship between the parties, (3) basic stipulations, (4) detailed stipulations, (5) document clause, (6) witnesses, and (7) blessings and curses. Table 9.1 portrays how the Book of the Covenant conforms broadly to this pattern:

Table 9.1 Structure of the Covenant in Exodus

1. Preamble	20:1
2. Historical prologue	20:2
3. Stipulations	
a. Basic	20:3–17
b. Detailed	21–23
4. Document clause	24

Unlike in Deuteronomy, the “blessings and curses” section is absent here. Nonetheless, the commands are enshrined in what would have been clearly recognized at the time as a covenant or treaty form. The implications of this form for proper theological understanding will be developed later. This much is clear: the covenant is formulated as a suzerain-vassal treaty in order to define God as Father and King and Israel as obedient son in a relationship of loyal love, obedience, and trust. This is confirmed by the fact that the epiphany on Mount Sinai is heralded by the blowing of a trumpet (Ex. 19:16, 19; 20:18), a clear signal in Israel for the accession and coming of a king (2 Sam. 15:10; 1 Kings 1:34, 39, 41; 2 Kings 9:13).[7] Space permits now only a brief analysis of the divine purpose of the covenant as given in Exodus 19, a summary treatment of the Ten Words, and a consideration of the ceremony of covenant ratification and its significance, before the implications for Christian theology are spelled out.

The Divine Purpose of the Covenant (Ex. 19:5–6)

As already stated, chapter 19 provides the background to the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 19–24) and acts as a bookend on the opening side of the covenant document. Israel arrives at Mount Sinai in her travels through the desert to the Promised Land. Central to the chapter is the flurry of movement by Moses going up and down the mountain. Three sequences of up and down dominate the section: (1) up (19:3) and down (19:7), (2) up (19:8) and down (19:14), and (3) up (19:20) and down (19:25). These three sequences form the boundaries of three sections within the chapter, delimiting (1) the divine purpose of the covenant, (2) the preparation of the people to meet Yahweh and receive his revelation and Torah,[8] and (3) the

actual epiphany of God on the mountain. The literary structure of the chapter, then, is as follows:

Literary Structure of Exodus 19

1. The setting in time and space 19:1–2
2. The divine purpose in the covenant 19:3–8
3. The human preparation for the covenant 19:9–15
4. The revelation of Yahweh at Sinai 19:16–25

The constant ascending and descending provide a vivid portrayal of the *distance* between the people and God and the need for a mediator. It then emphasizes the miracle of a covenant relationship of love, loyalty, and trust between parties such as these.[9]

> Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession, for the whole earth is mine.[10] You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD. (Ex. 19:3–8 NIV)

By paying attention to the number of the verbs, John Davies demonstrates a chiastic structure to this text as follows:[11]

a People of Israel camp at the mountain (third-person plural verbs) (19:1–2)
  b Moses's ascent and Yahweh's summons (third-person plural verbs) (19:3a)
    c Divine instruction regarding delivery of message to Israel (second-person singular verbs) (19:3b)

d Divine declaration concerning Israel (second-person plural verbs) (19:4–6a)

c' Divine instruction regarding delivery of message to Israel (second-person singular verbs) (19:6b)

b' Moses's descent and summons to the elders (third-person singular verbs) (19:7)

a' People of Israel respond (third-person plural verbs) (19:8a)

This chiastic structure aids by clearly delineating Exodus 19:3–8 as a self-contained unit. Since chiastic structures usually focus on the center, this structure shows that the central theme is the divine purpose in the covenant between God and Israel.

Thus, after verses 1–2 specify the place and time in history, verses 3–8 detail the purpose of the covenant *from God's point of view*. What we have in these verses is a proposal of the covenant in a nutshell: (1) 19:4 describes the past history of relationship between the two covenant partners; (2) 19:5–6 proposes a relationship of complete loyalty and obedience of Israel as a vassal to Yahweh as the great King and promises certain blessings; and (3) in 19:7–8 the people agree to the proposal. Thus, even in this covenant proposal in 19:3–8, the form and structure correspond to the formulae of ancient Near Eastern covenants and treaties.

Verse 4 is a marvelous encapsulation of the past relationship between the people and the Lord, using the imagery of being carried out of trouble on the wings of an eagle: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." This brief statement summarizes the abject condition of the people in slavery in Egypt and the signs and wonders Yahweh performed in both the ten plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea to deliver them from slavery. It also speaks of the way in which God had directed them through the mazes and mirages of the desert using a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. This form of leadership also protected them from extreme heat by day and cold by night. Every day, bread rained from heaven for their nourishment, and water gushed from the rock to satisfy their thirst. Our culture today can picture this from the movie world in the miraculous rescue of Gandalf by the eagles in *The Lord of the Rings*. God had protected the people and provided for

them during the difficult desert journey, bearing them on eagles' wings, so to speak, and had so arranged their itinerary as to bring them to himself, that is, to the place already prepared as a meeting place between God and men, to Sinai, the mountain of God (Ex. 3:1).

As John Davies notes, the phrase "I brought you to myself" is without parallel in the Hebrew Bible. His comment is worth citing in full:

> The "bringing to myself" expresses the underlying motivation of the preceding divine actions and focuses on relationship rather than location. For a moment the mountain and all terrestrial indicators fade from view, such that we are not sure where God is to be located. Is it in the heights of the mountain, where eagles have their nests (Job 39.27–30; Obad. 1.4; Jer. 49.16)? Or is it in heaven, or among the stars, where eagles venture (Prov. 23.5; 30.19; Lam. 4.19)? If an answer is felt to be needed, possible support for the latter alternative is to be found at Exod. 20.22 where again we have a recitation of divine acts which employs a closely parallel introductory formula: "Yhwh said to Moses, 'This is what you are to say to the house of Israel, "You yourselves saw that it was from heaven that I spoke with you."'" . . . in this central summary declaration giving, as it purports, a divine perspective on the exodus experience with its climax at Sinai, it is the resulting heightened *proximity* of Israel to God which is paramount, a proximity which is the result of divine initiative and accomplishment.[12]

Exodus 19:5–6 is constructed in the form of a conditional sentence: "If you do this . . . then you will be . . . and you will be . . ." The "if clause," or protasis, specifies absolute obedience to the covenant stipulations. The "then clause," or apodosis, defines the result in terms of relationship to Yahweh; they will belong to him in two ways: (1) as a king's treasure and (2) as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Before explaining the meaning of the terms defining the divine goal in the covenant relationship, the relation of verses 5–6 to verse 4 must be stressed. Perhaps a diagram may be used to picture this connection:

God's grace (19:4)

\
Israel’s loyalty demanded in covenant relationship (19:5a)
/
become my people (19:5b–6a)

Verse 4 shows that the motivation for concluding and keeping a covenant with Yahweh is sovereign grace. The creator God has chosen to display favor and kindness to Israel and has acted in history to redeem them and make them his people. Much misunderstanding has been caused by comparing the old covenant to the new in terms of “law” and “grace.” This text is clear: the old covenant is based on grace, and grace motivates the keeping of the covenant, just as we find in the new covenant. God had protected the people and provided for them during the difficult desert journey, bearing them on eagles’ wings, so to speak, and had so arranged their itinerary as to bring them to himself, that is, to Sinai, the mountain of God. This text teaches, then, that the basis for the covenant from the point of view of the human partner was confidence and trust in as well as gratitude to Yahweh as established by the events of the exodus. (What is unlike the new covenant is that covenant keeping depends on Israel’s promise to obey.)

Verses 5–6, then, describe the purpose, from God’s point of view, for which the covenant was given to the people and the nature of the relationship between God and Israel that will result from ratifying the covenant proposed by Yahweh.

Scholars have debated the logic of the conditional sentence in Exodus 19:5–6. Some, like James Muilenburg, have considered the situation similar to biblical passages that offer a reward conditional on obedience.[13] Others, like Dale Patrick, argue that the protasis, or “if clause,” does not so much lay down a precondition for benefits as define the content and nature of the status in the apodoses, or “then clauses.”[14] Davies illustrates these options by comparing two sentences:

> “If you accept my offer to teach you, and you devote yourself to learning Hebrew and other cognate languages, you will get a well-paid university position and a rewarding superannuation package,” and “If

> you accept my offer to teach you and you devote yourself to learning Hebrew and other cognate languages, you will have the satisfaction of being a Semitics scholar."[15]

The problem is largely a result of the traditional way of dividing up the "if" and the "then" clause. Jason DeRouchie has noted that since 19:6 begins with *wĕʾttem* (conjunction plus second-person masculine plural independent pronoun) this is a clear discourse grammar signal that the "then" clause begins with 19:6 and not with "then you will be" in 19:5b.[16]

The "then clause" spells out what is inherent in the "if clause." Further support for this understanding may be found on the grammatical level from the linguistic research of Barbara Dancygier and Eve Sweetser. Grammarians have typically classified conditional sentences as either real or unreal, but this standard approach is inadequate.[17] Dancygier and Sweetser classify conditions according to three major types: (1) *content conditionals*, where the speaker makes a prediction about the external sociophysical world—so the protasis postulates a situation (the prototypical "real" conditional); (2) *epistemic conditionals*, where the speaker draws an inference (abductive, internal) in the apodosis—so the protasis provides the basis for the inference; and (3) *speech-act conditionals*, where the speaker performs a speech act conditionally in the apodosis—thus the protasis makes the speech act "relevant."[18] The conditional sentence in Exodus 19:5–6 clearly belongs to the last category.[19] Thus, the conditional sentence is proclaiming the privileged status of Israel inherent in the covenant relationship. Important parallels in Deuteronomy such as 7:6–11; 14:2; and especially 26:18–19 also substantiate this view.[20] After evaluating both interpretations of Genesis 19, Davies concludes as follows:

> Perhaps in the end not too much weight should be placed on the distinction between a reward based on the condition of faithful service (as Muilenburg), and a favour which entails elevation to a position calling for honoured and faithful service (as Patrick). . . . There would be no significant weakening of the case being presented [below] for the meaning and function of the honorific designations of Israel in vv. 5–6a if one were to read some form of conditional reward at v. 5,

> provided this is understood to be within the framework of an already established relationship.[21]

As we have seen already, the categories of conditional and unconditional often used in characterizing covenants are not helpful or fruitful because they result in failing to hear the different emphases in the biblical text.[22] We will return to this topic later when dealing with the relationship of the old covenant to the new.

A grammatical question directly related to the logic of the conditional sentence is the discourse-grammar pragmatic value of the free infinitive / infinitive absolute שָׁמוֹעַ in verse 5: וְעַתָּה אִם־שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ בְּקֹלִי. This is a difficult matter to treat. The analysis of Davies is exhaustive and thorough but, as he admits, neither conclusive nor greatly illuminating. Nonetheless, more recent study of this aspect of grammar in Hebrew may be of help.[23] It is interesting to note that the root שׁמע is found in the free infinitive plus finite verb construction eight times in the Hebrew Bible: Exodus 15:26; 19:5; 22:22; 23:22; Deuteronomy 11:13; 15:5; 28:1; 1 Samuel 23:10. In six of the occurrences, the meaning has specifically to do with obedience, as indicated by a complement such as בקול; thus Exodus 22:22 and 1 Samuel 23:10 are excluded.[24] The research of Yoo-Ki Kim shows that the infinitive absolute functions not as a manner adverb modifying the predicate but rather as a manner adverb modifying the sentence as a whole and, in fact, as a discourse grammar or macrosyntactic signal far beyond the level of the sentence. In each of the six occurrences the infinitive absolute is preposed to the verb, a position marking focus or topic in Hebrew as well as in many languages. The brief but seminal study of Lynell Zogbo explores further the macrosyntactic functions. Not only does the infinitive absolute mark asseverative or contrastive focus and relevance, it also foreshadows events in the future or marks a major theme. Moreover, the infinitive absolute often occurs in "zones of turbulence," marking climactic peaks and pivotal points in the narrative.[25] Here the introductory "and now" (וְעַתָּה) along with the figurative language ("I bore you on eagles' wings") helps to signal a zone of turbulence. Davies recognizes this much:

> The macrosyntactic introductory particle ועתה (“now”) has the rhetorical effect of drawing attention to the change of subject from the first person clauses of v. 4 (recounting divine activity) to the second person clauses (referring to Israel), as well as marking a temporal shift from the narration of past events to the setting forth of present and future consequences, particularly, as Kalluveettil notes, in covenant settings (Deut. 4.1; 10.12; Josh 24.14; 1 Sam 12.13; 1 Chron. 22.11).[26]

The free infinitive also comes in the middle of the speech. Lynell Zogbo concludes from her study,

> The Infinitive Absolute has a discourse function, global role, that is, it is *marking a very crucial part of this text*. As a verbal repetition, it is itself linguistically MARKED. It is also accompanied by signs which highlight it: middle placement, figurative language, repetition, listen-listen, I-I, all . . . all. Also significantly for exegesis this line is parallel to *KEEP MY COVENANT*. To me this is what the infinitive absolute is about here! It is there to highlight COVENANT, the THEME of the book.[27]

It is interesting that the instances in Exodus 15:26 and 23:22 corroborate this conclusion and function in tandem both to help highlight Exodus 19:5–6 as a climax and to underline the covenant. Noteworthy is the fact that the only other occurrences are in Deuteronomy, also at key junctures in the text highlighting the covenant.

Personal Treasure (1 Chron. 29:3; Eccles. 2:8)

The meaning of the terms defining the divine plan for the role and status of Israel in the covenant relationship may now be explained. It is crucial to note the literary structure of Exodus 19:5–6 in explaining the terms “personal treasure,” “kingdom of priests,” and “holy nation.” Two clauses joined by the conjunction *waw* (“and”) constitute the content of Yahweh’s declaration. The first is “You will be my treasured possession more than / out of all the nations, for the whole earth is mine.” The second is “And you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” The relationship of these two statements is best understood by recalling what we noted earlier

about the way ancient Hebrew literature takes up a topic and develops it from a particular perspective and then stops and takes up the same theme again from another point of view. This pattern produces 3-D ideas and is pursued recursively at both the macro- and microlevels. One begins a conversation on a topic and then closes that conversation down and begins another. Taken together, both conversations are like the left and right speakers of a stereo sound system: each differs slightly, and together they produce 3-D Dolby surround sound or a 3-D holographic image. In other words, both statements are saying the same thing, but each does it in a different way from a different perspective. Once the terms are explicated, it will become clear that when taken together, "royal priesthood" and "holy nation" are another way of saying "God's personal treasure." In other words, the terms "royal priesthood" and "holy nation" constitute the right and left speakers of the surround sound, and then together they form the left speaker for which the term "personal treasure" is the right speaker.

The first purpose of the covenant is that these chosen, redeemed people might become God's own possession and private treasure. The word *segullâ* in Hebrew, translated "possession," is the same word used in 1 Chronicles 29:3 for King David's own private cache or vault of gold and silver, his personal store of all things precious and valuable.[28] If we were to travel back in time to the ancient Near East, we would find at capital cities such as Hattusa (Boğazkale, Turkey) and Ugarit (Syria) the rich treasure vaults of the kings. It is difficult for us to imagine, since we have no monarchy, such as the monarchs of Europe in the nineteenth century. Perhaps something comparable today would be the crown jewels in London. The use in Ecclesiastes 2:8 is also of a king's personal treasure. These two are the only nonmetaphorical occurrences of the word in the Old Testament.

John Davies's discussion of the meaning of *segullâ* is most illuminating. Although the word is uncommon in biblical Hebrew, it is common in the postbiblical literature of the Mishna as a commercial-legal term, where it refers to the personal property of a social inferior (such as a wife or slave). Davies notes that Greenberg posited a connection between the Hebrew word *segullâ* and the Akkadian *sikiltu*.[29] Found in Old, Middle, and Standard Babylonian, at Nuzi, and also in Middle Assyrian texts, the

Akkadian word refers to “acquisition” or “possession,” first of illegally acquired goods, then of private possessions in distinction from those possessions that form part of an estate.

In the Old Babylonian period, there is a metaphorical usage that casts light on the passage in Exodus. It is used no later than the fifteenth century BC by a god to refer to an honored king. Davies cites the following designation of King Abban: “Abban, the mighty king, son of Šarran, the servant of the god . . . the beloved of the god . . . the treasure of the god.”[30] Thus a royal figure is seen as a devoted servant of the god. A similar usage is found in Ugaritic, as Davies explains:

> Text 60 (18.38) of *PRU* 5 dates from the early twelfth century BCE and is a copy of a letter (no doubt a translation of the original Akkadian) from the Hittite suzerain to Ammurapi, the last king of Ugarit. It describes the vassal king in relation to the suzerain as both his “servant (*[ʿ]bdh*) and *sglth*.” This spelling out of the relationship between the two kings is a preface to a reproach by the suzerain for the failure of the Ugaritic vassal king to pay the customary visits of homage.[31]

Note that the use of the Ugaritic word for “personal treasure” is paired with the notion of servant as in the above example in Akkadian from Alalakh. “Personal treasure” is used in the context of devoted service in a relationship defined by a treaty. The same pairing of service and personal treasure is found in the Bible, in Malachi 3:17:[32]

> They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession [סגלה], and I will spare them as a man spares his son [בן] who serves [עבד] him. (ESV)

What is parallel here to “personal treasure” is “son,” qualified by the concept of devoted *service*. This biblical passage, corroborated by the Akkadian and Ugaritic parallels, casts enormous light on Exodus 19:5. When Yahweh calls Israel to be his personal treasure, he is speaking of the kind of devoted service given by a son.[33] We are back to the divine image in Genesis 1:26–28. Israel has inherited an Adamic role, giving the devoted service of a son to an honored king in a covenant relationship.[34]

A causal-explanatory כי clause[35] explains that the whole world belongs to Yahweh. In one sense, the King is owner or possessor of the entire country, but in addition to this, he may also have a personal/private treasure. The whole world is like a ring on God's hand, and his chosen people are the jewel in that ring.

Kingdom of Priests

Although some expositions consider the meaning of "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation" separately, in a real sense they should be taken together. The text clearly divides the goal of the covenant relationship into two statements. The first is supported by an explanation or reason. A second statement combines the phrases "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation" either as a hendiadys or at least as an expression similar to Hebrew poetry, where a pair of parallel lines allows one to consider a topic from two slightly variant but similar viewpoints to create a full-orbed perspective on some proposition. These phrases will be explained here, each in turn, but with the meaning of the other phrase kept in mind. At the same time, we should also keep in mind that both phrases together are unpacking the full meaning of "personal treasure."

First consider the phrase "kingdom of priests" found in this text. The full sentence is, "You will belong to me as a kingdom of priests" (*tihyû lî mamleket kōhanîm*). The *lamed* preposition in the phrase *lî* clearly indicates possession.[36] The Hebrew word "kingdom" may refer to the domain or realm that is ruled, or to the exercise of kingly rule and sovereignty.[37] According to the main options, then, the phrase "kingdom of priests" could mean a domain of priests whom God rules or, alternatively, the exercise of royal office by those who are in fact priests—that is, a royal priesthood. It is difficult to decide between the two main options since the *lamed* preposition suggests the former reading while the term "priests" modifying "kingdom" suggests the latter. Yet in the latter option, understanding *kōhanîm* as a genitive of apposition after the collective *mamleket* ("royalty, royal body, royal house") would be a more natural reading than to construe it as an attributive genitive.[38] Thus we may view in "priests" a collective reference to all Israel as being in some sense "priests" rather than as being a

“priestly kingship” or “priestly royalty.” Perhaps *both meanings* are intended, so that both the relationship between God and Israel and the relationship between Israel and the world are indicated. This ambiguity would serve well the theme *kingdom through covenant*.

What is the function of a priest? This question is also important in the interpretation. Some readings focus on the priest as an intermediary, so that the function of a priest is to bring others into the presence of God by offering sacrifices on their behalf. Dumbrell, who follows this track, sees the intermediary role as passive rather than active and missionary. Davies comments,

> Dumbrell is on surer ground, then, with a moderate “service to the nations” position, seeing the service as somewhat passive in character. That is, it is by being who they are in relation to God that Israel serves the nations. Dumbrell ties this notion to the role of Abraham as the one through whom the nations would find blessing (Gen. 12.2–3; 18.18; 22.18; 26.4). Dumbrell, however, regards any notion of status in v. 6 as being anticlimactic because status has already been dealt with in the word סגלה. Yet if my understanding of the syntax is correct, the expressions ממלכת כהנים and גוי קדוש are epexegetic of סגלה, and spell out further dimensions for the reader’s understanding of the extent of the privilege it is to be Yhwh’s “special treasure.”[39]

Alternatively, Davies’s reading focuses on priesthood as access to the divine presence. He argues that Exodus 19 itself provides an all-important clue to the significance of priesthood in verse 22:

> Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them. (ESV)

This passage offers a virtual definition of what it is to be a priest: priests are those who approach or come near to Yahweh and who are consecrated and devoted to him. Davies notes further,

> Central to any understanding of what a priest is, is the notion of his fitness to approach the deity and “minister” in his presence like an attendant in the court of a king. The tabernacle cult depicted in

> Exodus 25–31 and 35–40 is a stylized replica of what, in the widespread ideology of the ancient world, took place within the divine realm of the heavenly temple.[40]

Another argument supporting the emphasis Davies sees is found in the verb "consecrate" in Exodus 19:22, from the root קדשׁ. Indeed, this verb and the related adjective קדוֹשׁ is employed frequently in all things dealing with the activity of priests. Moreover, we should note that here in Exodus 19:5–6 the parallel term to the expression ממלכת כהנים is גוי קדוֹשׁ. If "kingdom" is parallel to "nation," then "holy" is parallel to "priests" in these two expressions. Although the common understanding of "holy" in North America has to do with separation, as we will see shortly, Davies rightly asserts that the primary meaning has rather to do with the divine sphere to which the person or object relates, not the sphere from which he, she, or it has thereby been separated:

> Persons or objects are holy to Yhwh, or in one case to Baal (2 Kgs 10.20). They are fit to be associated with the one who is inherently קדוֹשׁ, particularly when he is pictured as enthroned in his sanctuary (Isa. 6.3; Ps. 99.5, 9). It is no light matter to stand in the presence of Yhwh, the holy God, as the men of Beth Shemesh were aware (1 Sam 6.20). The "entrance liturgies" of Psalms 15 and 24 reinforce this demand for holiness on the part of the one who would approach God's dwelling place.
>
> If we regard קדוֹשׁ as being a guide to the understanding of כהנים, the character of Israel as כהנים will relate to their consecration or readiness to encounter Yhwh. This is the point of the preparations outlined in Exod. 19.14–15, including the washing of clothes, and the abstinence from sexual relations.[41]

Finally, Davies notes that the Sinai pericope simply contains no direct reference to Israel's responsibilities toward the nations, and he believes we ought to be looking not for a *functional* definition of priesthood but for an *ontological* one.[42] What priests *are* in their relation to God and in the eyes of the community is the issue.

The emphasis and focus for which Davies argues is correct because the arguments are based solidly on the text. Nonetheless, the focus on Israel's priesthood as access to the divine presence and on a priority in the worship of Yahweh alone as God does not exclude the perspective of Dumbrell, who has rightly kept his eye on the metanarrative as the context for Exodus 19:5–6. Just as God, in Genesis 1–2, establishes his rule through a covenant relationship between himself and man and between man and the creation (wherein Adam's priority according to Genesis 2 is to spend time in the divine presence to order his perspectives and role in the world), so God is extending his rule through the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12–22), promising blessing to the nations in relationship to Abraham, and through the covenant with his family Israel (Exodus 19–24) as a royal priesthood (with a priority on worship that results in being a light to the nations). Since Israel is settled at the navel of the world, the nations of the world will see displayed a right relationship to God, social justice in human interaction, and good stewardship of the earth's resources. Apparently, it is appropriate and convenient for Davies to expound the duties of priests at a later point in his exposition, and he demonstrates from the biblical text that this includes the function of the priest as intermediary between God and people, so why exclude it from purview here?[43]

We see, then, that Israel, the last Adam, will belong to God as a people under his rule and will exercise royal rule by spending time in the worship of God so necessary for display of the divine rule in one's thoughts, words, and ways. Davies notes that the tabernacle, the construction of which is the topic of the literary unit following Exodus 19–24, is in form a miniaturized and portable reproduction of God's heavenly sanctuary, of which Israel has caught a glimpse in the covenant ratification ceremony in Exodus 24:9–11.[44] The cloud denoting the divine presence on Mount Sinai settles on the tabernacle in Exodus 40. Thus Israel carries the divine presence with her. Moreover, the tabernacle is also a replica of the garden in Eden and a representation of the universe; thus, just as Adam was to fulfill his mandate by devoting himself to worship as a priest in the garden sanctuary, so Israel as a new Adam is to fulfill her mandate by devoting herself to worship as a priest in the tabernacle and later the temple. Since in the Bible and the

ancient Near East, kings are the ones who build temples,[45] Israel as a nation building the tabernacle in Exodus 25–40 also depicts her royal status. She is a king-priest. And as we noted earlier, this is the point in Hosea 6:7: "But they [i.e., Israel], like Adam, have transgressed the covenant." Israel's covenant violation was in her role as king-priest.

Israel is also a vehicle for bringing the nations to the divine presence and rule. Israel would be a people completely devoted to the service of God. The rite of circumcision as practiced in Israel is an excellent illustration of this role. Probably the background for understanding circumcision is Egypt, where only the aristocracy, the highest order of priests, and the noblest elite warriors along with the Pharaoh and his family were circumcised, because only they were completely devoted to the service of the gods.[46] In Deuteronomy 10:16, the command to Israel "Circumcise your hearts" is an exposition of the earlier command "to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good" (Deut. 10:12–13 NIV). Thus circumcision is an apt expression for the idea: be completely devoted to Yahweh.

Again, the summary provided by Davies is apt and deserves a hearing:

> Israel's cult shares some common features with the sanctuary ideology of the ancient world. The tabernacle is a representation of an ideal or restored cosmos, where God and man meet in an environment which transcends the limitations of the mundane world. The priest, granted access to the sacred space, is a model of the ideal held out to Israel of the meaning of its collective priesthood and the access to the presence of God of which it speaks. The priests are the chosen and privileged ones who are granted a royal dignity and the right of access to this realm, even, in the case of the high priest, to that sacred space which is regarded as the throne-room of heaven, the innermost sanctum of an ideal cosmos.
>
> Priests share characteristics of royalty in the prevailing ideology of priesthood in the ancient Near East. Israel had a collective memory of ancient priest-kings, and the descriptions of the garb of the Israelite

> priests preserve something of these royal associations. In their priests, the Israelites had a perpetual reminder of their own royal-priestly standing and privilege. The detailed literary portrayal of the priesthood of Aaron and his sons serves to flesh out for the reader something of what is meant by the image of Israel's corporate royal priesthood.
>
> In keeping with the expectation that sanctuary-building is the work of a chosen king, acting on instructions of a god and according to a divinely revealed pattern, it is suggested that Israel corporately functions as the royal sanctuary builder, according to Exodus, in keeping with the designation of Israel as a "royal priesthood."[47]

In a work on biblical theology entitled *Dominion and Dynasty*, Stephen Dempster analyzes the phrase "kingdom of priests" in a way similar to the exposition given here:

> The final phrase designates Israel as a particular type of kingdom. Instead of being a kingdom of a particular king, it will be a kingdom marked by priesthood; that is, service of God on behalf of people and *vice versa*. It will be "a kingdom run not by politicians depending upon strength and connivance but by priests depending upon faith in Yahweh, a servant nation instead of a ruling nation" (Durham 263). Israel will thus redefine the meaning of dominion—service. This will be its distinctive task, its distinguishing characteristic among the world of nations.[48]

In sum, the call of Israel to be a royal priesthood connects the Israelite covenant to the Abrahamic. Psalm 67 draws this out very well:

> May God be gracious to us and bless us
> and make his face to shine upon us, Selah
> that your way may be known on earth,
> your saving power among all nations.
> Let the peoples praise you, O God;
> let all the peoples praise you! (Ps. 67:1–3 ESV)

In verse 1, we see Israel praying as a priest, since the nation as a whole is invoking the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6. The goal or purpose of

invoking this blessing is so that salvation may come to the nations. This is none other than the goal of the Abrahamic covenant.

Holy Nation

The parallel phrase to "kingdom of priests" is "holy nation" (Heb. *gôy qādôš*). As already mentioned, this phrase is not necessarily identical in meaning to "kingdom of priests," but both phrases function as a pair, like parallel lines in Hebrew poetry, to paint a three-dimensional picture in one's mind.

The term *gôy* ("nation") is the parallel term to kingdom. It is an economic, political, and social structure in which a final governmental headship operates.[49] It therefore clearly reminds us of Genesis 12:2, as explained earlier. This is the city of God, the kingdom of God. In fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, Israel, by virtue of the Mosaic covenant, will provide under the direct rule of God a model of God's rule over human life, which is the divine aim for the entire world.

"Nation" is modified by the adjective "holy." What is a "holy" nation? Unfortunately, the term "holy" is not very well understood by the church today. Definitions commonly given are "pure" or "set apart." Such definitions are erroneous because the meaning is being determined by etymology rather than usage, and the etymology is completely speculative. The idea that "holy" means "set apart" can be traced to the influence of W. W. Baudissin, who proposed in 1878 that the root of "holy" in Hebrew (*qdš*) is derived from *qd-*, "to cut."[50] Exhaustive research by a French evangelical scholar, Claude-Bernard Costecalde, has cast better light on the meaning of this term since his analysis is based on the way the word is used rather than on hypothetical origins.[51] Costecalde's study examines all occurrences in the Old Testament and in ancient Near Eastern literature of the same time (e.g., Akkadian and Ugaritic). Not surprisingly, he discovered that the biblical meaning is similar to that in the languages of the cultures surrounding Israel. The basic meaning is not "separated" but rather "consecrated to" or "devoted to." This is also the basic meaning of ἅγιος, the counterpart in Greek.[52]

Noteworthy is the passage in Exodus 3, where Moses encounters Yahweh in the burning bush and is asked to remove his sandals because he is standing on "holy ground." This is the first instance in the Old Testament of the root *qdš* in either an adjectival or a nominal form. In the narrative, Moses is commanded to stay away from the bush, that is, from the place from which God speaks, but he is not commanded to stay away from the holy ground. There is nothing inaccessible or set apart about the holy ground. Moreover, his fright and shock come from a revelation of God, not from the holiness of the place. The "holy ground" (Ex. 3:5) encompasses a larger space than just the bush from which God speaks and is equivalent to "the mountain of God" in 3:1. The act of removing one's sandals, like the act of the nearest relative in Ruth 4:7, is a ceremony or rite of depossession well known in the culture of that time. Moses must acknowledge that this ground belongs to God and must enter into an attitude of consecration. Thus, rather than marking an item as set apart, "holy" ground is ground prepared, consecrated, or devoted to the meeting of God and man.

A holy nation, then, is one prepared and consecrated for fellowship with God and one completely devoted to him. Instructions in the Pentateuch are often supported by the statement from Yahweh, "For I am holy." Such statements show that complete devotion to God on the part of Israel would manifest itself in two ways: (1) identifying with his ethics and morality and (2) sharing his concern for the broken in the community. The commands and instructions in Leviticus 19 and 20 are bounded by the claim that Yahweh is holy (19:2; 20:26) and include concern against mistreating the alien and the poor, the blind and the deaf. In the "Judgments" of the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 19–24), some instructions relate to the oppression of orphans and widows (22:23). God was concerned about the rights of the slave (e.g., 21:2–11) and the disenfranchised in society. Over the past thirty years we have heard the strident voices of the feminist, of the antinuclear protest, and of the gay rights movement. But God hears the voice of those who are broken in body, in economy, and in spirit. If we are in covenant relationship with him, we must, like him, hear the voice that is too weak to cry out.

God also jealously protects what is devoted to him. His anger flares when his holiness is violated, as in the case of Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:7), who extended his hand to touch the ark of the covenant. Also, in Psalm 2, when the kings and princes of the earth gather to touch the Anointed of the Lord, he flares out in anger to protect his King. Also, in the case of Paul in the New Testament, who in persecuting the church was reaching up to heaven, as it were, to shake his rebellious fist at Jesus, the Anointed One (i.e., the Christ), and slap him in the face, it resulted in his calling himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).

This explanation of the terms “personal treasure,” “kingdom of priests,” and “holy nation,” then, shows the goal and purpose of the Sinai covenant for Israel. Although the language is different from that of Genesis 1:26–28 and 12:1–3, we can clearly see that the covenant at Sinai achieves and administers in the Iron Age, through the nation as a whole, the purposes of the promises given to Abraham. God is establishing his kingdom through covenant. The covenant entails relationship with God on the one hand and relationship with the world on the other. Israel will model to the world what it means to have a relationship with God, what it means to treat each other in a genuinely human way, and what it means to be good stewards of the earth’s resources. As priests, they will mediate the blessings of God to the world and will be used to bring the rest of the world to know God.

Christopher J. H. Wright observes that Exodus 19:5–6 has a chiastic structure as follows:

> Now then, if you really obey my voice and keep my covenant,
> **a** you will be for me a special personal possession
> **b** among all the peoples;
> **b'** for indeed to me belongs the whole earth
> **a'** but you, you will be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.[53]

Wright says,

> After the initial conditional clause (the first line), there is a chiastic structure of four phrases, in which the two central lines portray God’s universal ownership of the world and its nations, while the two outer lines express his particular role for Israel. This structure also makes

> clear that the double phrase “priestly kingdom and holy nation” stands in apposition to “personal possession.” . . . The *status* is to be a special treasured possession. The *role* is to be a priestly and holy community in the midst of the nations.[54]

The literary structure as explained by Wright reinforces the exposition here of Israel’s covenant relationship with God and with the world that takes up the sonship and kingship of the divine image in Genesis 1.

The new covenant succeeds where the old covenant failed. The purposes of the Mosaic covenant are now being fulfilled in the church. The apostle Peter calls the church God’s special treasure, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9–10). And God has forged both Jews and non-Jews into his new humanity [or Man, i.e., Adam], according to Ephesians 2:15.

The Ten Words (Exodus 20)

A brief explanation of the Ten Words will make plain our repeated claim that the Mosaic covenant entails a right relationship to God and social justice in human relationships. First, some general observations on the Ten Words are fundamental to a proper understanding of this covenant.

The Ten Words form the heart of the covenant between God and Israel at Sinai. The Book of the Covenant, as we have seen, consists of the Ten Words and the Judgments. The former constitute the basic and fundamental requirements of the covenant. The latter are detailed stipulations based on the Ten Words, which apply them in practical ways to specific social situations and draw out and nuance their meaning in various contingencies and circumstances.

We have already drawn attention to the fact that the earliest tradition in the biblical text refers to these requirements as the “Ten Words” (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4) and not as the “Ten Commandments,” as we now know them. There is, in fact, a particular reason for this and for why there are precisely ten instructions. A connection is being made between the covenants at Sinai and creation. In the creation narrative, God creates the universe by simply speaking, that is, by his word. In the Hebrew text, the verb *wayyō’mer*, “and he [i.e., God] said,” occurs ten times. In a very real way, the entire creation depends or hangs on the word of God. Here the

Book of the Covenant is what forges Israel into a nation. It is her national constitution, so to speak. And it is also the Ten Words that bring about the birth of the nation. Like the creation, Israel as a nation hangs for her very life on (the) ten words.

Although the biblical text explicitly tells us that there are *ten* words, the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant traditions have differed in enumerating them. Differences in itemization are focused on commands one, two, and ten, and debate is based on issues of cantillation in the Masoretic Text, on issues of form, meaning, and style, and on the fact that the repetition of the Ten Words in Deuteronomy 5 entails some slight variations from the text in Exodus.

Recent research on the enumeration of the Ten Words by Jason DeRouchie, however, supports the Catholic-Lutheran analysis as follows:[55]

1. No other gods
2. No use of name deceitfully
3. Sabbath
4. Honor parents
5. No murder
6. No adultery
7. No theft
8. No false witness
9. No coveting wife
10. No desiring household members/objects

DeRouchie's analysis is convincing because it is based on discourse-grammar/macrosyntax/text-linguistic analysis. This area of linguistic study pays close attention to features in the language that are grammatical markers above or beyond the boundary of individual sentences in the text as a whole. In particular, in the version of the Ten Words in Deuteronomy 5:6–21, the enumeration is clarified because commands five through ten are joined by the conjunction *waw* ("and") while commands one through four are set off from the last six by asyndeton (absence of the conjunction).[56] Moreover, the fact that only one reason in both Exodus 20:3–6 and Deuteronomy 5:7–10 supports commands one and two—according to the

enumeration of the Protestant tradition—provides further corroboration that they should be considered a single command.

The command to obey parents belongs with the first three so that we should divide the ten commands into two sections: four and six. This is clear from the fact that the command to obey parents, like the first three commands and unlike the last six, includes the phrase “Yahweh, your God.” Moreover, the first three commands are backed up by an explanation or reason, while the fourth is motivated by a promise. The last six have no explanation or motivation clause supporting them. The command to obey parents, then, shows that the covenant community of the family is the linchpin that connects loving God to loving others in human society and creation in general. It is the foundation of human society and the community where we should first learn covenant love.

In the light of a correct enumeration of the Ten Words, the command “You shall have no other gods before me” and the command “You shall not make for yourself images/idols” taken together constitute the first command, and “You shall not bear / lift up the name of the Lord your God in vain” is now the second command.

The discussion here of the first three commands is indebted to the treatment of John Walton, who follows the Protestant-Reformed tradition. To make this work, his first command will be referred to as command 1a herein and his second command will be referred to as command 1b.

The Ten Words are divided into three commands defining Israel’s relationship to Yahweh and six commands dealing with human interpersonal relationships within the covenant community. They define a genuinely human way to treat each other. At the center, in between our relationship to God and our relationship to others in society is a command that protects the family as the basic unit of human society. This is the only command supported by a blessing promised for obedience.

Note in particular that a reason or rationale is given for keeping the first three commands, introduced by *kî* (“because” or “for,” 20:5, 6, 11). One reason is supplied after commands 1a and 1b, and one each after the second and third commands. This is a hint, structurally, to consider the first three commands in pairs.

No reason or rationale is given for keeping the last six commands. These entail the basic and inalienable rights of every human and have been recognized by the customs and laws of every society.[57] These "laws" are paralleled in law codes from other societies in the ancient Near East, as shown in table 9.2:

Table 9.2 Legal Treatises of the Ancient Near East[58]

The Laws of Ur-Nammu	twenty-first century BC
The Laws of Lipit-Ishtar	nineteenth century BC
The Laws of Eshnunna	eighteenth century BC
The Code of Hammurabi	eighteenth century BC
The Middle Assyrian Laws	twelfth century BC
The Old Hittite Laws	seventeenth century BC

Although the Ten Words express these laws negatively, they could also be expressed positively in terms of the inalienable rights of every human, as shown in table 9.3:

Table 9.3 The Ten Words as Inalienable Human Rights

You shall not murder	= the right of every person to his or her own life
You shall not commit adultery	= the right of every person to his or her own home
You shall not steal	= the right of every person to his or her own property
You shall not bear false witness	= the right of every person to his or her own reputation

No society can endure that does not respect the basic, inalienable rights of every person. Since the last six commands can be paralleled in the law codes of other societies in the ancient Near East and were well known to the Israelites, no rationale for keeping them need be supplied in the text. The first three commands, however, as Maurice Andrew and Johann Stamm

have argued, are unparalleled in the ancient Near East.[59] Certainly, the command to worship only one God, the command not to manufacture or worship idols, and the command to observe the Sabbath are absolutely unique. In fact, the seventh day in Mesopotamia was considered unlucky. These commands constitute a new revelation, and God graciously supplies a rationale for keeping them, so that Israel may grasp an adequate motivation for following a practice that was unprecedented.

The question must also be raised as to why the commands are given as *prohibitions* and why they are formulated in the *second-person singular*. Why not express them positively as inalienable rights? Why not indicate by a second-person plural that they are addressed to all? The reason for this is simple: God wants each and every individual person to think first of the inalienable rights of the other person and not first about his or her own inalienable rights. This explains both the negative formulation and the second-person singular.

From the start and right throughout the entire history of Israel, attempts were made to boil down, digest, and summarize the instructions of the covenant—both the Judgments that elaborate on the Ten Words in practical situations and the Ten Words themselves. For example, Leviticus 18–20 contains a collection of instructions that develops further in particular the last six of the Ten Words. It is interesting to note that at the mid- and end points of Leviticus 19 we find the instruction, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18, 34).[60] Jesus and other rabbis of the first century demonstrated exegetical insight to observe that this was a summary statement of the various instructions in this section of Leviticus and indeed of the last portion of the Ten Words that they elaborate on. Later on, the prophets and poets used two pairs of words as summaries of the Torah. One is the pair “loving-kindness and truth,” and the other is “justice and righteousness.” Each pair of words is a hendiadys—communicating a single idea through two words. The first pair speaks of faithful, loyal love, and the second speaks of social justice. These are attempts to boil down the covenant stipulations into a single “sound bite.” They are important because they show that the instructions represent faithful love as well as social justice in human interrelationships.

In this brief treatment of the Mosaic covenant, space permits only a short explanation of each of the first three of the Ten Words, as these have been more troublesome for Christians to understand than the last seven.

Command 1a: No Other Gods Before Me

Some scholars and traditions have construed the first of the Ten Words as Exodus 20:2–3. Yet the fact that the covenant is broadly structured according to a Hittite treaty demonstrates plainly that verse 2, in which Yahweh says, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves," is, in fact, the historical prologue of the treaty, so that the first command begins in verse 3: "You shall have no other gods before me." In both Roman Catholic and Lutheran interpretive traditions, the command in verse 3 and the command in verse 4 ("You shall not make for yourself an idol") are counted as one command, while the command against coveting is separated into two: "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife," and "You shall not covet your neighbor's house." As Bruce Waltke notes, "According to the latter construction, the first commandment condemns false worship and the tenth commandment distinguishes wife from property."[61] We have seen that this analysis is supported by asyndeton, the phrase "the LORD, your God" recurring in the first four commands, and by the fact that only the first four commands are supported by causal/motivation clauses.

The interpretation of the Reformers and the creeds following in this tradition construe the text to mean that we should not have any other gods before the Lord, that is, in preference to the Lord. Thus the prohibition is understood in terms of priorities. According to the Westminster Confession, God must be the highest priority in our attitudes, thoughts, words, and ways. Others have interpreted the prohibition philosophically and argued that the main point is to establish absolute monotheism and rule out the existence of other deities.

The command, however, does appear to acknowledge the existence of other gods. In courses taught in the history of religion at universities in the Western world, the suggestion is frequently made that, at an earlier stage of the history of Israel, the people were henotheists—that is, they believed in

the existence of many gods but consciously chose to worship only one. At a later point in the development of Israel's religion, henotheism gave way to monotheism, the belief that there *is* only one god.

Bruce Waltke seeks to alleviate this problem by distinguishing between religious commands and theological statements:

> For theological statements of whether other gods exist, we turn to Deuteronomy 4:39: "Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other." Furthermore, Deuteronomy 32:17–21 identifies idol worship as bowing down to demons. Verse 17 reads, "They sacrificed to demons, which are not God [*lō'-'elōhîm*, 'no-God']." These declarative sentences serve as foundations for theological beliefs and doctrines.
>
> On the other hand, religious commands deal with subjective reality. The truth is, regardless of the existence of other gods, human beings create and worship what is "no-God" (1 Cor. 8:4–8). . . . Calvin noted that the human heart is a perpetual idol factory. Thus, rather than tacitly assuming the existence of other gods, the commandment assumes the depravity of the human race to create and worship their own gods. The religious command reflects the reality of the human situation but does not serve as a theological statement. Other passages teach monotheism.[62]

This distinction is helpful but nonetheless assumes that the exegesis in terms of priorities is correct. Yet this exegesis is difficult to maintain. As John Walton notes,

> The focus on God as the highest priority is as far back as the LXX, which translated the Hebrew *'l pny* ("before me") with the Greek preposition *plēn*, "except." However, if Hebrew meant to say "except" there were several ways to do this (e.g., *'ak* or *raq*). Similarly, if the Hebrew had intended to express priority, it could have used language such as that found in Deut 4:12 or Isa 45:21.[63]

In an exhaustive study of the use of the preposition *'l pny-* ("before") plus personal object in the Hebrew Bible, Walton shows that the meaning is

consistently spatial.[64] The linguistic data, then, demand that a spatial sense be considered as the main option.

In the past, students of the text have avoided this interpretation because they could not understand how it could make any sense. Data from the ancient Near Eastern culture now illuminate how a spatial sense is eminently suitable. In the culture of the ancient Near East at this time, the gods operated within a pantheon, a divine assembly. John Walton argues that the first commandment is distinguishing Yahweh from this common understanding of deity in the ancient world: "When the first commandment prohibits other gods in the presence of Yahweh, it is ruling out the concept that He operates within a pantheon, a divine assembly, or with a consort."[65] Walton's fuller analysis is enlightening and is discussed earlier, in chapter 6.[66]

In the progressive revealing and unfolding of God in history and Scripture, the completed canon shows that God has revealed himself completely and fully in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Our lives, our service and work, our worship must recognize his authority alone. This disenfranchises all gods and idols worshiped in our culture. There is no one else I am living my life for than Jesus Christ.

Command 1b: No Images/Idols

Command 1b of the Ten Words is as follows: "You shall not make for yourself an image and form that is in the heaven above and that is in the earth below and that is in the waters under the earth" (Ex. 20:4). As John Walton notes, popular prohibition of images has been influenced significantly by four factors: (1) Jewish interpretation, (2) controversies over icons in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, (3) statues of saints in the Roman Catholic tradition, and (4) debate over what constitutes art from a Christian perspective.[67] In classical Jewish and Muslim traditions, this command led to a prohibition of the representation of any living creature. Christian interpretation up to the nineteenth century was dominated by the idea that since God was invisible and transcendent, he could not be

contained in an image. Others have spiritualized the text, reducing idols to anything to which we devote our energy, money, and worth as deity.

Such misunderstandings of the second part of the first command are due to a couple of factors. First is ignorance of the ancient Near Eastern ideas concerning the nature and role of idols. Walton classifies ancient Near Eastern thinking about idols into three categories.

The first category is the manufacture of images. In the ancient Near Eastern mindset, only the god could approve and initiate the manufacturing process. At the end of the process, special ceremonies and rituals, in particular the mouth-opening ritual, allowed the god to inhabit the image and permitted the image to drink, eat food, and smell incense.

The second category concerns the use of the image. Walton notes that "in the ancient world all formal and public worship revolved around the image."[68] Thus the image involved mediation. It mediated revelation from the deity to the people and also mediated worship by the people to the deity as they brought clothes, drink, and food to honor it.

The third category has to do with ancient Near Eastern perceptions concerning the function and nature of images. According to Walton,

> As a result of the induction ritual the material image was animated by the divine essence. Therefore, from now on it did not simply represent the deity but also manifested its presence. However, this does not mean that the image had thereby been deified. The deity was the reality that was embodied in the image.[69]

Misunderstanding of the second part of the first command is due not only to ignorance of the ancient Near Eastern culture and worldview but also to faulty analysis of the grammar of this text. Let us consider closely the exact text of this command in both Exodus and Deuteronomy. Below, the Hebrew text is provided along with the translations of the KJV and NIV.

Exodus 20:4: לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה־לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה

KJV: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing . . .

NIV: You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything . . .

Deuteronomy 5:8: לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה־לְךָ פֶסֶל כָּל־תְּמוּנָה

KJV: Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing . . .

NIV: You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything . . .

The translation of the KJV represents early Jewish rabbinic understanding, no doubt mediated through the Latin Vulgate of Jerome. This is the way orthodox Jews today understand the text and also the way in which Muslims have consistently understood the text.

The original text in Hebrew actually conjoins the objects of the verb with *waw*, a copulative coordinating conjunction that always means "and." A series of alternative clauses may be joined by *waw*, but this does not mean that *waw* has the same value as "or" in English.[70] Hebrew does have a conjunction, "or" (*'ô*), and it could have been used here to designate the alternative possibility but was not. The text in Exodus 20:4 is difficult, but the early rabbinic understanding does not follow the rules of grammar in Hebrew. Note that the parallel text in Deuteronomy does not have the conjunction *waw* but employs instead a construct phrase, "a carved image/idol *of* any form." Certainly the rendering "or" is contrary to the syntax here. It seems that interpretive traditions have molded Deuteronomy 5:8 to suit their understanding of Exodus 20:4

If we believe in the analogy of Scripture, however, where we interpret the unclear by the clear, the Jewish understanding cannot be the correct meaning of this text. Consider, for example, the art in the tabernacle and also in Solomon's temple. Artwork in the construction of Solomon's temple featured representation of the creation with images of bulls, cherubim, lions, palm trees, and pomegranates (1 Kings 7:18, 25, 36). Since the grammar of the text in Deuteronomy 5:8 is clear, a better approach is to use the clear text there to interpret the unclear in Exodus 20:4. The construction in Exodus 20:4 could be understood as a hendiadys, a common figure of speech in Hebrew literature where one idea is communicated by two nouns or verbs joined by "and." The first notable example in the Bible is Genesis 3:16, which in the Hebrew reads, "I will greatly increase your pain and your pregnancy." This does not mean an increase of pain on the one hand and

pregnancy on the other. The next sentence goes on to explain, “In pain you will bring forth children.” So the earlier expression must mean “pain in pregnancy”—an example of a hendiadys. In Exodus 20:4, “a carved image and any form” must therefore in the light of Deuteronomy 5:8 mean “a carved image/idol in any form.” This is the approach taken by the NIV, and it accurately follows the grammar of the Hebrew language and uses the clear meaning of one text to assist the interpretation of the other rather than imposing the faulty interpretation of Exodus on the clear text in Deuteronomy.

Accurate exegesis of command 1b, then, shows that this text has nothing to do with art or the representation of aspects of the created order with images. Rather, the command has to do with images used as mediators of the presence or revelation of deity from god to human, or mediation of the worship of people to the deity. As Walton observes, “The prohibition of images excluded in particular that sort of worship that understood cultic rituals to meet the needs of the deity through the image.”[71]

Second Command: Do Not Bear the Name of God Deceitfully

Popular misunderstanding also exists concerning the second of the Ten Words: “You shall not lift up the name of Yahweh your God worthlessly (*laššāw’*)” (Ex. 20:7). Once again, better knowledge of both cultural setting and linguistic data can improve our understanding of this text.

First, the basic import of this instruction is not related to the use of God’s name idly in blasphemy, minced oaths, or profanity. This is certainly inappropriate, and respect and reverence for the divine name is enjoined in Deuteronomy 28:58.

Second, the traditional view has focused on false oaths. As Bruce Waltke notes,

> The operative word is *šāw’* (KJV, “in vain”; cf. Lev. 24:15). . . . *Šāw’* is used in biblical Hebrew in several ways: to denote to be false or deceitful with respect to speaking (Deut. 5:20 in reference to being a false witness against a neighbor; Exod 23:1 in reference to a false report or rumor); with respect to being false in worship (Isa. 1:13, which discusses a false tribute to God where the people hold to a form

> of worship, but their heart is not there); and with respect to being false in prophecy (Ezek. 13:3–7, which refers to false prophets who claim to have seen a vision, but there is no reality to what they have seen). Herbert Huffmon argues from both biblical and extrabiblical evidence that the commandment prohibits false or frivolous swearing. "The focus is on not making God an accomplice, as it were to one's falseness, whether of intent or of performance."[72]

Thus, according to analysis of the linguistic data, the command has to do with lifting up the name of God falsely or worthlessly. But this does not provide a full picture.

Walton argues that in order to get a valid understanding, the linguistic data must be set within the context of the ancient Near Eastern culture. This, he asserts, depends on a careful definition of magic, the world in which the false or proper use of names occurs.[73] In the ancient Near East and also in the Graeco-Roman world, there was no demarcating line between religion and magic. Later, influence from the medieval church and the Enlightenment resulted in distinguishing the two. In the past, however, interpreters have not appreciated how names were used in the framework of magic and power.

G. Frantz-Szabó offers a comprehensive and helpful definition of magic in the context of invoking supernatural powers:

> [Magic] is a reasoned system of techniques for influencing the gods and other supernatural powers that can be taught and learned. . . . Magic is a praxis, indeed a science, that through established and for the most part empirical means seeks to alter or maintain earthly circumstances, or even call them forth anew. Magic not only manipulates occult forces but also endeavors to master the higher supernatural power with which religion is concerned.[74]

The name of God represents and sums up his entire character and person. To use that name brings his person and his power into a particular situation. When we use his name for something that is contrary to who he is, contrary to his character, we lift it up to a lie. Walton observes that "the name is equivalent to the identity of the deity, and the divine identity can be

commandeered for illicit use. The problem of identity theft is widely recognized today."[75] In Psalm 139:19–22, David dissociates himself in the strongest of terms from fellow Israelites who want him to join them in a scheme to murder someone and are doing this using the name of Yahweh. Misusing the name of God occurs among Christians today when someone says, "The Lord led me to do such and such a thing," when we know from Scripture that the act violates the revealed will of God.

Daniel I. Block proposed a different interpretation for the second command than that provided by Walton.[76] The traditional interpretations and translations in the English versions may "miss the central issue, namely, that of wearing the name of Yahweh as a badge or brand of ownership."[77] The key to this injunction is the verb נָשָׂא, which does not mean "to misuse" or "to pronounce" or "to take" in this text since all these translations would require different idioms. Instead, here the normal sense "to bear, carry" is most suitable. The collocation of this verb with "name" occurs elsewhere only in Exodus 28:12 and 29, where it refers to Aaron, the high priest, bearing the names of the sons of Israel since they were inscribed on two onyx stones on the shoulder pieces of his ephod. In addition, Block notes,

> According to Numbers 6:27 in the future the Aaronic priests would "put" Yahweh's name on the Israelites by declaring for them what came to be known as "the Aaronic blessing." And because they bore the stamp of His name they were objects of His blessing. In Deuteronomy the expression קָדֹשׁ לַיהוה, "holy belonging to Yahweh," is applied to Israel as a whole (Deut. 26:19; cf. 7:6; 14:2, 21). Like the Shema', which was to be inscribed on houses and gates and on phylacteries on the forehead, to bear the name of God means to have His name branded on one's person as a mark of divine ownership.[78]

Several other passages may be briefly mentioned to support this view. The notion of branding[79] (e.g., cattle) used metaphorically may underlie Isaiah 44:5:

> This one will say, "I am the LORD's,"
> another will call on the name of Jacob,
> and another will write on his hand, "The LORD's,"

and claim as honorific title the name of Israel.

Further, Deuteronomy 28:9–10 clearly connects belonging to the Lord (i.e., holy to Yahweh) and bearing the name of the Lord:

> The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. (ESV)

Finally, observe that when God judged his people in exile, he scattered them among the nations because they had *desecrated his holy name* (Ezek. 36:17–23). Conversely, in Daniel's famous prayer for the end of the exile and judgment, he asks God to act for his own sake, *because your city and your people bear your name* (Dan. 9:16–19).

What then would the clause "bear the name" mean when modified by the adverbial phrase *laššāw'* (KJV, "in vain")? The comments cited earlier by Bruce Waltke are apt in spite of the fact that he is arguing for a traditional Jewish interpretation of this text. Although the noun can mean "empty" or "worthless," as Waltke points out, it frequently has to do with what is deceitful or false. Isaiah 59:3, "Your lips have spoken deceitfully," is a good example (cf. Isa. 5:18). Psalm 139:20 actually alludes to the second of the Ten Words, and the context clarifies the issue:

> They speak against you with malicious intent;
> your enemies take your name in vain. (ESV)

Here David (according to the title of the psalm) is confronting men who plan to murder someone and want David to join them in this. This is bearing the name of Yahweh deceitfully, and David identifies them instead as the enemies of God because the act they intend under the umbrella of his name is contrary to who he is and what he represents.

On the basis of the analysis of the second command given by Daniel I. Block, a further insight is possible concerning the first two commands. According to the numbering scheme of the Catholic-Lutheran tradition, the first command, "no other gods," is identical to the claim "I am your God,"

and the second command, “no wearing his name deceitfully/worthlessly,” is identical to the claim “You are my people,” since bearing the name indicated belonging to Yahweh—that is, wearing his brand or mark as a badge of honor. In this way, as shown in table 9.4, the first two of the Ten Words may be seen as an exposition of the Covenant Formula (“I will be your God, and you shall be my people”).

Table 9.4 The First Two of the Ten Words as an Exposition of the Covenant Formula

No other gods before me	→	I will be your God
No bearing my name dishonorably	→	You will be my people

The interpretation of command 1b suggested by Daniel I. Block has been investigated and supported by a full-length doctoral dissertation by Carmen J. Imes.[80]

The mention of *’el qanna’* (KJV, “a jealous God”) in the first command adds support for this view since the Hebrew word *qanna’* refers to acting to protect one’s property and the next command indicates that Israel belongs to Yahweh.

A proposal made recently by Stephen Dempster could be further explored.[81] He suggests that the Ten Words are a further explication of the divine name, especially in light of the revelation of the divine name in Exodus 34:5–7. He notes that “I am Yahweh your God” (Ex. 20:2) is the first use of this formulation of divine identification in the Bible and is followed by what he understands as an explanatory gloss on the divine name—“who brought you out of servitude to Egypt.”[82] He observes that the first command stresses Yahweh’s uniqueness and therefore Israel’s exclusive worship—Yahweh is one. The second command (according to the enumeration in the Protestant tradition) stresses his incomparability in the material realm—so much so that there cannot be any material duplicate. In particular, the motivation for keeping the command—*’el qanna’* (KJV, “a jealous God”)—is clearly related to the divine identity (cf. Ex. 34:14). In the Ten Words there is punishment down to the third and fourth generation of “those who hate me” versus *ḥesed* for the thousands of generations of

“those who love me.” In the revelation of the divine name in Exodus 34:5–7, this punishment is omitted. In the third command (according to the enumeration in the Protestant tradition), the divine name cannot be profaned because it is incomparable—note that the guilty party will not be acquitted, and compare this to the revelation of the divine name in 34:6–7: “He will not acquit the guilty.” This approach makes sense in the rest of the Ten Words as well, but explicit indications of it given there are lacking. Note as well that Exodus 22:26–27 (22:25–26 MT) is the first reference to חַנּוּן (“gracious,” as in the revelation of the divine name in Ex. 34:6) in the Bible in the context of motivation for keeping a law. At any rate, central to the exodus is the revelation of the divine name (Exodus 3; 6; and now 20–24). Christopher Seitz has explained that God’s name is the most personal revelation of God’s own character.[83] Therefore the Ten Words as a revelation of the divine name is at the same time a revelation of the character of Yahweh. No doubt the structure of the Ten Words is arranged with such skill that different analyses are possible at the same time.

Third Command: Keep the Sabbath

The third of the Ten Words is a positive injunction to observe the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8–11). The importance of this injunction is indicated by its length—it is the longest of the Ten Words.

For several decades in the twentieth century, scholars attempted to find precursors to the Israelite Sabbath in the nations surrounding ancient Israel. This effort was entirely unsuccessful. The Hebrew *šabbāt* is not connected to the Babylonian *šabbatu*, which is the fifteenth day of the month. Moreover the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of certain months in the Babylonian calendar were considered unlucky. Nonetheless, the concept of divine rest is well attested in ancient Near Eastern texts, and the cultural context can cast great light on interpretation of the third command.

Six aspects of the notion of divine rest in the ancient Near East, drawn mainly from the great epics such as the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, are delineated by Walton.[84] These can be briefly summarized as follows: (1) in the ancient epics, divine rest was disturbed by rebellion; (2) divine rest was

achieved after conflict; (3) divine rest was achieved after acts of creation, establishing order; (4) divine rest was achieved in the temple; (5) divine rest was characterized by ongoing rule and stability; and (6) divine rest was achieved by the gods creating people to do their work.

There are both similarities and differences between the biblical command to observe the Sabbath and the cultural context of the ancient Near East. We need to attend carefully to the linguistic data in the relevant texts. In Exodus 20:8–11, the Israelites are commanded to remember the Sabbath day to consecrate it. In the Old Testament, the notion of remembering is not merely mental recall; it entails acts in space and time based on keeping something at the front of one's mind. Israel is to consecrate the Sabbath; it is a commemorative event that belongs to Yahweh and is to be devoted to him. Both humans—free or slaves, citizens or resident aliens—and animals are to cease from the business and labor ordinarily undertaken to provide for our own life and sustenance. It is an act of faith acknowledging Yahweh as the Creator and giver of life and as the one who rules our lives.

The biblical viewpoint is fundamentally different from the ancient Near Eastern perspectives, in spite of many parallels on the surface. Walton says,

> In the Old Testament people work for their own benefit and provision, rather than to meet the needs of God or to do his work for him. When commanded to share the rest of God on the Sabbath, it is not to participate in it per se, but to recognize His work of bringing and maintaining order. God's rest symbolizes His control over the cosmos, which His people recognize whenever they yield to Him the day they could have used to provide for themselves.[85]

On the other hand, the parallel between the ancient Near Eastern building of temples for divine rest and the biblical creation narrative culminating in divine rest is valid. The framework of the account of creation in the Bible strongly suggests that the cosmos is constructed as a sanctuary/temple in which God may take up his rest.

Discussion of this command brings us right into the middle of the problem of the relationship between the old covenant and the new, a matter

that cannot be adequately discussed in this chapter. Nonetheless, a few comments on the Sabbath are in order.

First, we must note that the Sabbath was the sign between Yahweh and Israel of the old covenant, as is clearly stated in Exodus 31:12–18. Covenants often have a physical sign associated with them. God gave the rainbow as a physical sign of the promise in his covenant with Noah. He commanded circumcision in the body of every male in Israel as a physical sign of God's covenant with Abraham. Similarly, the Sabbath is stipulated as a permanent sign between Yahweh and Israel that the God who created the world in six days and then rested has consecrated them to himself. Note that while the Mosaic covenant is not described as "everlasting" in the Old Testament, the sign of it is, because Jesus has fulfilled the Sabbath for believers (Matt. 11:28).

Second, as we compare the old covenant and the new covenant, we see that the self-identity of the people of the Lord in the old covenant was that of children, while the self-identity of the people of the Lord in the new covenant is that of mature adults (Gal. 3:24–25). The external forms and shadows of the old covenant have been done away now that the reality has come in Christ (Col. 2:16–17).

Now, of what does the Sabbath speak? Let us notice at once that, in the two texts in the Old Testament where we have the Ten Words, the reason given for the Sabbath in one text is different from the reason given in the other. In Exodus, the reason is given in 20:11. God's work of creation was complete. It was finished; no one could add anything to it. The people were invited to enter his rest and enjoy his work. Hebrews applies this notion to the work of Christ. We cannot do anything to add to the work of Jesus Christ. We are simply to enjoy it.

In Deuteronomy 5:15, a different reason is given for the Sabbath. The people of Israel must remember that they were slaves in Egypt and that God brought them out of slavery, so they should give their slaves a chance to rest as they do on the Sabbath. Paul, in Colossians 1:12–14, speaks, as do many authors of the New Testament, of the work of the Lord Jesus as a new exodus. Egypt is a picture or symbol of the world, Pharaoh is a symbol of Satan, and slavery is a symbol of our enslavement to our passion and pride

from which Christ has redeemed us in his death on the cross. Jesus is the new Joshua, who will lead those people connected to him by the new covenant to enter and enjoy God's Sabbath rest.

It is important to note here that the Sabbath belongs to the Mosaic covenant and is not grounded in the covenant at creation. G. K. Beale attempts to ground the Sabbath as a creation command by citing Genesis 2:15, "Yahweh God . . . deposited/placed him (i.e., the Man) in the garden." Beale's interpretation is based on an error in linguistic method. The verb "deposited/placed him" is וַיַּנִּחֵהוּ in Hebrew. Beale claims that this means "to cause to rest" from the root נוח ("to rest").[86] There are two different *hiphil* forms from נוח. The first, usually designated *hiphil A* (or *1*) means "to cause to rest." The second, designated *hiphil B* (or *2*) has the meaning "deposit," "lay," "leave," or even "abandon." The two uses are carefully distinguished in form. *Hiphil A* always has an initial vowel that is long, while *hiphil B* has one that is short followed by a doubling of the *nûn*, as occurs in Genesis 2:15. It may be that in the distant past, *hiphil B* developed from *hiphil A*, but as far as the Hebrew writers are concerned, they function as two different verbs with different meanings. There is therefore no basis for the claim that the verb in Genesis 2:15 has anything to do with the Sabbath. The verb "deposited/placed him" (וַיַּנִּחֵהוּ) is simply a stylistic variant for וַיָּשֶׂם in 2:8.

Summary

The first command in the Ten Words can be construed as a pair. John Walton's summary is helpful in grasping the pair's function and intent:[87]

> *Commandments 1a and 1b*
> Yahweh's mode of operating in the two realms (divine and human):
>
> - Commandment 1a concerns how Yahweh was *not* to be perceived as operating in the divine realm—no distribution of authority to other divinities.
> - Commandment 1b concerns how Yahweh was *not* to be perceived as operating in the human realm—no iconographic mediator of his presence, revelation, or worship.

The second command clearly calls the human partner to full allegiance: we belong to Yahweh. We bear his name, and our actions must represent Yahweh appropriately. Together the first and second commands reinforce the Covenant Formula: “I will be your God, and you will be my people.”

The third command concerns a covenant sign—people were to symbolize the covenant by refraining from attempts to control their own lives on the Sabbath, that is, they were to symbolize belonging to Yahweh as King.

The Judgments (Ex. 20:22–23:33)

Following the Ten Words is a section entitled the Judgments. This section is an expansion on the Ten Words. Although parts of the section are in the form of apodictic or prescriptive statements (“You shall/shall not”; e.g., Ex. 22:18–23:10), large parts are in the form of conditional sentences, that is, case decisions or descriptive law or judicial precedents (e.g., 21:2–22:17). Like the Ten Words, provisions for cultic issues (i.e., festivals, 23:10–19) are mixed together with moral matters and issues of restitution and social justice. Davies observes that this section begins and ends with a warning of the dangers of worshiping other gods, and this *inclusio* characterizes the function of the section.[88]

John Walton has devoted significant study to comparing and contrasting these materials with counterparts in ancient Near Eastern culture and society.[89] Earlier, table 9.2 listed similar texts, such as the Laws of Ur-Nammu and the Code of Hammurabi. Walton draws on scholars who have devoted a lifetime to the study of such texts in Egypt and Mesopotamia, Israel’s neighbors. The consensus is that the texts are not law codes as we who have a Graeco-Roman heritage think of them, because they are neither *comprehensive* nor *prescriptive*. The ancients loved to compile lists, and these are anthologies of examples that model judicial wisdom. Jean Bottéro, an expert in ancient Near Eastern legal material says,

> In the eyes of its author the “Code” [of Hammurabi] was not at all intended to exercise by itself a univocal normative value in the legislative order. But it did have value as a model; it was instructive and educative in the judicial order. A law applies to details; a model inspires—which is entirely different. In conclusion, we have here not a

> law code, nor the charter of a legal reform, but above all, in its own way, a treatise, with examples, on the exercise of judicial power.[90]

Bottéro compares legal treatises to treatises for divination and medicine. They are similar in form and function. All three contain conditional statements and are intended to assist practitioners through cases that serve as models or paradigms. As Walton says,

> The medical treatises teach medical practitioners about diagnosis, the divinatory treatises teach the practitioners about prognostication through omens, and the legal treatises teach practitioners (whether future kings or court personnel) about judicial wisdom, all through multiplying examples through patterns.[91]

Bottéro concludes,

> The cuneiform treatises are nothing else but types of paradigms or tables. It was by repetition and the variation of particular cases, of models to be considered in a spirit of analogy, that the substance of the discipline in question was assimilated, that the habit of scientific judgment was formed, that the sense of correct reasoning was acquired at the same time as the capacity to extend these same judgments and reasoning to all the material objects of the science in question, according to their eventual presentation.[92]

Thus, the ancient legal treatises were not law codes in the sense in which we think of them in the Western world, but they gave instruction in model justice through exemplary verdicts.

Hammurabi compiled his list of exemplary verdicts to legitimize his reign and rule, showing that his skill in administrative justice was derived from the sun god Shamash. In this sense, there is a similarity between such legal texts and biblical Wisdom Literature.

It is also important to note that Hammurabi's legal treatise was not considered the "law of the land," and it imposed no obligations on the courts or society. In extensive research and study of court cases from the ancient Near East, never is there any direct reference or appeal to the six major legal treatises that have been frequently listed as "law codes."

The covenant at Sinai (Exodus 19–24) must be not only compared to the culture of the ancient Near East but contrasted as well. Walton provides a table that helps to show some of the differences (see table 9.5):

Table 9.5 Literary Context of the Law in the Pentateuch and the Ancient Near East[93]

Exodus 19–24 / Deuteronomy	**Ancient Near Eastern Treatises**
Essentially a self-revelation of deity	Essentially a self-glorification of the king
Covenant charter that synthesizes an entire detailed and organized vision of the "right" exercise of what it means to be a holy nation (Ex. 19:5–6; Deut. 26:19)	Political charter that synthesizes an entire detailed and organized vision of the "right" exercise of justice
Stipulations of the covenant	Treatise on jurisprudence
Portrays the ideal covenant keeper	Portrays the ideal king
The prime purpose of the biblical compilation is sanctification	The prime purpose of the Mesopotamian compilations is justice

Since the covenant in Exodus 20–23 entails *covenant stipulations* embodying the guidelines and Torah (i.e., instruction) of Yahweh for life in the land, the prescriptive statements were certainly intended to be obeyed. The covenant at Sinai is not just wisdom literature. Nonetheless, the case laws illustrate the righteousness of God *in an Iron Age cultural setting* and are bound by the psychology of that time. This aspect shows that the "law" is not eternal.

Jeffrey Niehaus objects to the treatment of legal material provided by Walton. His lengthy objections can be cited in summary:

> The treatise hypothesis seems to fall short in light of the highly detailed nature of most of the laws contained in the ancient codes. A familiar example is the Code of Hammurapi [hereafter *CH*]. Hammurapi's laws address many different cases with a high degree of specificity and are laws in their own right, not just paradigms in a treatise (although, of course, they often provide models of judgment, just as the Mosaic laws, or for that matter, any secular laws can do, since we understand that no law code can anticipate all the details of every case that will arise). Furthermore, Hammurapi refers to himself

> as “the king of righteousness, to whom Shamash has given law/justice/truth (Akkadian *kīnātum*)” (*CH* xxvb.95–98)—a claim that hardly seems refuted by the casuistic and list forms of the codex’s contents (cf. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 288–91). Even if we understand *kīnātum* as “justice/truth” rather than “law,” its historical usage indicates a state of being in alignment with divinely given standards of what is right (cf. *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, 8:383–84), and, again, it is given to the king by Shamash, the Mesopotamian god of laws and covenants. Moreover, this statement and statements by the king that he has given the land its law/judgments (*CH* xxvb.60–74; cf. *CH* xxvb.80–84, “The procedure, the administration, and the law of the land, which I have given”) stand in direct contradiction to Walton’s statement, “In the ancient Near East we found that neither Shamash (the deity) nor Hammurabi (the king) could be considered a lawgiver” (297).[94]

Unfortunately, Niehaus seems to miss the point made in the hypothesis that the legal materials are treatises. Two main issues are at stake. First, Niehaus confuses covenant and law. He says, “All covenants involve law, that is, stipulations that must be obeyed by one or both parties.”[95] This is a major confusion of categories. Covenant stipulations are not the same as laws in a legal code. Laws in a legal code are closer to requirements in a contract, not covenant stipulations. Second, Niehaus attempts to counter Walton by saying that the laws in the “law codes” are real precedents or precedents from real life. This completely misses the point of Walton’s strong claim that the precedents in the “legal treatises” are never once appealed to in actual court cases in the many court records from Assyria and Babylonia. They may be real precedents in origin, but their purpose is to illustrate the justice and wisdom of the king, not to provide actual laws to be used in court (however real they may seem). Of course, the cases are specific; this is fundamental and natural for a model or paradigm. Moreover, Niehaus misrepresents Walton since he says that neither Shamash nor Hammurabi could be considered lawgivers. In an identical statement earlier, Walton puts “lawgivers” in quotes to show that he does

not mean lawgivers in the sense that we use the word in our Western society based on its Graeco-Roman heritage.[96] At the end of our next chapter, on Deuteronomy, the issue of implications of the form of covenants and legal treatises will be carefully examined. Niehaus does not reflect on the fact that Exodus 19–24 and Deuteronomy may look like "law codes" in content but in fact are not in form and that they may look like a covenant in form but differ somewhat in content. Finally, Niehaus bolsters his view by employing "law" as an equivalent for Akkadian *kīnātum*, but the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* to which he appeals gives only "correct measure, justice, truth" and never "law" as an equivalent. Even if in the genre of literature of which we are speaking the king administers justice as divinely given, this does not mean we have a law code as opposed to a treatise of the judicial wisdom of the king. Thus his appeal to the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* is weak.

The Ceremony of Covenant Ratification (Ex. 24:1–11)

Exodus 24 picks up the narrative after the Ten Words and the Judgments are recounted. Davies notes the close connection between chapters 24 and 19:

> In many ways Exod. 24.1–11 relates closely to the narrative of ch. 19, which it resumes after the suspension of movement by the recounting of the laws in chs. 20–23. Sarna has drawn attention to the perhaps deliberate use of דבר seven times in both chapters, and the sevenfold use of ירד ("descend") in ch. 19, matched by a sevenfold use of עלה ("ascend") in ch. 24. This is an extraordinary *inclusio* which would serve to bind the two chapters as anticipation and realization. In particular a close link is sometimes observed between the units 19.3b–8 and 24.3–8, units where the covenant is first proposed, then consummated.[97]

Two episodes dominate Exodus 24. The ceremony of covenant ratification is described in verses 1–11. In verses 12–18, Moses ascends Mount Sinai to receive instructions on how Israel is to worship God.

The ceremony of covenant ratification is significant for our understanding of the Sinai covenant. First, Moses reports the Ten Words and the Judgments to the people, who, as in Exodus 19:7–8, agree to the

covenant. Then Moses commits the Words and Judgments to writing in a document referred to in Exodus 24:7 as “the Book of the Covenant.” Early in the morning he builds an altar and erects twelve pillars. Presumably, the altar represents Yahweh, for we are clearly told that the twelve-stone stelae represent the people, that is, the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses has assistants from the twelve tribes offer burnt offerings and fellowship/peace offerings. Moses collects the blood from the bulls sacrificed and pours half on the altar. Next he reads the Book of the Covenant, and the people vow to obey and practice the covenant stipulations. Then he scatters/tosses the other half of the blood on the people. In reality, he may have actually scattered the blood on the pillars that represented the people.

Concerning the blood tossed on the people, Bruce Waltke says, “The latter is called the ‘blood of the covenant’ because it effects the covenant relationship by cleansing the recipients from sin.”[98] This interpretation may appear plausible, but in this instance it is not sustained by all the evidence from the text. Fellowship offerings can be made to express thanksgiving or can be offered as the result of a vow, according to Leviticus 7:12–18. The latter is appropriate, since covenant making entails vows. The offering in Exodus 24 is not specified as a sin or reparation sacrifice, nor is the verb “sprinkled” used, as is normal for offerings for sin. The blood is applied to the altar representing Yahweh as well as to the people, and certainly Yahweh does not need to be cleansed from sin. Instead, the ceremony indicates the meaning. Half of the blood is put on Yahweh, and half of the blood is put on the people. In between these two symbolic acts is the reading of the Book of the Covenant and the vow of the people to keep its stipulations. The symbolism is that the one blood joins the two parties.[99] What is most similar to the ceremony of Exodus 24 is a wedding.[100] Two people who are unrelated by blood are now, by virtue of the covenant of marriage, closer than any other kin relation. It is by virtue of the covenant at Sinai that Yahweh becomes the *gō’ēl*, the nearest relative, and that Israel becomes not just a nation but a “people” (עם), a kinship term specifying relationship to the Lord.[101] This is clearly the interpretation of Jeremiah 31:32, where the new covenant “is not like the covenant I made with their ancestors on the day I grasped them by the hand to bring them out of the

land of Egypt, because they violated my covenant *although I was a husband to them*." Jeremiah's statement must be based on Exodus 24.

This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that a party representing the people ascends the mountain and eats a meal. Examples of eating a communal meal to conclude a covenant are numerous.[102] This ancient Near Eastern and biblical practice is the basis for banquets at weddings today.

Davies proposes an alternative interpretation to the covenant-ratification ceremony. He sees the rituals as a service for the ordination of Israel as a priest to God. At the conclusion, seventy elders who represent Israel have direct access to the divine presence. A chiasm is identified as support:

a Expectation of nearness (Ex. 19:1–19)
  b Unexpected warning to keep distance for fear of reprisal (Ex. 19:20–25)
    c Revelation of the character expected of the people, followed by their fear and plea for mediation (Exodus 20)
  b' Expectation of distance (Ex. 24:1–2)
a' Unexpected nearness without reprisal (Ex. 24:9–11)[103]

Since access to the divine presence is at the heart of being a priest, the literary structure supports the arrival at this goal in the covenant-ratification ceremony.

Davies further supports his view by noting parallels between the covenant-ratification ceremony and the description of the service for ordaining the priests in Leviticus 8 as follows:

> There is a ritual washing and donning of clothing (Lev. 8.6–9; cf. Exod 19.10), sacrifices (Lev. 8.14–23; cf. Exod. 24.5), the application of blood to the altar (Lev. 8.15, 19, 24; cf. Exod. 24.6), the application of blood to the "ordinands" (Lev. 8.23, 24, 30; cf. Exod. 24.8), followed by a meal before Yhwh (Lev. 8.31; cf. Exod. 24.11) and a period of time spent at the entrance to the tabernacle, that is, at the threshold of the replica of the heavenly sanctuary (Lev. 8.33, 35; cf. Exod. 24.10). There is the injunction [Hebrew] וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֵת־מִשְׁמֶרֶת יְהוָה וְלֹא תָמוּתוּ ("You are to keep Yhwh's charge, that you do not die," Lev. 8.35), and the chapter concludes with the note that "Aaron and his sons observed

(ויעשׂ) all that Yhwh commanded through Moses" (Lev. 8.36; cf. Exod. 24.3, 7).[104]

Davies's proposal that the ceremony in Exodus 24 "ordains" Israel as a royal priest is confirmed in general terms by the movement from denial of access to the divine presence to unbelievable access to the divine presence. The parallels noted with Leviticus 8, however, are unpersuasive. What is significant is that the sacrifices in Leviticus 8 differ notably from those in Exodus 24. The ceremony in Leviticus 8 entails three sacrifices: (1) a bull for a sin offering (חטאת), (2) a ram for a burnt offering (עלה), and (3) a second ram of ordination (מלאים). The sacrifices in Exodus 24 are only two: (1) burnt offerings (עלה) and (2) peace or fellowship offerings (זבח שלמים), both of bulls (number of sacrifices unspecified). The two kinds of sacrifices in Exodus 24, "taken together," says Davies,

> have the characteristics of a rite for the removal of sin, that is, the movement from a state of unholiness to a state of holiness, the characteristic of God. They speak of reconciliation (atonement, Lev. 1.4), or the establishment of a communion with the deity, perhaps even a royal dignity, which would not otherwise be possible.[105]

Davies's explanation confuses the issue. The best brief and simple explanation of the meaning of Israel's sacrifices as described in Leviticus 1–7 can be found in the book *A House for My Name*, by Peter J. Leithart.[106] Naturally, *all* the sacrifices have to do with humans, who are defiled and sinful, approaching God and being accepted by him. The burnt offerings, however, communicate the idea of consecration and devotion, and the fellowship or peace offerings focus on communion with God. The purification or sin offering is notably absent at the covenant-ratification ceremony in Exodus 24. Holiness has to do with being consecrated or devoted, but the focus here is not specifically on atonement or removal of sin.

This assessment of the burnt offering and general interpretation of the sacrifices at the covenant ratification may be challenged by some. Concerning the burnt offering, Leviticus 1:4 states, "He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him *to make*

atonement for him" (ESV). In addition, Hebrews 9:11–28, which apparently cites Exodus 24:8, speaks of cleansing and forgiveness of sins.

Leviticus 1:4 does employ the term in Hebrew *kipper* rendered "to make atonement for him." The meaning of this verb has been debated. A fresh semantic study has been made by Nobuyoshi Kiuchi. From careful and convincing handling of the data in Leviticus 1–4, he concludes that the verb means "to make oneself (itself) *kôper* [ransom]" and shows that the idea of appeasement or propitiation is entailed in the meaning.[107] Although he calls this a "reflexive meaning," an explanation of the verb as a denominative Piel from *kôper* ("ransom") could mean "to be/do a *kôper*." This is intransitive instead of reflexive, although it can be explained as reflexive in English. What Hebrews 9:15–20 emphasizes is that the sacrifices represent the deaths of the covenant parties, and that is what brings the covenant into effect. The notion of purification arises in Hebrews 9 because he is summarizing the entire Levitical system, but it is not the focus of his treatment of Exodus 24. Thus the burnt offering is suitable for covenant making since this involves self-maledictory oaths and since only the death of a covenant party can appease the outrage or wrath of the party experiencing covenant violation. Such a challenge from Leviticus 1:4 or Hebrews 9, then, does not conflict in any way with the interpretation that Exodus 24 entails a marriage of the parties so that they are closer than kin.

Davies explores different options in an attempt to understand the significance of the meal in Exodus 24:

> Little is to be gained by insisting that the meal of Exod. 24.11 in and of itself be taken as constituting the definitive act of formal ratification of a covenant. In its literary setting, however, we cannot escape the observation that the meal follows close behind the references to "covenant" (vv. 7, 8) and more generally brings to a certain climax the whole section (from ch. 19) which has had this relationship with Yhwh as its undergirding theme. While the word ברית may be lacking in the text right at this point, this fact of course is not determinative, as it is entirely lacking from 2 Samuel 7 as well, yet it is clear from such passages as Psalms 89 and 132 that the ברית or covenant of grant to David forms the substance of this chapter. Nicholson acknowledges

> that at a redactional level at least, the meal does function as closure to a covenant pericope. Some of the difficulty has been with some ill-founded assumptions about the nature of a covenant, and we must be wary of assuming that we have here something closely analogous to a suzerainty treaty (which is popularly regarded as the only viable covenant paradigm for the Sinai covenant). We must allow the text to speak for itself as to the nature of the "covenant" with which this meal is associated, at least in the final form of the text.
>
> In line with the understanding presented here of the entire Sinai event as a recognition and affirmation of Israel's royal-priestly character, and hence favoured access to the presence of God, the meal may be regarded as a further demonstration of the substance of the declaration already made regarding Israel. That is, whatever else the meal may suggest, it is above all a clear indication of the unconstrained access enjoyed by Israel to the domain of God as his royal attendants, or priests.[108]

Certainly, Davies is on firm ground to assert that the meal represents favored access to God. But he misses much by not paying attention to the offerings and the one blood sprinkled on the two parties. Note Leithart's comments on Israel's offerings:

> At the tabernacle, Israel worships God mainly through bringing animals, killing them, and burning them on the altar. This kind of worship is often called "sacrifice," but this word is not exactly right. In the Bible, a "sacrifice" is an offering that is followed by a meal. When there is no meal, the offering should not be called a "sacrifice."
>
> To understand Israel's worship, we need to understand two words that are used for all the animal offerings. The first word is the Hebrew word *qorban* (see Leviticus 1:2, 2:1; 3:1–2; 4:23; 5:11; 7:38). This word means a "gift" or "something brought near." For Israel, a gift is a very important thing. It is not just a "present," like we might give on a birthday. When two people exchange gifts, they are forming a friendship or continuing a friendship. Exchanging gifts is one way of making a "covenant" with someone, like a man and a woman who exchange rings at a wedding. At Sinai, God makes a covenant with

> Israel, so that Israel becomes His "bride." Yahweh as the Husband of Israel promises many gifts, and to continue in the "marriage" covenant, Israel is supposed to bring gifts.[109]

Note that the ordination in Leviticus 8 has no sacrifices; that is, no meal is involved in the ceremony. Leithart is on target to describe the covenant making at Sinai in terms of a marriage or wedding. Certainly, later prophets like Ezekiel and Hosea see it this way. And as Leithart goes on to point out, we eat to enjoy time with family and friends as well as to celebrate important events like birthdays, holidays, and weddings.[110] The seventy elders, representing Israel, eat a meal with God because they are *family* and are *celebrating* a friendship—they are celebrating *marriage* with God. Davies's interpretation, while not incorrect, is too narrow and restrictive, not considering the larger context of culture and the metanarrative of Scripture. The *one* blood is placed on the *two* parties to portray that their relationship is now as close as a blood or kin relationship. As the message of Hosea so loudly proclaims, it is the covenant at Sinai that makes Israel a people, a term showing that they are kin to Yahweh. Adultery, a violation of the marriage covenant, makes them "not my *people*" (Hos. 1:9).

The Covenant at Sinai within the Larger Story: The Significance of the Form

Observing the form of the covenant as given in Exodus and Deuteronomy is important for properly understanding the Mosaic covenant and foundational for correlating the old covenant with the new. The form and literary structure in both Exodus and Deuteronomy show the following points:

1. The Ten Commandments are foundational to the ordinances, and conversely, the ordinances or case laws apply and extend the Ten Commandments in a practical way to all areas of life. Nonetheless, one cannot take the Ten Commandments as "eternal" and the ordinances as "temporal," for both sections together constitute the agreement or covenant made between God and Israel. It is one package: one cannot accept part of it and reject the other part.

2. It is common to categorize the laws as (a) moral, (b) civil, and (c) ceremonial, but this classification is foreign to the material and imposed

on it from the outside rather than arising from the material and being clearly marked by the literary structure of the text. In fact, the ceremonial, civil, and moral laws are all mixed together, not only in the Judgments or ordinances but in the Ten Words as well (the keeping of the Sabbath may be properly classified as ceremonial). Those who claim the distinction between ceremonial, civil, and moral law do so because they want to affirm that the ceremonial (and in some cases, civil) laws no longer apply but that the moral laws are eternal. Unfortunately, John Frame in his magisterial work *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* and Bruce Waltke in his equally magisterial *An Old Testament Theology* perpetuate this tradition.[111] This classification is an inaccurate representation of Scripture at this point. Exodus 24 clearly indicates that the Book of the Covenant consists of the Ten Words and the Judgments, and this is the covenant (both Ten Words and Judgments) that Jesus declares he has completely fulfilled (Matt. 5:17) and that Hebrews declares is now made obsolete by the new covenant (Heb. 8:13). What we can say to represent accurately the teaching of Scripture is that the righteousness of God codified, enshrined, and encapsulated in the old covenant has not changed, and that this same righteousness is now codified and enshrined in the new.[112]

3. When one compares Exodus and Deuteronomy with contemporary documents from the ancient Near East in both content and form, two features are without parallel:

a. In content, the biblical documents are identical to ancient Near Eastern law codes but do not have the form of a law code.
b. In form, the biblical documents are identical to ancient Near Eastern covenants or international treaties but not in content.

This is extremely instructive. God desires to rule in the midst of his people as King. He wants to direct, guide, and instruct their lives and lifestyle. Yet he wants to do this in the context of a relationship of love, loyalty, and trust. This is completely different from Greek and Roman law codes or ancient Near Eastern law codes. They represent an impersonal code of conduct binding on all citizens and enforced by penalties from a controlling authority. We should always remember that Torah, by contrast, means

personal “instruction” from God as Father and King of his people rather than just “law”; thus a term like “covenantal instruction” might be more useful.[113]

Our view of the old covenant is enhanced by accurate exegesis that not only properly attends to the cultural context and language of the text but also allows the text to inform us of its own literary structure and considers the place of the text in the larger story. The biblical-theological framework is especially important because there we come to see the Ten Commandments not merely as fundamental requirements determining divine-human and human-human relationships as moral principles but as the foundation of true social justice and the basis of what it means to be a son or daughter of God, an Adamic figure—that is, truly and genuinely human.

As explored elsewhere, just as the righteousness of the old covenant can be summarized as “faithful, loyal love” to God and fellow humans, so can the righteousness of the new covenant be summarized this same way.[114] Differences exist between the old and new covenants in the detailed stipulations but not in the content of righteousness.

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1. Parts of chap. 9 are adapted from Peter J. Gentry, “The Covenant at Sinai,” *SBJT* 12, no. 3 (2008): 38–63. Used by permission of the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*.

2. The covenant in Genesis 1–2 and the covenant with Noah in Genesis 6–9 have been discussed in greater detail in chaps. 5 and 6.

3. W. Randall Garr, “‘Image’ and ‘Likeness’ in the Inscription from Tell Fakhariyeh,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 50, nos. 3–4 (2003): 227–34.

4. See Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 399–404; William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 24–25; M. Hutter, “Adam als Gärtner und König (Gen. 2:8, 15),” *BZ* 30 (1985): 258–62.

5. Exodus 15:17 shows that Canaan becomes for Israel what the garden sanctuary was for Adam.

6. William M. Schniedewind claims, “Writing has no role in the so-called Covenant Code in Exod 21–23.” Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 131. This claim has been thoroughly refuted by Alan Millard, “The Tablets in the Ark,” in *Reading the Law: Studies in Honour of Gordon J. Wenham*, ed. J. G. McConville and Karl Möller, LHBOTS 461 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 254–66.

7. H. Ringgren, “שׁוֹפָר *šôpār*,” in *TDOT* 14:541–42. So also John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, JSOTSup 395 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 109.

8. The Hebrew word *torâ* simply means “direction” or “instruction.”

9. There is a contrast here between the covenant at Sinai and the covenant at creation. In Eden, the man dwells on the mountain and walks with God without a mediator. I am indebted to John Meade for this insight.

10. This citation follows the text of the footnote in the NIV rather than the main text, which has “. . . possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you . . .” The grammar clearly signals the adverbial clause as dependent on the preceding and not the following, and therefore a causal rather than a concessive clause is signaled.

11. Adapted from Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 35.

12. Ibid., 40–41.

13. James Muilenburg, “The Form and Structure of the Covenantal Formulations,” *VT* 9, no. 4 (1959): 347–65.

14. Dale Patrick, “The Covenant Code Source,” *VT* 27, no. 2 (1977): 145–57.

15. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 43–44.

16. Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 234–37.

17. Traditionally, אִם introduces the protasis of a *real* as opposed to *irreal* conditional; see, e.g., Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §38.2.

18. See Barbara Dancygier and Eve Sweetser, *Mental Spaces in Grammar: Conditional Constructions*, Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 108 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Bill Bivin, “Translating IM” (paper presented at 2010 Genesis Workshop, SIL International, Dallas, TX, October 20, 2010). I am grateful to Bill Bivin for alerting me to the work of Dancygier and Sweetser.

19. Confirmed by personal communication with Barbara Dancygier at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, November 19–23, 2010.

20. Deuteronomy 26:18–19 is discussed in the section titled “The Covenant Formula in Deuteronomy” in chap. 10.

21. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 46.

22. On the categories of conditional and unconditional being inadequate to describe, e.g., the Abrahamic covenant, see Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 180–81.

23. Scott N. Callaham, *Modality and the Biblical Hebrew Infinitive Absolute*, AKM 71 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); Yoo-Ki Kim, *The Function of the Tautological Infinitive in Classical Biblical Hebrew*, HSS 60 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009); Lynell Zogbo, “Interface entre l’exégèse et la traduction de la Bible: le cas de l’infinitif absolu en hébreu” (paper presented at the 2010 International Symposium, May 25–26, Montréal).

24. In Deuteronomy 11:13, the verbal complement is אל־מצותי; elsewhere בקול or לקול is used. Both specify the hearing of obedience.

25. For the expression “zones of turbulence,” see Robert E. Longacre, “The Grammar of Discourse,” in *Topics in Language and Linguistics*, ed. Thomas A. Seboek and Albert Valdman (New York: Plenum, 1983).

26. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 42.

27. Personal communication, Lynell Zogbo, July 17, 2010 (emphasis original).

28. Hebrew *segullâ* occurs only in Ex. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; 1 Chron. 29:3; Ps. 135:4; Eccles. 2:8; and Mal. 3:17. All occurrences refer back to Ex. 19:5 except 1 Chron. 29:3 and Eccles. 2:8, which are valuable to show the concrete, ordinary use of the word.

29. Moshe Greenberg, “Hebrew *segulla*: Akkadian *sikiltu*,” *JAOS* 71, no. 3 (1951): 172–74.

30. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 53.

31. Ibid.

32. As noted by Mitchell Dahood, “Ugaritic Hebrew Parallel Pairs,” in *Ras Shamra Parallels: The Texts from Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Loren R. Fisher, AnOr 49–51 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1975), 2:1–33.

33. In modern German, the term *Schatz* (“treasure”) is employed in *family settings* as a term of endearment, particularly of a man referring to his wife.

34. Priests are given the honorific epithet “servants of Yahweh” (עבדי יהוה) in Pss. 134:1 and 135:1. Similarly, the participial form in the *piel* of שׁרת (i.e., “servant”) is also used to describe priests as the servants of Yahweh (Neh. 10:37 [10:36 EV]; 2 Chron. 13:10; Jer. 33:21; Ezek. 45:4; Joel 1:9, 13; 2:17). In Ps. 103:21, משׁרתיו is parallel to צבאיו, i.e., the heavenly army or host who attend on God, and in Isa. 61:6, the priests who are designated as the servants of Yahweh are corporate Israel—i.e., the calling of Ex. 19:5–6, once defiled by covenant violation, is now renewed in the new covenant. See Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 154–55.

35. Some would employ the term *explanatory* or *evidential*, as the use is not strictly *causal*. See Anneli Aejmelaeus, “Function and Interpretation of כי in Biblical Hebrew,” *JBL* 105, no. 2 (1986): 193–209. For a detailed analysis and evaluation, see Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 55–60. Scholars have proposed that the כי is (1) causal, (2) concessive, (3) asseverative, or (4) explanatory. Causal and concessive are not logically satisfying: for what motive does it offer the reason, or why would a concession to Yahweh’s universal ownership be needed? As Aejmelaeus has shown, the asseverative use is unlikely.

36. See the magisterial treatment by Ernst Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, vol. 3, *Die Präposition Lamed* (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 2000), 23–25, 54–57, 77.

37. See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907, 1953), s.v. Davies debates at length the merits of what he terms the “active” and the “passive” interpretations. This is not an accurate approach. In Hebrew noun formations, a prefix *mem* normally marks (1) instrumentality, (2) location, or (3) a verbal abstract. This would yield (1) a means of ruling, (2) a place of ruling, or (3) just the act of ruling. This is the correct analysis of the data in linguistic terms and yields, according to the lexica, precisely these meanings for the word in question. See Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 70–86. In the end, Davies reaches the ambivalent meaning argued above.

38. See Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 94.

39. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 97. See William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1984), 89–90.

40. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 98.

41. Ibid., 99–100.

42. Ibid., 97–98.

43. Ibid., 162–64.

44. Ibid., 139.

45. Ibid., 144.

46. See John D. Meade, "The Meaning of Circumcision in Israel: A Proposal for a Transfer of Rite from Egypt to Israel," *SBJT* 20, no. 1 (2016): 35–54; Meade, "Circumcision of the Heart in Leviticus and Deuteronomy: Divine Means for Resolving Curse and Bringing Blessing," *SBJT* 18, no. 3 (2014): 59–85; Meade, "Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart: The Typology of the Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 127–57.

47. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 169.

48. Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 101–2.

49. In addition to the discussion given previously on "nation" in Gen. 12:2, in "Abram and the City of God" in chap. 7, see the authoritative study by Daniel I. Block, "The Foundations of National Identity: A Study in Ancient Northwest Semitic Perceptions" (PhD diss., University of Liverpool, 1981).

50. W. W. Baudissin, "Der Begriff der Heiligkeit im Alten Testament," in *Studien zur semitischen Religionsgeschichte* (Leipzig: Grunow, 1878), 2:1–142.

51. Claude-Bernard Costecalde, *Aux origines du sacré biblique* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1986). Unfortunately, this work is only in French and therefore not widely known in the North American evangelical world.

52. See H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. with revised supplement (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v. ἅγιος, which gives as the fundamental meaning, "devoted to the gods."

53. Translation by Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 255.

54. Ibid., 255–56 (emphasis original).

55. See Jason S. DeRouchie, *A Call to Covenant Love: Text Grammar and Literary Structure in Deuteronomy 5–11*, Gorgias Dissertations 30 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2007), 115–17, 127–32; DeRouchie, "Counting the Ten: An Investigation into the Numbering of the Decalogue," in *For Our God Always: Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Jason Gile, and Kenneth J. Turner, Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 93–125. This analysis is also supported by Daniel I. Block, "Reading the Decalogue Right to Left: The Ten Principles of Covenant Relationship in the Hebrew Bible," in *How I Love Your Torah, O Lord! Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 56–60; Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).

56. For a description and evidence of asyndeton versus the use of the conjunction *waw* as a macrosyntactic signal, see Stephen G. Dempster, "Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative: A Discourse Analysis of Narrative from the Classical Period" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1985).

57. See C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1943, 1946).

58. John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 69–71.

59. Johann J. Stamm and Maurice E. Andrew, *The Ten Commandments in Recent Research*, SBT, 2nd ser., vol. 2 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1967). I have not carefully researched whether the command concerning misuse of the divine name is found in other ancient Near Eastern societies.

60. The command means "to provide assistance" or "be useful" to one's neighbor. See A. Malamat, "'You Shall Love Your Neighbour as Yourself': A Case of Misinterpretation," in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. E. Blum, C. Macholz, and E. W. Stegemann (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchner, 1990), 111–15.

61. Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 411.

62. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 415–16.

63. John H. Walton, "Interpreting the Bible as an Ancient Near Eastern Document," in *Israel—Ancient Kingdom or Late Invention?*, ed. Daniel I. Block (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 306.

64. Ibid., 307.

65. Ibid., 306.

66. See under "The Meaning of the First-Person Plural" in chap. 6.

67. Walton, "Interpreting the Bible," 309–13.

68. Ibid., 311.

69. Ibid., 312.

70. See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. ו §1d.
71. Walton, "Interpreting the Bible," 313.
72. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 419.
73. See Walton, "Interpreting the Bible," 316.
74. G. Frantz-Szabó, "Hittite Witchcraft and Divination," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), 2007.
75. Walton, "Interpreting the Bible," 318.
76. Daniel I. Block, "Bearing the Name of the Lord with Honor," in *How I Love Your Torah, O Lord!*, 61–72 (originally published in *BSac* 168 [2011]: 20–31). See now Carmen Joy Imes, *Bearing YHWH's Name at Sinai: A Reexamination of the Name Command of the Decalogue*, *BBRSup* 19 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2018).
77. Block, "Bearing the Name," 63.
78. Ibid., 64.
79. The Hebrew word for "branding" (כְּוִיָּה) occurs in Isa. 3:24 as a judgment on women whose attire represents riches derived from social injustice.
80. Carmen J. Imes, "Bearing Yhwh's Name at Sinai: A Re-Examination of the Name Command of the Decalogue" (PhD diss., Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, 2016). Now published as *Bearing YHWH's Name at Sinai: A Reexamination of the Name Command of the Decalogue* by Eisenbrauns, 2018.
81. Personal communication, February 4, 2011.
82. It may be that "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt" is the first use of this formulation of the divine name, but it is, in another sense, a reworking of part of the Covenant Formula occurring as early as Gen. 17:7–8.
83. Christopher Seitz, "The Call of Moses and the 'Revelation' of the Divine Name: Source-Critical Logic and Its Legacy," in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*, ed. Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 145–60.
84. Walton, "Interpreting the Bible," 319–22.
85. Ibid., 322.
86. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 39.
87. Adapted from Walton, "Interpreting the Bible," 323.
88. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 112.
89. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*.
90. Jean Bottéro, "The 'Code' of Hammurabi," in *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 156–84.
91. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 289.
92. Bottéro, "The 'Code' of Hammurabi," 178.
93. Adapted from Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (2006), 293. Used by permission of Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group.
94. Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), 56–57.
95. Ibid., 56.
96. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 295.
97. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 116.
98. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 435.
99. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:43, 156–57.
100. This interpretation is not new. See T. Lewis, "Sprinkle," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1939) 5:2846–47.
101. This interpretation of the covenant as kinship or marriage is correctly picked up by Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Purposes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). Nonetheless, covenants frequently entail more than kinship.
102. Examples of a communal meal as covenant ratification include Gen. 31:44–46, 54; 2 Sam. 3:12–13, 20. The accession of a king involved a covenant (2 Sam. 3:21; 5:3 = 1 Chron. 11:3; Jer. 34:8–18) and communal meal as ratification (1 Sam. 11:15; 1 Kings 1:9, 25; 3:15).
103. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 119.
104. Ibid., 122–23.
105. Ibid., 120.
106. Peter J. Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2000), 87–97.
107. Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, "Propitiation in the Sacrificial Ritual," *Christ and the World* 15 (2005): 35–60 (Inzai, Chiba: Tokyo Christian University). See also Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, ApOTC 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).
108. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 134.
109. Leithart, *House for My Name*, 87.
110. Ibid., 88.

111. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 213–17. Frame says, “The distinction [moral, ceremonial, and civil law in the Westminster Confession] is a good one, in a rough-and-ready way” (213). Later he admits that “the laws of the Pentateuch are not clearly labeled as moral, civil, or ceremonial” (214). In the end, he struggles to provide clear criteria to show what from the old covenant is and is not applicable for Christians today. See also Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 434, 436.

112. Waltke does say that the Ten Words are an expression of the character and heart of God, but his approach does not provide a biblical criterion for determining how the old covenant applies to us today. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 413. *As a code*, including the Ten Words, it does not apply. The righteousness enshrined in this code, however, is the same that is now enshrined for us in the new covenant.

113. This extremely important point is forcefully made by Waltke in an extended footnote in *An Old Testament Theology*, 405. Nonetheless, it is not properly integrated into his discussion of the relationship between the old and new covenants.

114. Peter J. Gentry, “Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph 4:15): Life in the New Covenant Community,” *SBJT* 10, no. 2 (2006): 70–87.

10

The Mosaic Covenant

Deuteronomy/Moab

The book of Deuteronomy brings us to the heart of the matter and also to the matter of the heart in relation to the Mosaic (or Israelite) covenant.[1] In particular, Deuteronomy 6:4–9 is arguably *the* key text of the Old Testament. This is not stated for effect or to register my opinion as a scholar. Our Lord Jesus himself said so in his earthly instruction and teaching (Matt. 22:34–40). We must learn from Jesus and his apostles how to interpret the Old Testament as they did and discover how/why they came to this conclusion.

In John Bunyan's classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian is living in the City of Destruction until he is instructed by Evangelist to flee the coming wrath and pursue the road to the Celestial City. Away over the bogs and fields he is pointed to a little wicket gate. When he passes through this gate, he will begin his journey to the Celestial City. We can say that Deuteronomy 6:4–9 is the wicket gate to the spiritual high road of the Old Testament.

The Date of Deuteronomy

The consensus among scholars of the Old Testament is that the book of Deuteronomy was given its final form in the fifth century BC.[2] This is unfortunate. The literary form/structure of the text may be analyzed according to a variety of features and genres (i.e., homilies/sermons vs. treaties) that are *not* mutually exclusive *blended together in composite*

structure. According to markers in the text, the book can be divided into three major speeches or sermons given by Moses: (1) 1:1–4:43; (2) 4:44–28:68; (3) 29:1–30:20. Detailed discussion of the literary structure as a series of speeches will be given later. Alternatively, and not as a competing form but rather as a complementary structure, the book may be analyzed as having the form of a suzerain-vassal treaty of the type common among the Hittites in the fourteenth century BC. Neal Huddleston completed a dissertation of almost 1,200 pages in 2015 demonstrating that Deuteronomy has a *composite structure*, blending different discourse genres of preaching and treaty at the same time.[3]

First, one example of scholars interpreting the literary structure according to the form of a suzerain-vassal treaty is the work of Kenneth. A. Kitchen in table 10.1:[4]

Table 10.1 Deuteronomy as a Suzerain-Vassal Treaty (Kitchen)[5]

1. Title	1:1–5
2. Historical prologue	1:6–3:29
3. Stipulations	
a. Basic	4–11
b. Detailed	12–26
4a. Deposit of text	31:9, 24–26
4b. Public reading	31:10–13
5. Witnesses	31:16–30, 26; 32:1–47
6. Blessings and curses	
a. Blessings	28:1–14
b. Curses	28:15–68

My own analysis of the text, however, influenced somewhat by Steven Guest[6] and Norbert Lohfink,[7] led me to recognize Deuteronomy 27 as corresponding to the document deposition and public reading and to conclude that the appeal to witnesses or god list section was absent. In

addition, Deuteronomy 29–30 constitutes a formal ceremony where the parties make oaths or vows that solemnize the covenant. From a formal point of view, then, the pattern of the treaty structure would end at Deuteronomy 28:68. This analysis is displayed in table 10.2:

Table 10.2 Deuteronomy as a Suzerain-Vassal Treaty (Gentry)

1. Preamble	1:1–5
2. Historical prologue	1:6–4:44
3. Stipulations	
a. General	4:45–11:32
b. Specific	12:1–26:19
4. Document clause	27:1–10
5. Appeal to witness	27:11–26
6. Blessings and curses	28:1–68
7. Solemn oath ceremony	29:1–30:20

As a fundamental point, it must be noted that since no gods exist besides Yahweh, no appeal can be made to them, and therefore the *appeal to witnesses* section could not, by definition, be part of a covenant or treaty between Yahweh and Israel. So in Deuteronomy, the solemn oath ceremony is roughly equivalent to the appeal to witnesses in secular treaties. Nonetheless, as Daniel I. Block notes, “In the end, while the book has the broad structures and features of ANE treaties, homiletical and rhetorical concerns trump the treaty structure.”[8]

Kitchen has extensively analyzed the form of treaties. What is interesting is that the literary form of the ancient Near Eastern treaties changes over time. This can be demonstrated quickly through tables. First, table 10.3 provides a comprehensive list of covenants/treaties and legal treatises over three millennia in the ancient Near East.

Table 10.3 Ancient Near East Covenants/Treaties and Legal Treatises[9]

Phase	**Date**	**List of Documents**

I. *Archaic:* Treaties	ca. 2500–2300	A. East: Eannatum/Umma; Naram-Sin/Elam B. West: Ebla; Abarsal
II. *Early:* Laws	ca. 2100–1700	Late third millennium: Ur-Nammu Early second millennium: Lipit-Ishtar; Hammurabi
III. *Early:* Treaties	ca. 1800–1700	Several Mari and Tell Leilan treaties 2 Old Babylonian treaties
IV. *Intermediate:* Treaties	ca. 1600–1400	2 North Syrian (Alalakh) 4 Hittite (Anatolia; Cilicia)
V. *Middle:* Treaties	ca. 1400–1200	31+ treaties from the Hittites, Anatolia, Egypt, Syria
VI. *Late:* Treaties	ca. 900–650	A. East: 10 Mesopotamian treaties B. West: 3 Sefiré Aramaic treaties

The literary structure of the early legal treatises can be displayed as shown in table 10.4:

Table 10.4 Literary Structure of the Early Legal Treatises (Phase II)[10]

Phase II		
Ur-Nammu	*Lipit-Ishtar*	*Hammurabi*
[1. Preamble (lost)]	1. Preamble	1. Preamble
2. Prologue: Theological Historical Ethical	2. Prologue: Theological	2. Prologue: Theological
3. Laws	3. Laws	3. Laws
(lost)	9. Epilogue	9. Epilogue
(lost)	6a. Blessings	6a. Blessings
(lost)	6b. Curses	6b. Curses

Finally, tables 10.5 and 10.6 present the form and literary structure of the treaties from phases III through VI:

Table 10.5 Phases III and IV[11]

Phase III		**Phase IV**	
Mari/Leilan		*North Syria*	*Hittites*
5. Witness	7. Oaths	1. Title	1. Title 5. Witnesses
3. Stipulations		3. Stipulations	3. Stipulations
6b. Curses		6b. Curses	7. Oath 6b. Curses

Table 10.6 Phases V and VI[12]

Phase V	**Israelite Covenant**	**Phase VI: West**	**Phase VI: East**
Hittite Treaties	*Exodus 20* *Deuteronomy*	*Sefiré*	*Assyria*
1. Title	1. Title	1. Title	1. Title
2. Historical prologue	2. Historical prologue	5. Witnesses	5. Witnesses
3. Stipulations	3. Stipulations	6b. Curses	3. Stipulations
4. Deposit of text / public reading	4. Deposit of text / public reading	3. Stipulations	6b. Curses
5. Witnesses	5. Witnesses		
6b. Curses	6a. Blessings		
6a. Blessings	6b. Curses		

Two major observations are obvious by considering the hard data. First, the form and literary structure of the treaties change over the centuries, and the form of Deuteronomy best matches only those of the fourteenth century BC. It does not match the forms of the earlier or later treaties.[13]

Second, while the form of Deuteronomy clearly follows that of the Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties of the fourteenth century, in actuality it represents an amalgam or confluence of the legal treatises and political treaties of its time, since the order of the blessings and curses matches that of the legal treatises, although the fact that there are few blessings and many curses corresponds to the suzerain-vassal treaties. Kitchen expresses it this way:

> Sinai is neither just law nor properly a treaty. It represents a *confluence* of these two, producing a further facet in group relationships, namely, social-political-religious covenant. Law, treaty, and covenant in this context are three parts of a triptych. Law regulates relations between members of a group within the group. Treaty regulates relations between members of two groups politically distinct (or, with vassals, originally so). Covenant in our context regulates relations between a group and its ruling deity. It is thus "religious" in serving its deity through worship; social in that the mandatory content of the covenant is rules for practical living (law); and political in that the deity has the role of exclusive sovereign over the group. The confluence shows up in three details in particular. First the *overall* framework format and main range of contents is drawn from the treaty format of the fourteenth/thirteenth centuries; second the law content of the stipulations derives from law, not treaty, and the Sinai covenant's use of short blessings plus longer curses (not the roughly equal curses and blessings of the Hittites) goes back to the older law collections' usage; third, use of the interim epilogues before these final sanctions likewise goes back to the older law collections, not treaty.[14]

More will be said about this topic later, but the evidence from the ancient Near East strongly supports the book of Deuteronomy as coming from the time that the internal evidence of the text indicates: the era of Moses.

Deuteronomy: The Center of the Old Testament

The book of Deuteronomy is the center of the entire Old Testament, in terms of both metanarrative and theology.

First, Deuteronomy brings to a climax and conclusion the Pentateuch, or first five books of the Bible. According to the book of Genesis, God called Abraham to give him a land from which would emanate his blessing and salvation to the ends of the earth. In Deuteronomy, Abraham's family are now poised at the entrance to that land, and they are given instructions on how to live in the land, so that they might be a blessing and bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

The book of Exodus narrates how God redeemed Israel out of Egypt so that they might come to a mountain and worship him and begin to live their lives in conformity with his word as a holy nation and royal priesthood. Further instructions for their worship of God and detailed guidelines on what devotion to the covenant Lord entails are given in the book of Leviticus. The book of Deuteronomy supplements the covenant thus given in Exodus and Leviticus; it completes it (Deut. 28:69 [29:1 EV]). Moreover, the wanderings through the wilderness that are the subject of the book of Numbers bring them to this very point. Thus, Deuteronomy is the climax of the Pentateuch.

The historical books Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings (known in the Hebrew canon as the Former Prophets) present a history of Israel based on and evaluated from the point of view of the Israelite covenant, particularly as given in Deuteronomy. For example, Israel and Judah are evaluated on the basis of the command for the centralization of worship in Deuteronomy 12—Israel for the centers established by Jeroboam and Judah for her high places. The history of the monarchy is evaluated according to Deuteronomy 17. And the efficacy of the prophetic word is evaluated on the basis of Deuteronomy 18 (e.g., 2 Kings 24:2). It is commonplace among scholars today to refer to Joshua through Kings as "the Deuteronomistic history" since the perspective of the book of Deuteronomy provides the "historiographical method/philosophy" of the authors. Where scholars are entirely askew, however, is in dating the book of Deuteronomy to the sixth or fifth century BC. Deuteronomy was written first, and *afterward*, the history of Israel was written from the perspective of this central document in the canon of the Old Testament.

The Mosaic covenant, especially the expression or form of the covenant as it is constituted in Deuteronomy, is also the basis and foundation for the Latter Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Prophets. The central concern of the prophets was to call the people back to the covenant. The people constantly violated the covenant by following idols and failing to fulfill the covenant stipulations. As demonstrated so ably by Claus Westermann in his book *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, both their promises and their threats, as well as even their sentences, are all based on

the book of Deuteronomy.[15] Just one example is the expression "the stubbornness of their (evil) heart"—an absolute favorite of the prophet Jeremiah. He uses it eight times (Jer. 3:17; 7:24; 9:13; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17). This expression is derived from Deuteronomy 29:18, and it occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament only in Psalm 81:13 (81:12 EV).[16]

When the Psalms speaks of the Torah of Yahweh—"On his law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:2)—the psalmist is referring to the book of Deuteronomy. It is also what is celebrated in the longest Psalm—Psalm 119.

Bruce Waltke has shown that the book most closely connected to the theology of the book of Proverbs is the book of Deuteronomy.[17] Proverbs contains the instruction that the king and queen together gave their son to raise him in the ways of the Lord. The Torah, or instruction, of the covenant (Deuteronomy) is presented as a beautiful woman to attract the son to follow this way. Failure to follow this way is not so much sin against the Lord as just plain folly and stupidity, bringing loss in every way in one's life. Similarly, Song of Songs presents the skillful way in marriage. And as far as Job is concerned, without the covenant and the related notion of the *gō'ēl* (kinsman-redeemer), its instruction on suffering would be emasculated. Precisely because Israel is married to Yahweh by virtue of the covenant making at Sinai and thus becomes "his people," he is now her nearest relative, who will step in to lift her out of debt and suffering.

The centrality of Deuteronomy to the rest of the Old Testament may perhaps be displayed as follows:

Deuteronomy and Genesis: land promised, land entered
Deuteronomy and Exodus–Leviticus: addition to covenant
Deuteronomy and Numbers: completes wanderings
Deuteronomy as basis of Joshua–Kings (Deuteronomistic history)
Deuteronomy as basis of Prophets
Deuteronomy as basis of Wisdom texts

Deuteronomy 6:4–5: The Center of the Book of Deuteronomy

When the book of Deuteronomy is considered from the perspective of the suzerain-vassal-treaty form, the command in 6:5 ("You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your

strength") is placed *immediately after* the preamble and historical prologue in the section providing the general stipulation of the covenant. Within this section, it is, in fact, the *first* command given after material *repeated* from Exodus 19–24, and it is also the *greatest* command among all the covenant stipulations: to be completely devoted and loyal to Yahweh. This command is the foundation of all the requirements and stipulations of the covenant.[18] In the section Deuteronomy 4:44–11:32, Moses is concerned to expound *this one requirement* as fully as possible.

Viktor Korošec, who pioneered analysis of the suzerain-vassal treaties,[19] makes the following statement concerning this section of the treaty:

> What the description amounts to is this: that the vassal is obligated to perpetual gratitude toward the great king because of the benevolence, consideration, and favor which he has already received. Immediately following this, the devotion of the vassal to the great king is expressed as a logical consequence.[20]

Placing Deuteronomy 6:5 within the context of the literary structure demonstrates, as one might expect, that Jesus was right: this is both the first and the greatest command in the covenant: wholehearted devotion to the great King.[21] From what has been said so far, it is therefore the key text of the Old Testament.

What It Means to Love God

The central command to love God is modified by three prepositional phrases: (1) "with all your heart," (2) "with all your soul," and (3) "with all your strength." Each will be considered in turn.

In Hebrew, the word "heart" refers to the core of who one is, the center of each person. It refers, in particular, to the place where we feel, where we think, and where we make decisions and plans, that is, to the emotions, mind, and will. This can be easily seen from the following illustrative passages:

Feelings

A glad heart makes a cheerful face,
but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed. (Prov. 15:13 ESV)

A joyful heart is good medicine,
but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. (Prov. 17:22 ESV)

When these proverbs refer to a “glad heart” or a “joyful heart,” they are clearly referring to one’s emotions and feelings in terms of a healthy psyche.

Reasoning

But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear. (Deut. 29:4 ESV)

Make the heart of this people dull,
and their ears heavy,
and blind their eyes;
lest they see with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed. (Isa. 6:10 ESV)

In both Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 6:10, one *understands* with the heart; surely, then, what is being referred to is what we normally call the mind. This is the place where we reason and think and understand.

Will

The heart of man plans his way,
but the LORD establishes his steps. (Prov. 16:9 ESV)

May he grant you your heart’s desire
and fulfill all your plans! (Ps. 20:4 ESV)

Proverbs 16:9 and Psalm 20:4 show that the “heart” makes plans and has desires; it is the place where we make decisions. Concerning the Hebrew word “heart,” H. W. Wolff says:

> In by far the greatest number of cases it is intellectual, rational functions that are ascribed to the heart—i.e. precisely what we ascribe to the head and, more exactly, to the brain; cf. I Sam. 25.37. . . . We

must guard against the false impression that biblical man is determined more by feeling than by reason.[22]

According to Hans W. Wolff, the Hebrew word “heart” refers to the mind in approximately 400 out of 814 passages speaking of the human heart. This supports his warning that “we must guard against the false impression that biblical man is determined more by feeling than by reason.”

We should note, then, that the biblical language differs markedly from our own in the Western world. For us, the heart is associated with emotions, feelings, love, and Valentine’s Day. Conversely, for the Bible, the heart is where we reason and think and make decisions and plans. We can frequently speak of people who cannot bridge the eighteen-inch gap between the head and the heart.[23] The ancient Hebrews knew no such gap. The heart is the center of one’s being and the place where emotions, mind, and will operate in harmony and union.

Notice how the text of Deuteronomy 6:5 is quoted in the Gospels:

> Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”
>
> Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matt. 22:34–40 NIV)

> One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”
>
> “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”
>
> “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your

> heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions. (Mark 12:28–34 NIV)
>
> He answered: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Luke 10:27 NIV)

In the Gospel of Matthew, the command is cited as loving God with all your “heart” (καρδία), “soul” (ψυχή), and “mind” (διανοία). In the Gospel of Mark the command is cited as loving God with all your “heart” (καρδία), “soul” (ψυχή), “mind” (διανοία), and “strength” (ἰσχύς), which the response of the scribe shortens to with all your “heart” (καρδία), “understanding” (σύνεσις), and “strength” (ἰσχύς). And in the Gospel of Luke the command is cited as loving God with all your “heart” (καρδία), “soul” (ψυχή), “strength” (ἰσχύς), and “mind” (διανοία). In Matthew “strength” is omitted while “mind” is added; in Mark and in Luke “mind” is added and nothing is omitted—four things are mentioned. In the scribe’s shortened version, “soul” is omitted and “understanding” is added. Central to all citations in the Gospels is the addition of mind or understanding. The reason for this is that the Greek word καρδία (“heart”) does not sufficiently convey to the audience of the first century the fact that reasoning and thinking are included in the functions of the heart in Hebrew.

We should not think that merely intellectual pursuits are equivalent to loving God. According to the context, loving God has to do with fearing him, obeying his commands, and passing on his instructions to another generation.

Second in the command in Deuteronomy 6:5 is to love the Lord “with all your soul.” “Soul” renders the Hebrew word *nepesh* (נֶפֶשׁ). One of the best discussions of this term is by Wolff.[24] The original meaning is “throat,” and hence, by extension it can refer to our “desire” or “longing.” The soul thus designates the organ of “desires” or of “vital needs” that have to be satisfied

if man is to go on living. In this way the term comes to mean “soul” or “life.” Our entire life in terms of our desires and needs is to be devoted to the Lord.

Third, we are to love the Lord with all our “strength.” This translation renders the Hebrew word מְאֹד, normally an adverb meaning “exceedingly” or “greatly.” The lexicons give the meaning “power” or “strength” for מְאֹד as a noun only for Deuteronomy 6:5 and 2 Kings 23:25 amid the approximately three hundred instances in the Hebrew Bible.[25] Possibly the word ought to be construed as functioning as an adverb here as well. The meaning would be, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul—and that to the fullest extent.”

The Covenant Formula in Deuteronomy

In our analysis of Genesis 17, we noted the first instance of the Covenant Formula (“I will be their God,” 17:8; cf. 17:7). Rendtorff, in a major study, identified three variants of this formula. He designates them “Formula A,” “I will be God for you [להיות לך לאלהים]” (occurring sixteen times); “Formula B,” “You shall be a people for him [להיות לו לעם]” (occurring ten times); and “Formula C,” a combination of the two formulae (occurring twelve times).[26]

More recently, Steven Guest completed a doctoral dissertation devoted to the study of the Covenant Formula in Deuteronomy.[27] The main points of his research are summarized as follows. He notes that the Covenant Formula is found precisely seven times in the book of Deuteronomy as a whole (Deut. 26:17–18 is counted as one instance):[28]

1. Deuteronomy 4:20

   וְאֶתְכֶם לָקַח יְהוָה וַיּוֹצֵא אֶתְכֶם מִכּוּר הַבַּרְזֶל מִמִּצְרָיִם
   לִהְיוֹת לוֹ לְעַם נַחֲלָה כַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה

   But as for you, the LORD took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are. (NIV)

2. Deuteronomy 7:6

   כִּי עַם קָדוֹשׁ אַתָּה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּךָ בָּחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

לִהְיוֹת לוֹ לְעַם סְגֻלָּה מִכֹּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה׃

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. (NIV)

3. Deuteronomy 14:2

כִּי עַם קָדוֹשׁ אַתָּה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּבְךָ בָּחַר יְהוָה
לִהְיוֹת לוֹ לְעַם סְגֻלָּה מִכֹּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה׃

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession. (NIV)

4a. Deuteronomy 26:17

אֶת־יְהוָה הֶאֱמַרְתָּ הַיּוֹם לִהְיוֹת לְךָ לֵאלֹהִים

You have declared this day that the LORD is your God. (NIV)

4b. Deuteronomy 26:18

וַיהוָה הֶאֱמִירְךָ הַיּוֹם לִהְיוֹת לוֹ לְעַם סְגֻלָּה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־לָךְ

And the LORD has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised. (NIV)

5. Deuteronomy 27:9

הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִהְיֵיתָ לְעָם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ׃

You have now become the people of the LORD your God. (NIV)

6. Deuteronomy 28:9

יְקִימְךָ יְהוָה לוֹ לְעַם קָדוֹשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע־לָךְ

The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath. (NIV)

7. Deuteronomy 29:13

לְמַעַן הָקִים־אֹתְךָ הַיּוֹם לוֹ לְעָם וְהוּא יִהְיֶה־לְּךָ לֵאלֹהִים
כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־לָךְ

. . . to confirm you this day as his people, that he may be your God as he promised you. (NIV)

Not only is the Covenant Formula found seven times in Deuteronomy, but also the Covenant Formula occurs in each of the main sections of the book (not counting the preamble) as divided according to the literary structure of Hittite treaties from the fourteenth century BC (see table 10.7).

Table 10.7 The Covenant Relationship Formula (CRF) in the Literary Sections of Deuteronomy[29]

Hittite Treaty Formulary	**Represented in Deuteronomy**	**CRF Used (Reference)**
1. Preamble	1:1–5	None
2. Historical prologue	1:6–4:44	Formula B (4:20)
3a. General stipulation	4:45–11:32	Formula B (7:6)
3b. Specific stipulations	12:1–26:15	Formula B (14:2)
	26:16–19	Formula C (26:17–19)
4. Document clause	27:1–8	None
	27:9–10	Formula B (27:9)
5. Appeal to witness	27:11–26	None
6. Blessings and curses	28:1–69 [Eng 29:1]	Formula B (28:9)
7. Solemn oath ceremony	29:1 [Eng 29:2]–30:20	Formula C (29:12)

Not only is the Covenant Formula found in each of the major sections, it also occurs at a key point in the literary structure of each section. Two examples may suffice.

The literary structure of Deuteronomy 4:15–24 may be represented by the following chiasm:[30]

a Watch yourselves (4:15)
  b Don’t act corruptly (4:16–19)
    c Covenant relationship formula (4:20)
  b' I acted corruptly (4:21–22)

a' Watch yourselves (4:23–24)

Note how the Covenant Formula appears at the center of the section according to its chiastic structure.

The blessings in Deuteronomy 28:7–14 are also arranged in a chiastic pattern:[31]

a Blessing against enemies (28:7)
  b Blessing in the land (28:8)
    c Blessing in relationship (28:9–10)
  b' Blessing on the land (28:11–12)
a' Blessing over all (28:13–14)

Once again, the covenantal formula occurs in verse 9, at the center of this literary structure.

Guest likens the double version of the Covenant Formula in Deuteronomy 26:17–19 to the keystone of a bridge (made of stone) and provides support for this claim by demonstrating the centrality of 26:17–19 in the chiastic macrostructure of the book as a whole:[32]

a Blessing and curse in a covenant renewal under Moses (11:26–28)
  b Blessing and curse in a covenant renewal at Shechem (11:29–32)
    c Mutual commitments made between Yahweh and Israel (26:16–19)
  b' Blessing and curse in a covenant renewal at Shechem (27:1–16)
a' Blessing and curse in a covenant renewal under Moses (28:1–69)

The text of Deuteronomy 26:16–19 is difficult because of the *hiphil* forms of the verb אמר (“to say”), found only here in the Hebrew Bible. A literal translation could read as follows:

> You have caused the LORD to say today to be your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes and his commandments and his ordinances, and to obey his voice. And the LORD has caused you to say today to be to him a people of special treasure, just as he promised you, and to keep all his commandments, and to set you high above all the nations which he has made for praise and for fame and for honor, and to be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as he promised.[33]

Each partner is “caused to say” four phrases (expressed in infinitives in Hebrew). The partner obligations are as shown in table 10.8:

Table 10.8 Treaty Obligations in Their Infinitival Forms[34]

Speaker	**Speaker Obligation**	**Partner Obligation**
Yahweh (26:17)	לִהְיוֹת לְךָ לֵאלֹהִים	וְלָלֶכֶת בִּדְרָכָיו וְלִשְׁמֹר חֻקָּיו וּמִצְוֹתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וְלִשְׁמֹעַ בְּקֹלוֹ
Israel (26:18–19)	וְלִשְׁמֹר כָּל־מִצְוֹתָיו	לִהְיוֹת לוֹ לְעַם סְגֻלָּה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־לָךְ וּלְתִתְךָ עֶלְיוֹן עַל כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לִתְהִלָּה וּלְשֵׁם וּלְתִפְאָרֶת וְלִהְיֹתְךָ עַם־קָדֹשׁ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֵּר

The first phrase in the first set of four is the commitment of Yahweh, and the last three are Israel’s. The second phrase in the second set of four is the commitment of Israel, and the first one and last two phrases are Yahweh’s. Guest diagrams the commitments as follows (table 10.9):

Table 10.9 Mutual Covenant Commitments (Deut. 26:16–19)[35]

Yahweh Speaks		Israel Speaks
Commitment	לִהְיוֹת לְךָ לֵאלֹהִים	
	וְלִשְׁמֹר כָּל־מִצְוֹתָיו	Commitment
	וְלָלֶכֶת בִּדְרָכָיו	
The terms	וְלִשְׁמֹר חֻקָּיו וּמִצְוֹתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו	
	וְלִשְׁמַע בְּקֹלוֹ	
	לִהְיוֹת לוֹ לְעַם סְגֻלָּה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־לָךְ	
	וּלְתִתְךָ עֶלְיוֹן עַל כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לִתְהִלָּה וּלְשֵׁם וּלְתִפְאָרֶת	The benefits
	וְלִהְיֹתְךָ עַם־קָדֹשׁ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֵּר	

Thus the subjects of the infinitives could be filled out as follows:[36]

a *I shall be your God*
b You shall walk in my ways
You shall keep my statutes and my commandments and my ordinances
You shall listen to my voice
b' *We shall keep all your commandments*
a' You shall make us your people of special possession
You shall set us high above all the nations you have made
You shall make us a holy people

In this diagram the first four phrases (a and b lines) are spoken by Yahweh, and the final four phrases (b' and a' lines) are spoken by Israel. Nonetheless, the arrangement is given an interlocking structure for rhetorical effect.

Guest comments on the difficulty of the *hiphil* forms as follows:

> The difficulty arises . . . that the English language does not have a functional equivalent to "X caused Y to say" that can capture the juridical nature of the exchange. It may be that the best one can offer is

> a periphrastic translation that maintains the integrity of the identities of the corresponding partners and their statements of the obligations accepted upon themselves and the corollary stipulations expected from the other. The relational component of the covenant must be fronted in both expressions to highlight the priority given to the relationship by Yahweh.[37]

Guest then supplies an idiomatic rendering:

> Today, you have ratified the declaration of the LORD: that he would be your God, that you will walk in his ways, and that you will keep his statutes, his commandments, and his ordinances, and that you will listen to his voice. Today, the LORD has ratified your declaration: that you would be to him a people of special possession, just as he promised you, and that you will keep all his commandments, and that he will set you high above all the nations which he has made for praise and for fame and for honor, and that you will be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as he promised.[38]

The narrative that undergirds these verses is the covenant oath exchanged between Yahweh and Israel on the plains of Moab, articulated in relational terms. The statements of mutual obligation and stipulations are declared and ratified by both partners. As Guest puts it,

> It is at this moment that the suzerain Yahweh steps forward, and—as anticipated by and as required by this solemn and sacred ceremony—makes his gracious and awesome offer: "I will be your God." But his declaration does not stop there. He continues by asserting fully the stipulations commensurate with the obligation which he has assumed: "You will walk in my ways, you will keep my statutes, my commandments, and my ordinances, and you will listen to (obey) my voice."
>
> In response—recognizing the incredible privilege of having Yahweh as their God—vassal Israel acknowledges its unique relationship that is the result of Yahweh's ancient oath to the patriarchs and states, "We are your people of special possession, *just as you promised us*; we will keep all your commandments. You will set us on high above all the

> nations you have made—for your praise and fame and honor; and we will be a people holy to Yahweh our God, *just as you promised*.
>
> Thus this text reveals that Yahweh initiates the covenant by committing himself to be Israel's God and by reiterating the attending stipulations of that covenant.[39]

Deuteronomy 26, in which the double Covenant Formula is found, is devoted to three ceremonies: (1) a ceremony of confession for the first-fruits tithe (26:1–11), (2) a ceremony of confession for the triennial tithe (26:12–15), and (3) a ceremony of confession for covenant ratification (26:16–19). Guest observes interesting parallels hitherto unnoticed in form, offering, confession, and grace between all three of these ceremonies:[40]

> Yahweh—instead of giving gifts of land, produce, or even deliverance from slavery, as in the first two ceremonies—offers *himself* to Israel to be their God. And in a strikingly parallel manner, Israel *responds* to Yahweh's gracious gift by offering themselves back to Yahweh to be his people of special possession and a people holy to Yahweh. In this instance, the "token" of Israel's grateful response and pledge of continual faithfulness is neither a first fruit nor a tithe but rather a commitment to covenant loyalty as expressed in the wholehearted keeping of all his commandments (וְלִשְׁמֹר כָּל־מִצְוֹתָיו).[41]

As Guest claims, the Covenant Formula is central to tying the literary structure together:

> Once the alternative schema for the covenantal framework of Deuteronomy was established, the observation that the covenant relationship formula was employed a single time in each of the components of the covenantal framework reinforced the notion that there was a literary, if not theological, significance to the formula.[42]

Guest concludes that the Covenant Formula in 26:16–19,

> like the keystone in the old stone bridge, serves as the focal point which defines, unifies, and bears the weight of the covenantal framework of Deuteronomy. In turn this affirms Rendtorff's

observation that the "covenant formula is an element of theological language which is introduced in a *highly conscious manner*."[43]

The Relationship of Deuteronomy to Earlier Covenants

R. N. Whybray describes as common ground among the critics the view that in relation to Genesis through Numbers, the book of Deuteronomy is "an alien block of material."[44] What are we to make of this claim? An important question is the relationship between the book of Deuteronomy and Exodus 19–24, designated in Exodus 24:7 as "the Book of the Covenant."

In broad strokes there are two or three major views of the relation of the book of Deuteronomy to the earlier material: (1) that it is an expansion and renewal of the Sinai covenant (covenant/Reformed theologians), (2) that is an expansion and renewal of the Abrahamic covenant (dispensational theologians), and (3) that it is a completely new covenant (some medieval Jewish exegetes).[45]

In passing we may note that the name Deuteronomy (τὸ δευτερονόμιον) comes from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament made around 280 BC. This term is derived from two words: δεύτερος, meaning "second," and νόμος, meaning "custom" or "law"—that is, a "second law." The translators in the third century BC used this word as a mistranslation of the "copy of the law" that the king was to write out for himself in Deuteronomy 17:18. What is relevant, however, is not explaining our tradition but understanding what Scripture actually says about the relation of these two sections of the Torah. As Columbanus stated, "The truth which drives out error is older than every tradition."[46]

Our initial research failed to consider adequately the relation of Deuteronomy to Exodus 19–24. Moreover, one of the first reviewers, Douglas Moo, wondered why the expression *kārat bĕrît*, "cut a covenant," was used of the book of Deuteronomy when the Mosaic covenant was already inaugurated at Sinai in Exodus 19–24.[47]

To describe the proper relationship between Deuteronomy and Exodus 19–24, we will, first, examine the use of *kārat bĕrît* for covenant renewal ceremonies and, second, reanalyze the literary structure of

Deuteronomy, showing the structural significance of Deuteronomy 29:1–30:20 for understanding *the book as a whole*.

Kārat Bĕrît in Covenant Renewals

A key passage is Deuteronomy 28:69 (29:1 EV), where the same standard terminology (*kārat bĕrît*) is employed with direct and specific reference to the book of Deuteronomy itself as a covenant:

אֵלֶּה דִבְרֵי הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה
לִכְרֹת אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב מִלְּבַד הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר־כָּרַת אִתָּם בְּחֹרֵב

> These are the words of the covenant that the LORD commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb.

Whether this verse begins a new section or ends the previous section will be determined later. For now, note that Deuteronomy constitutes a covenant made (i.e., "cut") with the people in the land of Moab before they enter Canaan. The preposition "beside" (מִלְּבַד) is crucial in this text. The meaning of this preposition is "beside," "besides," or "in addition to."[48] This text clearly states that the book of Deuteronomy is a covenant in its own right, made with the people, *besides* the Book of the Covenant in Exodus 19–24 with its expansions in Leviticus and Numbers. Deuteronomy is thus an *addition* or *supplement* to the covenant at Sinai. It is a bit like a codicil added to a will (though here the codicil is larger than the will itself).

We know that God made a covenant with Israel at Sinai. We know that the people of Israel violated the covenant in the middle of the proceedings —while it was being inaugurated. We know that the relationship between God and Israel was maintained only by forgiveness on the part of Yahweh. The book of Deuteronomy appears to be a reaffirmation and restatement of the covenant instruction (*tôrâ*) just before entering the land of Canaan. Why, then, is the expression "to cut a covenant" used in Deuteronomy 29:1 (28:69 MT)?

Before turning to consider the evidence in Deuteronomy in a fresh way, it ought to be noted that the expression *kārat bĕrît*, "cut a covenant," can be used in covenant renewal ceremonies. Quite a number of scholars who have

commented on the expressions in Hebrew are confused about how this works. Let us look briefly at Joshua 23–24 as an example.

Covenant Renewal in Joshua 23–24

Joshua 23 reports that toward the end of Joshua's life, he summoned all the tribes of Israel to Shechem. He notes that Yahweh has kept his promises. Some land remains to be taken, but the Lord will continue to drive out the Canaanites if the Israelites continue to be faithful to the covenant and do not mix with the Canaanites or serve and worship their gods. According to 23:16, serving and worshiping the gods of Canaan is equivalent to transgressing the covenant of Yahweh. This must be a reference to the covenant made at Sinai and renewed in Deuteronomy.

In chapter 24, Joshua summons Israel to a covenant renewal at Shechem. Verses 1–13 describe the faithfulness and grace of Yahweh toward Israel in bringing them to Canaan and giving them the land. Then in a challenge answered by the people of Israel that Joshua repeats twice, he stresses that choosing to serve Yahweh means excising all idols and removing all worship of alternative deities. We pick up the thread in 24:24:

> And the people said to Joshua, "Yahweh our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey." So Joshua made a covenant for the people that day, and put in place a decree and a judgment for them at Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the Torah of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God." So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance. (Josh. 24:24–28)

What is actually happening here is that the people are making a covenant in order to keep the covenant at Sinai. Their commitment to Yahweh is divided. They need to put away the idols and give complete devotion to Yahweh alone. They are renewing their original commitment and solemnizing this renewal as a covenant. So, in fact, they are *making* a covenant to *keep* an earlier covenant.[49] This is different from verbally

affirming a covenant or acting to fulfill an obligation specified in an earlier agreement, and it fully justifies the expression “to cut a covenant.” Linguistically, then, “cut a covenant” is always used of making a covenant (for the first time) but can be used of covenant renewals since people make (new) covenants to keep earlier covenants.

This past summer close friends of my wife’s and mine in Germany celebrated their silver wedding anniversary. It was a service of worship in the local church with family and friends, exactly as on their wedding day. This is a covenant renewal in the sense that they make an agreement to keep the original agreement. Such is the human condition that we constantly fall away from our position of complete loyalty so that a solemnizing of a renewed commitment is possible.

Scholars have confused the matter by attempting to correlate the expressions *kārat bĕrît* (“to cut a covenant”) and *hēqîm bĕrît* (“to affirm/uphold a covenant”) with covenant making and covenant renewal. This is not how these expressions are used. The expression *kārat bĕrît* (“to cut a covenant”) is normally used for making a covenant and in a few instances for renewing a covenant. The reason why *kārat bĕrît* (“to cut a covenant”) is used for covenant renewals is that humans tend to lag in their loyalty over time. Then they realize that they have lost something of their original commitment and devotion, and they make a covenant, a promise, a vow, or simply a statement that they intend to keep the original covenant. This is not the same thing as a person who has never lagged in his or her commitment and loyalty verbally affirming a previous commitment or acting at some time after the original covenant making to uphold their commitment or obligation. The expression *hēqîm bĕrît* (“to uphold a covenant”) is used for affirming a previous covenant or stepping into the situation to fulfill a commitment and is *never used for a covenant renewal* in Scripture.

Something else is noteworthy in Joshua 24:26. The words of this agreement to renew commitment in terms of exclusive and total loyalty to the original covenant are written in the book of the *tôrâ* of God. If I am correctly grasping the meaning of the text, it seems that the renewed

commitment becomes part of the declaration in the original covenant, like a codicil added to a will.

The Literary Structure of Deuteronomy

When I coauthored *Kingdom through Covenant* with Stephen Wellum, I devoted an entire chapter to the book of Deuteronomy as I attempted to come to grips with what this book represents and what the nature of its relationship is to the covenant at Sinai.[50] Naturally, I did some work on the literary structure, but my attention was restricted to chapters 1–28. I have realized since that this was an error. I ought to have paid more attention to the structure of the *whole* book. I had never grasped properly the function of chapters 29–30 to the covenantal structure and never analyzed properly the literary structure in terms of sermons or speeches by Moses.

Guest sees Deuteronomy 29–30 as a covenant ratification ceremony, and I believe he is right.[51] The difference between his literary structure and mine seemed slight in 2012 when the first edition of *Kingdom through Covenant* was published, but it has greater significance than at first glance. Let us briefly look at the evidence together.

First of all, although the book of Deuteronomy is structured as a suzerain-vassal treaty, in reality the book consists of a series of four speeches or sermons given by Moses.[52] This can be determined by noting, first, that the narrator sections (versus speeches) are extremely limited—most of the book is, in fact, direct speech; and, second, that the speeches are marked by four headings.

Verses Bearing Narrative Sections (in Deuteronomy)[53]

1:3–5
5:1
27:1, 9, 11
29:2 (29:1 MT)
31:1, 7, 9–10, 14–16, 22–25, 30
32:44–46, 48
33:2, 7, 8, 12, 13, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24
34:1–12

Remarkably, third-person narration is sparse; the book consists entirely of direct discourse and speeches. From the narrative sections, five headings are clearly visible because they are narratorial cleft-sentence formulae: three display an asyndetic and plural demonstrative element, while two exhibit the conjunction *waw* and the singular demonstrative. All are verbless clauses followed by modifying relative clauses.

1. Deuteronomy 1:1: "**These are the words that** Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan."
2. Deuteronomy 4:44: "**And this is the Torah that** he placed before the sons of Israel."
3. Deuteronomy 6:1: "**And this is the command**, the decrees, and the judgments which Yahweh your God commanded to teach you to do in the land where you are going over to possess."
4. Deuteronomy 29:1 (28:69 MT): "**These are the words of the covenant that** Yahweh commanded Moses to cut with the sons of Israel in the land of Moab in addition to the covenant which he cut with them at Horeb."
5. Deuteronomy 33:1: "**And this is the Blessing with which** Moses, the man of God blessed the sons of Israel before he died."

The heading marked by 6:1 is different from the rest because it is part of a speech and not narratorial. The formula calls attention to the centrality of 6:4–9. So four headings remain. Not all scholars observe these headings. A major problem is 29:1 (28:69 MT). What is debated is whether Deuteronomy 29:1 is a superscript for what follows or a subscript for what precedes. Does it open a new section or close the previous one? Indeed, there are scholars who attempt to have it both ways and speak of it as a hinge verse.

Deuteronomy 29:1 (28:69 MT) Subscript or Superscript?

Today, a majority of scholars argue that Deuteronomy 29:1 (28:69 MT) is a conclusion or subscript to chapters 1–28. The arguments provided by Jeffrey Tigay represent this position well:

> This subscription concludes the covenant made in the land of Moab, whose terms and consequences are presented in 4:44–26:19 and chapter 28. It is comparable to the subscriptions in Leviticus 27:34, Numbers 36:13, and elsewhere. Abravanel and some modern scholars argue that the verse is really an introduction to the third discourse (chaps. 29–30), in which Moses prepares the people to enter the covenant and warns them about violating it. However, the phrase "terms of the covenant" refers to specific legal obligations and their stated consequences, and applies to the laws, blessings, and curses of the preceding chapters much more readily than it does to the exhortations of chapters 29–30. Literarily, too, this verse belongs with the second discourse, since it echoes Moses' opening words there (5:2); together the two passages form a frame around that discourse (see introductory Comment to 4:44–28:69). The Masoretic and Samaritan *parashah* divisions agree that this verse refers to what precedes it.[54]

Tigay summarizes well the arguments of a major study by H. van Rooy in 1988 in which he sought to prove that Deuteronomy 29:1 was a concluding statement to chapter 28.[55] Nonetheless, Norbert Lohfink provided a convincing response to van Rooy that is not as well known.[56] Lohfink's arguments deal with the literary features and structures of the text. The four main points of his response can be briefly summarized as follows.

First, Deuteronomy 29:1 (28:69 MT) belongs to the system of four titles that divide the book of Deuteronomy as narrated sections (i.e., they are employed to identify the literary structure of the book). Note that there is a pattern to these headings in terms of sentence structure:

a These are the words 1:1
  b And this is the Torah 4:44
a' These are the words 29:1
  b' And this is the blessing 33:1

Thus, Deuteronomy 29:1 belongs to a group of headings that have a definite pattern of sentence structures. It may be true that in the majority of

occurrences in the Old Testament, the expression “the words of the covenant” refers to covenant stipulations, but here it is a reference pointing forward to the ceremonial or ritual words of a covenant conclusion or ratification ceremony and cannot be disregarded as such.

In Deuteronomy 29:1, the covenant is carefully described to identify it precisely and to distinguish it from the Horeb (i.e., Sinai) covenant. Now in Deuteronomy, all instances of the word “covenant” referring to relationship with God before Deuteronomy 29:1—viewed from the perspective of the patriarchal promises—refer concretely to the covenant at Sinai: to the Decalogue, or first offer. A Moab covenant does not occur, nor is referred to before Deuteronomy 29:1. By contrast, the covenant “in the land of Moab” is explained by “covenant” in 29:12 and 29:14 as current and unconsummated. The parallel with “oath” (אלה; “*sworn* covenant,” ESV) in both places may be observed. So in respect to the use of the word, the term “covenant” in reference to a Moab covenant concluded by Moses, occurs in Deuteronomy only *after* and not *before* Deuteronomy 29:1 in the sermon(s).

Second, another observation strengthens the argument. Deuteronomy 29:10–15 is in no way, as van Rooy thinks, merely an admonition. Here we have more than just an admonition “to keep the covenant.”[57] What we have is mainly *performative speech* that will define the community that concludes the covenant—note the address, the participial forms, and the purpose clauses. Twice in chapter 29 (29:12, 14) we have this participial construction: “I am cutting/making this covenant.” The participial construction (which occurs only four times in the Old Testament: Ex. 34:10; Deut. 29:12, 14; Neh. 10:1) *always* marks the present tense and speaks of a ceremony or ritual in progress. Indeed, we do not have a *narration* of covenant conclusion. Deuteronomy 29:1 announces, in fact, not a narrative but rather “words” of a covenant. Also, this verse mentions the place, Moab, where Moses concludes the covenant actually stated. So Deuteronomy 29:10–15 is not simply an exhortation. If it is not a closing *ceremony*, then there is none. This must be the concluding ceremony of the Moab covenant of which Deuteronomy 29:1 speaks. In other words, what we have in Deuteronomy 29:10–15 are not the words of a parent admonishing a child but rather the *words* of a couple saying their vows in a

wedding ceremony. The words “I do” and “I will” constitute *performative speech* that creates the marriage covenant or constitutes the vows.

Third, further observations may be added about the arrangement of the words. In the laws in Exodus through Numbers, and also in Deuteronomy 12–26, occurrences of “covenant” (ברית) are quite rare. There is, de facto, only one single instance in Deuteronomy 12–26: 17:2. Throughout Deuteronomy 27–28, there is absolutely no instance. On the contrary, instances of the word “covenant” in Deuteronomy 29 are frequent: 29:1a, 1b, 9, 12, 14, 21, 25. This directs our attention to a larger pattern of speech arrangement: the marking of catch phrases and words. Frequently in the literature of the Old Testament, repeating important words is what binds material together. Variation of references as well as of meaning between the repeated words are thereby given eloquence and significance. In our case, the declaration of Deuteronomy 29:1, mentioning “covenant” twice clearly points forward to the fivefold repetition of the word “covenant” (ברית), which previously occurred so seldom.

This becomes even more clearly marked by the fact that “covenant” occurs precisely seven times: 29:1a, 1b, 9, 12, 14, 21, 25. The center of this series makes 29:12 the hub of the matter. In Deuteronomy, a count of seven often binds together things that belong together. Georg Braulik describes several patterns of seven.[58] As examples, the expression “the statutes and the rules” (הַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים) occurs precisely seven times (5:1, 31; 6:1, 20; 7:11; 11:32; 12:1), and the word “command” (מִצְוָה) in the singular fourteen times, or two sets of seven (5:31; 6:1, 25; 7:11; 8:1; 11:8, 22; 15:5; 17:20; 19:9; 26:13; 27:1; 30:11; 31:5). The word “covenant” is consciously used in Deuteronomy 1–30 so that it occurs precisely twenty-one times, or three sets of seven; the division between the first two groups of seven is marked by the rare compound expression “covenant and *ḥesed*” occurring twice (7:9, 12).[59]

Fourth, and finally, another terminal marker apparently occurs before Deuteronomy 29:1, pointing to the matter that the expression “the words of the covenant” (דברי הברית) in 29:1 refers to (and here I agree fully with van Rooy): “the words of this *tôrâ*” (דברי התורה הזאת, 17:19; 27:3, 8, 26; 28:58). This expression also sweeps on from the end of chapter 29 afresh

(29:29; 31:12, 24; 32:46). In 29:9, instead of the common terminal marker "the words of this *tôrâ*," the phrase "the words of the covenant" is used; was this expression perhaps inserted only because in this section a seven-count incidence marks off a covenant conclusion ceremony? That one actually ought to expect "the words of this *tôrâ*" in 29:9 is shown by 17:19; 28:58; 31:12; and 32:46, where likewise both the verbs "to keep" (שמר) and "to do" (עשה) are found. The expression "the words of the covenant," however, is located in 29:9 only to arrive at the count of seven. Thus it is clearer that 29:1, with its two instances of "covenant," is aligned with the subsequent section.

To argue, as we have, that Deuteronomy 29:1 is a heading for what follows and not an ending to Deuteronomy 28 does not contradict the fact that the ritual words of the covenant conclusion in Deuteronomy 29–30 constantly allude back to Deuteronomy 5–28, the covenant text proper: cf. 29:9, 21, 27, 29; 30:1, 2, 7, 10, 11 (16). The ceremonial or ritual text of Deuteronomy 29–30 as such can in no way be spoken if the covenant text itself is not also reported in the same ceremony. Various other allusions to the covenant text of Deuteronomy 5–28 can be found in the concluding ceremony of Deuteronomy 29–30. Only the allusion to the Covenant Formula in Deuteronomy 29:13 (cf. 26:17–19; 27:9; 28:9) and to the circumcision of the heart in 30:6 (cf. 10:16) need be given as examples. Thus Lohfink's four observations on the function of 29:1 show that in all probability it is a heading and not a colophon, as van Rooy and other scholars suspect.

Literary Structure Summarized

Once the role of Deuteronomy 29:1 is clearly grasped as a *heading* for Deuteronomy 29–30, and 29–30 is understood as a covenant conclusion or ratification ceremony, we can focus attention on the literary structure of the whole work—including chapters 29–30, which were not accounted for in the first edition of *Kingdom through Covenant*.

We return to the fact that there are four headings, which divide the book into four parts as follows:

a These are the words 1:1 1:1–4:43

b And this is the Torah that 4:44 4:44–28:68
a' These are the words 29:1 29:1–32:52
b' And this is the blessing that 33:1 33:1–34:12

Note further that the third section is divided into three parts by the narrative statements (31:1, 7, 9–10, 14–16, 22–25, 30; 32:44–46, 48) as follows:

1. Covenant oath and solemn ceremony: 29:1–30:20
2. Appointment of Joshua as Moses's successor: 31:1–30
3. Song of Moses: 32:1–52

Thus the narration in the third person clearly sets off chapters 29–30 from chapters 31–32. The analysis of the literary structure just provided is supported by additional arguments from discourse grammar by Neal Huddleston.[60]

The Function of Deuteronomy 29–30: Why the Moab Covenant was "Cut"

Now that we have a better grasp on the literary structure of Deuteronomy 1–30 as the three sermons of Moses, some exposition of chapters 29–30 is relevant to discuss the relationship of this material to Exodus 19–24. This may seem to be a fool's errand since R. N. Whybray averred, "The significance of, and the necessity for, this second covenant has never been satisfactorily explained,"[61] but we will give it a try.

The Literary Structure of Deuteronomy 29–30

Let us first lay out the literary structure of Deuteronomy 29–30.

A. Heading 29:1 (28:69 MT)
B. Narrative Introduction 29:2a (29:1 MT)
C. Third Sermon 29:2b–30:20
   1. Past *ḥesed* and *'ĕmet* of Yahweh 29:2b–9
   2. Covenant-inauguration ritual language 29:10–15
   3. Reminder of curses for covenant disloyalty 29:16–28
   4. Secret things—revealed things 29:29
   5. Future curse followed by blessing 30:1–10

6. Circumcised heart: reason for future blessing 30:11–14
7. Final warning regarding life and death 30:15–20

The proposed outline divides this section into seven paragraphs based on grammatical markers in the text. These ought to be noted briefly as follows.

Deuteronomy 29:1 (28:69 MT) is a verbless clause introduced by asyndeton—that is, there is no clause connector or conjunction. This macrosyntactic pattern either marks the beginning of a section or a comment on the previous sentence. Here it marks the beginning of a new section. Deuteronomy 29:2a begins with a *waw*-consecutive imperfect, but this is narration as opposed to direct speech. Deuteronomy 29:2b, "You have seen," commences the direct speech. This first paragraph is concluded by a *waw*-consecutive perfect functioning as a command, which might be rendered "So therefore keep the words of this covenant." Asyndeton in the midst of 29:5 denotes an aside or comment, and the *waw*-consecutive imperfect in 29:7 resumes the speech from this aside.

Note that Deuteronomy 29:10 also commences with asyndeton and is a verbless clause. This marks the beginning of the second paragraph. The causal conjunction *kî* in 29:16 marks the beginning of the third paragraph. Deuteronomy 29:29 again begins with asyndeton and is another verbless clause. This not only sets off this one verse as a paragraph by itself but marks this statement as a metacomment, or explanatory summation, that directly addresses the major tension in the flow of thought in these two chapters. We will come back to this in a moment.

Deuteronomy 30:1 begins with a temporal clause after the metacomment in Deuteronomy 29:29. The beginning of a second paragraph is signaled in Deuteronomy 30:15 by an imperative introduced by asyndeton. Another causal-conjunction *kî* marks off the beginning of the last paragraph just as the conjunction *kî* marked the beginning of the last paragraph in the first set of three paragraphs.

Exposition of Deuteronomy 29–30

Deuteronomy 29–30 contains six paragraphs arranged in two sets of three with an additional paragraph at the center containing a *metacomment*. The

significance of this will become plain shortly. There is a clear flow of thought throughout the six paragraphs.

The first paragraph bases the commitment of the people on the grace of Yahweh in his dealings with them in the past. This idea is identical to what we see in Exodus 19:4. Then comes the oath or vow, a performative speech act that actually creates the covenant on the human side. After these ritual words, the third paragraph is a warning about covenant disloyalty—much like the sermon in a wedding after the vows.

The first paragraph in the second set of three deals with the distant future. Those who see this as referring to the present fail to allow Paul to guide them in their exegesis of the Old Testament. Moses assumes covenant disloyalty on the part of the people and subsequent exile as Yahweh is true to his Word in bringing the covenant curses on Israel. The second paragraph deals with the gift of a circumcised heart in the future as an act of divine grace. The people will then keep the covenant and be blessed. Finally, the third paragraph in the second set, like that in the first, ends with a warning to maintain covenant loyalty. The covenant sets before Israel the offer of life or death.

There is not sufficient space here for a full discussion and explanation of this significant text. For our purposes, it is important to actually cite Deuteronomy 29:1–15 before we make a few brief observations regarding the text.

> These are the words of the covenant that the LORD commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb.
>
> And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: “You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear. I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn off your feet. You have not eaten bread, and you have not drunk wine or strong drink, that you may know that I am the LORD your God. And when you came to this

place, Sihon the king of Heshbon and Og the king of Bashan came out against us to battle, but we defeated them. We took their land and gave it for an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of the Manassites. Therefore keep the words of this covenant and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do.

"You are standing today, all of you, before the LORD your God: the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the sojourner who is in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the LORD your God, which the LORD your God is making with you today, that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you, and as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before the LORD our God, and with whoever is not here with us today. (ESV)

TWO PARALLEL SECTIONS. The key to understanding Hebrew literature is grasping the function and role of repetition. An author will go around a topic at least twice, each time discussing that topic from a different angle or perspective so that hearing in succession the two treatments is like listening to the left and right speakers of a stereo system playing music. This gives the hearer a "well-rounded idea," similar to a 3-D image or Dolby surround sound. Therefore, statements made in a fuller treatment of a topic may be referred to by means of abbreviated statements in a parallel or repeated section (or sometimes vice versa). Much of what is treated in chapters 29–30 is developed at greater length in chapters 4:45–11:32. Here I borrow an outline of 4:45–11:32 from John Meade to show that the flow of thought there is identical to the flow of thought in chapters 29–30.[62]

General Stipulation: 4:45–11:32

A. Basic principle of covenant relationship 4:45–6:3
B. Measures for maintaining covenant relationship 6:4–25
C. Implications of covenant relationship 7:1–26
D. Warnings against forgetting covenant relationship 8:1–20
E. Failures in covenant relationship 9:1–10:11

F. Restoration to covenant relationship 10:12–22
G. Choices required by covenant relationship 11:1–32

The basic stipulation in the covenant is complete devotion and loyalty to Yahweh, Israel's covenant Lord and suzerain, as expounded in Deuteronomy 6:5–9 and demanded in the oath taking in 29:10–15. This central command (see above on the occurrences of "command" in the singular in Deuteronomy) is supported by both the means and the implications of covenant relationship in sections B and C of Meade's outline. Then in D, exactly as in chapters 29–30, comes the warning against disloyalty and unfaithfulness creeping into the relationship, followed by the assumption in E that this will happen and hence a prediction of eventual restoration in F. Then both 4:45–11:32 and chapters 29–30 end with the choices provided by the covenant relationship. Interestingly enough, the only two instances in the book that refer to the "circumcision of the heart" are in 10:16 and 30:6, both at exactly the same location in the flow of thought in these parallel sections—namely, at the point noting eventual covenant violation and the future gift from God of a circumcised heart that will make possible human faithfulness and restoration in the covenant relationship.

The observation that Deuteronomy 4:45–11:32 and 29:1–30:20 are parallel sequences in treating the same topic along with a grasp of how Hebrew literature works can help us to interpret ambiguous statements in Deuteronomy 29:1–30:20 correctly.

DEUTERONOMY 29–30 AND THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART. Deuteronomy 29:1b–2 begins with noting the fact that those hearing Moses's sermon actually heard and saw the miracles and tests that resulted in the exodus. This is hyperbolic since those in the audience hearing Moses at this point who actually remembered these things would include only those over fifty years old. Observe that a similar point is made in 4:33; 5:3b–5; and 11:1–7. This is a rhetorical device to help the generation listening to Moses identify with the Israel that entered the covenant at Sinai and *commit to its renewal* in the covenant at Moab. Notice that in Deuteronomy 29:14–15, Moses affirms that the *human party* committing to the covenant at Moab includes

those there that day and those not there that day. The folks listening to Moses could say, “Well, we were just kids back when the covenant at Sinai was made. That covenant was made with our parents and not with us. We are not responsible for this covenant at all.” Moses wants not only to close the door to this argument concerning the covenant at Sinai but also to prevent any and all future generations in Israel from making such an argument in regard to the covenant at Moab.

After affirming that the people standing with Moses to enter the covenant at Moab had observed and seen “the great testings and those great signs and wonders,” he contrasts this with the fact that Yahweh has not to this point given them a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear (29:4). On a crassly literal level of interpretation, this could mean that the testings (i.e., the plagues that determined the difference between Yahweh and the gods of Egypt) and the signs and wonders (i.e., the miracles occurring to deliver Israel as a nation from slavery in Egypt and bring her through the desert) had not been properly understood by the people—these miracles were like the signs in the Gospel of John, but the people had not grasped the message. This, however, is an entirely shallow interpretation. Instead, the statement is, according to the normal pattern of Hebrew literature, an alternative way of referring to “the circumcision of the heart” in Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6.

What Moses is saying is this: incredible displays of supernatural power in miracles and physical deliverance from slavery were insufficient to bring the hearts of the people to being completely devoted and loyal to Yahweh. God rescued them from Egypt, but the moment he arranged to solemnize an agreement of loyalty between them—that is, a covenant—they were faithless, fickle, and treacherous, engaging in idolatry.

As a matter of fact, Isaiah makes the same point in Isaiah 29:14. During the crisis created by the rise of Assyrian power and the pressure put on Judah by the anti-Assyrian coalition of Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel, both king and people wanted to make deals with the Assyrians or the Egyptians and not to believe the word of Yahweh given to Isaiah. In rejecting the prophetic message calling them back to covenant loyalty, God confirms them in their rejection by pouring on them a spiritual blindness

and stupor. So when Isaiah says in 29:14, “Therefore I shall deal with them in completely extraordinary/supernatural ways,” this does not mean simply that Yahweh will bring physical rescue by killing 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. Admittedly, this is an extraordinary act, but it means far more than this. It means that unless God acts supernaturally to circumcise the people’s hearts, Israel *as a community/nation* will not give their full loyalty and trust to Yahweh. The miraculous deliverance from Assyria in Hezekiah’s time cannot of itself engender covenant loyalty. An “extraordinary act of extreme extraordinariness” (so Isa. 29:14) is needed to generate trust in the Lord that represents covenant loyalty.

In Deuteronomy 29:5–6, Moses draws attention (in an explanatory note marked by asyndeton) to the miracles in the desert journey: the people’s clothes and shoes did not wear out. He adds in 29:6, “Bread you did not eat and wine and beer you did not drink in order that you may know that I am Yahweh your God.” This correlates with the longer parallel passage in Deuteronomy 8:1–10, which explains more fully the purpose clause “that you may know that I am Yahweh your God” in 29:6. In Deuteronomy 8:3, it says, “He gave you manna to eat, which you and your fathers had not known, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (HCSB). So the miracles in the desert are designed to bring the people to complete trust in the word of Yahweh—exactly what happens in a covenant relationship. Yet the miracles by and large do not achieve this goal: the hearts of the people remain uncircumcised.

We are now in a position to appreciate the major tension in the plot structure of chapters 29–30, and in fact of the entire book of Deuteronomy: on the one hand, Moses is laying out for the people the *direction* or *instruction*—that is, the *tôrâ*—encoded in a covenant made at Moab that is separate from but considered an addition to and expansion of the covenant at Sinai (29:1). Note how 30:10 brings to a conclusion the opening statement in 1:5, “Moses began to explain this *tôrâ*.” Within chapters 1–30, there are fourteen (or two sets of seven) instances of *tôrâ* (1:5; 4:8, 44; 17:11, 18, 19; 27:3, 8, 26; 28:58, 61; 29:20, 28; 30:10). At the end of the exhortation to be completely devoted and loyal (4:45–11:32), the summary

in 11:26–32 claims that this revelation sets blessing and cursing before the people. The parallel section in Deuteronomy 29–30 ends with exactly the same theme: blessing and cursing leading, respectively, either to life and prosperity or to adversity and death (30:15–20). Indeed, the end of the covenant text is 28:1–68, which puts blessings and curses before the people. In great tension with this is the fact that Yahweh has not given them a circumcised heart (29:4). In both sections, Deuteronomy 4:45–11:32 and 29:1–30:20, at the exact same spot in the flow of thought, circumcision of the heart is actually mentioned and described as a future event.[63] This tension is described by the *metacomment* on the whole section in Deuteronomy 29:29: "The hidden things belong to the LORD our God, but the revealed things belong to us and our children forever, so that we may follow all the words of this *tôrâ*." According to this metacomment, there is a tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Israel is called to absolute loyalty to Yahweh in the covenant, but the plot structure to this point in the Old Testament shows that the human partner is incapable of faithfulness, something that will be given by divine grace at a future time. Here Moses sums up his entire ministry.

PINPOINTING THE TIME OF DEUTERONOMY 30:11–14. A major part of correctly grasping the tension in the plot structure is interpreting the time of Deuteronomy 30:11–14. Is it present or future?

> For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and *in your heart*, so that you can do it. (ESV)

Frequently commentators view it as present.[64] The most obvious pointer to this is the expression "I am commanding you today" (participle plus הַיּוֹם). Nonetheless, all the clauses or sentences in these verses (11–14) are verbless clauses and have no explicit tense. Steven Coxhead has argued that Deuteronomy 30:11–14 refers solely to the future. He considers the fact that

there is no finite verb in the text and that as a result the tense is determined by the previous text in 30:1–10.[65] Both positions are anchored in the data of the text. How do we decide?

The ancient Near Eastern epic of Gilgamesh relates how in the face of the death of his closest friend he sought answers to the issues of death and life by going across the ocean. Moses, by contrast, is saying that the issues of death and life are not that far away. The issues of death and life entail two matters: divine instruction and the loyalty of the heart. In the covenant at Moab, the divine instruction has already been given to them. The only issue preventing blessing and life is the loyalty of the human heart. So the answer is not very far away: *it is in our own hearts*. The answer is not out there; it is in us. According to Deuteronomy 30:1–10, Israel will obtain a circumcised heart at a future time, and that is why 30:11–14 ultimately refers to the future, in spite of Moses's appeal in the present. Paul in his exposition in Romans 10 was right.[66] Yet when is that future time? In God's providence, Moses thinks it might be today, that is, his present, and hence the force of his appeal for the present. Let us remember Deuteronomy 29:29, the *metacomment* and the tension in this text: there is a tension in chapters 29–30 between divine sovereignty—that is, the secret things, when God will give the circumcised heart at a future time—and human responsibility—that is, the revealed things, and therefore Moses's urging in his present, hence *today*. This, in fact, turns out to be the tension of his entire ministry.

New Research on *Bĕrît*. Before summing up the argument, let us briefly review the use of the word *bĕrît*, or "covenant," in the book of Deuteronomy. New research requires a minor revision of the exposition given in the first edition of *Kingdom through Covenant*.

The analysis of Lohfink is easy to verify: all instances of "covenant" (*bĕrît*) before Deuteronomy 29:1b (aside from a foreign treaty in 7:2) refer to the covenant at Sinai (4:13, 23; 5:2, 3; 7:9; 9:9, 11, 15; 10:8; 17:2; 29:1a) or the Abrahamic covenant on which it is based (4:31; 7:12; 8:18). All the instances of covenant after 29:1a in chapters 29–30 refer to the covenant at Moab (29:1b, 9, 12, 14, 21, 25). After chapters 1–30, we find six occurrences of covenant: the instances in 33:9 and in the phrase "the ark of

the covenant" refer to the covenant at Sinai (31:9, 25, 26). Note carefully that in 31:25–26 the book of Deuteronomy (chapters 1–30) is written as a single text and placed *beside* the ark of the covenant, just as Deuteronomy 29:1 specifies that it is a covenant *beside* the covenant at Sinai. Finally, the two instances in Deuteronomy 31:16 and 20 are clearly passages where the covenant at Sinai and the covenant at Moab are fused as one in the author's mind.[67]

Is Deuteronomy 5:1–6 also a passage where the covenant at Sinai and the covenant at Moab are fused as one in the author's mind? When I wrote my portion of the first edition of *Kingdom through Covenant*, I struggled to find a correct interpretation of this significant text and concluded that the covenant at Sinai and the covenant at Moab may have been fused as one in the author's mind in 5:1–6. Now a better interpretation may be suggested of this text:

> And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. The LORD spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, while I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD. For you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain. He said:
>
> "'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.'" (ESV)

This passage reviews the covenant material from Exodus 19–24 before presenting the main stipulation of the covenant (Deut. 6:5) followed by the detailed stipulations. Deuteronomy 5:2 says, "The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb" (ESV), and employs the standard terminology, *kārat bĕrît*, "cut a covenant." This is a clear reference to the Israelite covenant made at Sinai (Exodus 19–24). Then Moses says, "Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today." The question arises here, what does he mean by "our fathers"? Does this refer to the generation at Sinai that has now passed away, or is it a

specific reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—a normal referent for "fathers" in Deuteronomy? Part of the problem is also the referent of "this covenant" in the same sentence, which has been construed to refer to the book of Deuteronomy, apparently reinforced by the statement at the end of Deuteronomy 5:3, "but with us, who are all of us here alive today."

If we bear in mind the general usage of the word "covenant" in the book as a whole and the literary structure, a simple solution may be found: The "fathers" in 5:3 are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The covenant referred to in 5:3 is the covenant at Sinai, which is being distinguished from the Abrahamic covenant. The language at the end of 5:3 is part of the rhetorical device in the book where Moses seeks to connect the people listening to him at Moab with the events in Egypt and at Sinai, even though they were children (under twenty) at the time. This cuts the Gordian knot of this verse satisfactorily, at least to my mind.

The previous generation violated the covenant and died in the wilderness, and now the covenant needs to be renewed with a new Israel. Peter Leithart expresses this reality well:

> The Pentateuch ends with Israel camped in the plains of Moab, east of Canaan. They are still "east of Eden," but they are now preparing to cross the Jordan to receive their land. While they are camped in Moab, Moses preaches to them, and his sermons make up the book of Deuteronomy. Since this is a new Israel, the covenant that God made at Sinai is renewed.[68]

In fact, Deuteronomy, rather than Exodus 34, should be viewed and understood as the covenant renewal.[69] Editorial headings in modern English versions frequently label Exodus 34:10–27 as "The Covenant Renewal." There is, however, no real basis for such a description in the text itself. Granted, the chronological sequence of events in Exodus 19–40 is not always abundantly clear. Nonetheless, the rehearsal of these events in Deuteronomy 9:9–29 aids in clarifying the narrative in Exodus.

It seems that after the covenant ratification in Exodus 24, Moses is called to ascend farther up the mountain. We read in Exodus 24:12, "The LORD said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may

give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction'" (ESV). While Moses has written the Book of the Covenant (Ten Words and Judgments) given orally, God will give him the stone tablets and the instruction (Torah) and the commandment that he has personally written to instruct them. So when Moses went up the mountain, the cloud, that is, the glory of Yahweh, covered the mountain for six days, and on the seventh, Moses was summoned and enveloped by the cloud and was on the mountain forty days and forty nights (24:15–18). At the end of this time, Moses descended the mountain in anger because the people had broken the first of the Ten Words and thus violated the covenant (32:15–20). No doubt Moses's breaking of the tablets symbolized the broken covenant.

Then Moses interceded for the people and was on the mountain another forty days and forty nights (34:27–28). During this time God revealed himself to Moses as compassionate and forgiving. Moses appealed immediately to the character of God newly revealed. It is in this context that God makes the following statement:

> And he said, "Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you." (34:10 ESV)

Note particularly in verse 10 the use of the active participle, "I am making a covenant" (אָנֹכִי כֹּרֵת). Whether the action is construed as imminent or as nonperfective, the context indicates that God *is in the midst of* covenant making.[70] First the Ten Words were given verbally; then they were written. The covenant was violated before the stone tablets were given to the people. God forgave Israel at Moses's request and carried on with his covenant making in writing another set of stone tablets to give to the people. There is no indication that Exodus 34 entails a "covenant renewal" apart from the people being given a rewritten set of stone tablets.

In the end, the generation entering the covenant at Sinai died in the wilderness, and another generation arose.[71] Deuteronomy is a renewal of

the covenant with them as well as a covenant made for the first time as a supplement to the covenant at Sinai. There are only three other constructions in the Hebrew Bible where the participle is employed in the standard terminology (*kārat bĕrît*): Deuteronomy 29:11 and 13 and, analogously, Nehemiah 9:38 (10:1 MT). In each case the participle corresponds to the present tense in English and refers to something in the making that is in the process of being completed.

Conclusion

We are now in a position to conclude. The question before us is this: why was an addition (codicil?) to the covenant at Sinai necessary, and why was the expression "cut a covenant" employed for this addition?

First, an addition to the covenant at Sinai was necessary because the directions or instruction (*tôrâ*) encoded in the covenant at Moab cover more adequately the situations of life in Canaan than the directions or instruction (*tôrâ*) encoded in the covenant at Sinai. Thus the instruction in Deuteronomy reshapes the covenant at Sinai for life in the land. There is a whole new context and situation even though it is the same covenant.

Second, we must put the covenant making at Moab in perspective with what comes before and what comes after. In referring to the covenants that precede it, I shall not appeal, as does David Andrew Dean, to terminology imposed externally, such as covenant obligations versus regulations, conditional versus unconditional, or bilateral versus unilateral covenants.[72] Rather, we can grasp the important points from the metanarrative and from sensitivity to the statements in the biblical text.

The first point to note is that creation entails a covenant between God and man on the one hand and between man and the world on the other. Though the humans violate the covenant by failing to show *ḥesed* and *'ĕmet* and disobey the command in the garden, the commitment of the Creator to his creation is affirmed/upheld in the covenant with Noah.

The second point to note concerns the covenant that God makes with Abraham (Genesis 15). This entails commitments and promises to Abraham and requires Abraham to be an obedient son and servant-king. Though

Abraham is less than a satisfactory ambassador and agent for Yahweh, God affirms/upholds his covenant in Genesis 17.

Then at Sinai Yahweh offers to the nation the role of kingdom of priests and holy nation. The people will be bound to Yahweh by covenant and will act as obedient son and servant-king in the world. Israel's disloyalty and treachery in worshiping the golden calf violate this covenant. Here there is a *difference* from the earlier covenants: the fulfillment of the covenant rests on the human partner's loyalty. Although God forgave Israel in Exodus 33–34, that entire generation—that is, that entire Israel—was wiped out in the desert as a judgment for their unbelief in Numbers 14. The covenant needs to be renewed, but the expression *hēqîm bĕrît*—literally, "to affirm or uphold a covenant"—is entirely inappropriate. God has made no commitment to uphold that which he has not already upheld. And the human partner that made the covenant is dead. It is a brand new Israel that has replaced the earlier one that needs to affirm loyalty to Yahweh in the face of earlier faithlessness and covenant violation. The expression *hēqîm bĕrît* is never used in a situation where a partner fails and now needs to affirm a commitment made previously. No, Israel needs to renew the covenant by making a covenant to keep the earlier one, just as we see in Joshua 23–24. Then the content or instruction of this covenant can be *added* to the earlier one and can be kept *beside* the ark of the covenant.

Earlier we saw that Joshua 23–24 indicates a continuity between the book of Joshua and the Pentateuch. Deuteronomy 29–30 indicates that in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is adding something in continuity with the covenant at Sinai. Moses is making a covenant to keep the covenant at Sinai. This is why the expression *kārat bĕrît*, "to cut a covenant," is the only one appropriate for this situation. And this time the covenant is made not only with the Israel present but with all future generations of Israel so that the children cannot argue that the covenant at Sinai was with their parents and not with them.

Deuteronomy is best seen as a renewal and expansion of the Sinai covenant. The exposition given here of Deuteronomy 30:11–14 coheres completely with Deuteronomy 4:25–31 and Leviticus 26:39–45, where even the ideas of an uncircumcised heart and repentance in exile are found.

This, then, best explains the relation of Deuteronomy 1–30 to Exodus 19–24 and the terminology used to describe that relationship. It is clear from this analysis that there is no such thing as a Palestinian covenant in Deuteronomy 29–30 as proclaimed by dispensationalists.[73] This is a complete misunderstanding of the literary structure and the function of chapters 29–30 as a covenant conclusion ceremony and of the relationship of the Moab covenant to that of Sinai.

John H. Sailhamer also sees Deuteronomy 29 as a separate covenant—without stipulations—related to the covenant promised in the Prophets and not related to any part of the book of Deuteronomy preceding chapter 29.[74] This is largely due to a failure to observe the literary structure of the text and the function of chapters 29–30 as the actual ceremony of covenant making.

Finally, a brief comment on Deuteronomy 4:29–31 is necessary. When Moses reviews the history of past relationship with Yahweh in the historical prologue section of the covenant/treaty, covenant breaking and faithlessness are duly noted. In 4:1–14, Moses commands obedience, and in verses 15–31, he warns them of the danger of covenant violation and idolatry in the future, leading to curse, exile, and death. Nonetheless, when they are exiled, even then the Lord will not destroy his people or forget the covenant with "your fathers":

> But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them. (4:29–31 ESV)

The long shadow of Sinai looms over the people. Dempster details how events before and after Sinai are similar, but those after are judged more severely.[75] The possibility of a faithful human partner to this point in the narrative plot structure is bleak. Thus, this factor explains the need for chapter 30 after chapters 28 and 29 and also 32:34–43 within the song of

Moses—though the word *bĕrît* does not occur here. Both Deuteronomy 30 and 32:34–43 foresee the faithlessness and future judgment of Israel. Deuteronomy 4:29–31 also underscores the relationship between the Israelite covenant and the Abrahamic: because of the Abrahamic covenant, violation of the Israelite covenant by Israel does not mean the end of God's purposes for the family of Abraham.

The Significance of the Form

Earlier we discussed the significance of the form of the Book of the Covenant and included Deuteronomy in that discussion. Analysis of the book of Deuteronomy requires reinforcement of one or two things.

Just as in Exodus 19–24 the Ten Words are foundational to the Judgments and, conversely, the Judgments applied and extended the Ten Words in a practical way to all areas of life, so in Deuteronomy the specific stipulations in chapters 12–26 illustrate the application and extension of the basic requirement of loyalty and the review of the Ten Words to various areas of life (in an Iron Age culture).

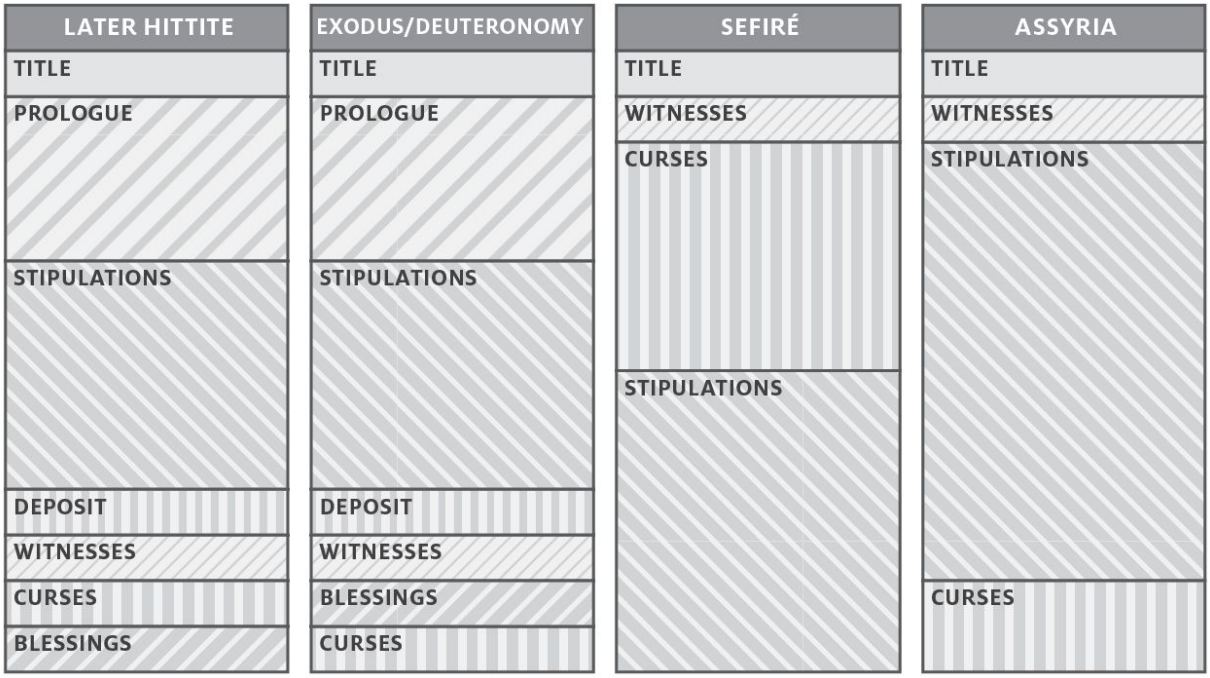
Once again, the classification of the laws as moral, civil, and ceremonial is foreign to the literary structure of the text. In fact, the ceremonial, civil, and moral laws are all mixed together.

Comparing Deuteronomy with contemporary documents from the ancient Near East in both content and form reveals that the book, in relation to other treaties, belongs to the fourteenth century BC (see figure 10.1, where columns 1 and 2 belong to the fourteenth century BC, while columns 3 and 4 belong to the seventh century BC).

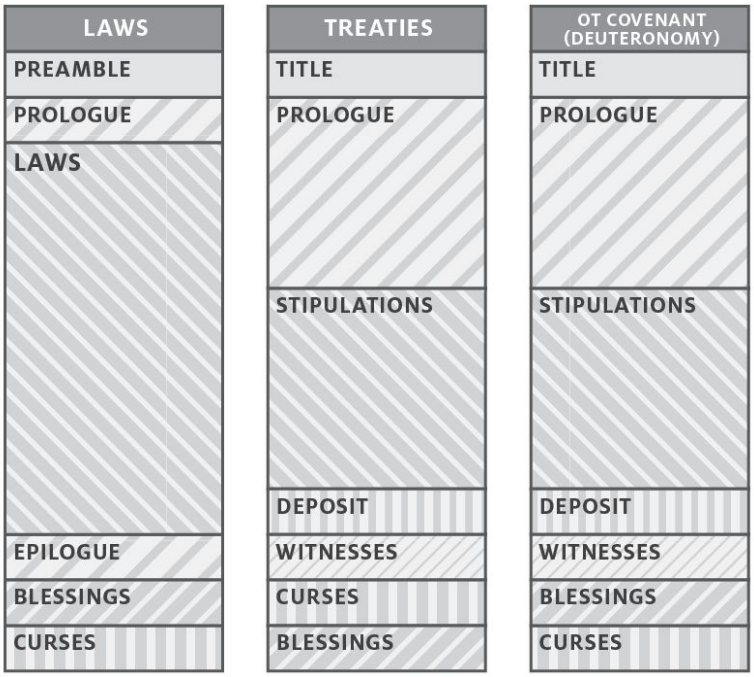
The Israelite covenant, as found in the book of Deuteronomy, is without parallel in the ancient Near East in terms of content and form taken together: (1) in content, Deuteronomy is most similar to ancient Near Eastern legal treatises, but it does not have the form of a law treatise; (2) in form, Deuteronomy is most similar to ancient Near Eastern treaties but not in content. This is obvious from figure 10.2. God desires to direct and instruct the lives/lifestyle of his people, yet he wants to do this in the context of a family relationship characterized by love, loyalty, and trust. This is completely different from Greek and Roman law codes or ancient

Near Eastern legal treaties. We should always remember that Torah means "instruction" rather than "law." It might be better for Christians to simply speak of the "instruction" in the covenant.[76]

Figure 10.1 Comparison of Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Forms



10.2 Comparison of Ancient Near Eastern Laws/Treatises and Deuteronomy



The Relationship of the Israelite Covenant to the Abrahamic Covenant

In order to construct a metanarrative that is true to the biblical text, we must not only accurately determine the meaning of the foundational texts, we must also listen to what the text says about interrelationships between two or more covenants.

Two main points are made in the text concerning the relationship of the Israelite covenant to the Abrahamic covenant. First, the exodus from Egypt is a fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham (Ex. 2:24; Deut. 7:7–9; 9:5; Jer. 11:2–4). In Genesis 15, when God made the covenant with Abraham, he predicted that Abraham's descendants would be enslaved and mistreated in a country not their own for four hundred years but afterward would come out with great possessions. Among the several texts that refer to this, we can cite Deuteronomy 7:7–9 as an example:

> The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh

> king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. (NIV)

Here, deliverance from enslavement in Egypt is attributed to the Lord keeping his covenant of love. This is a clear reference to his promise to Abraham in Genesis 15.

Second, Exodus 19:5–6 shows that by means of the Israelite covenant, God intends for the nation to fulfill the Adamic role reassigned to Abraham. Through covenant, God will bring his blessing and establish his rule in the lives of his people and, through them, in the rest of the world.

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1. Parts of chap. 10 are adapted from Peter J. Gentry, "The Relationship of Deuteronomy to the Covenant at Sinai," *SBJT* 18, no. 3 (2014): 35–57. Used by permission of the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*.

2. See Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 12–13; Weinfeld, "Book of Deuteronomy," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:168–83; Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, rev. ed., WBC 6A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), lxviii; Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 1:187–95.

3. Neal A. Huddleston, "Deuteronomy as Mischgattung: A Comparative and Contrastive Discourse Analysis of Deuteronomy and Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Traditions" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, 2015).

4. After the publication of the first edition of *Kingdom through Covenant*, a work by Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Lawrence appeared entitled *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*. This magisterial piece comprises three volumes and 1,642 pages in which every covenant, law, and treaty known in the entire ancient Near East from the third millennium BC to the time of Jesus Christ is presented in its original text and English translation and analyzed exhaustively. See Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012). See also their earlier works: K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1966); Kitchen, *The Bible in its World: The Bible and Archaeology Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977); Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 283–89; Paul Lawrence, *The Books of Moses Revisited* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011). The texts are also easily accessible in English translation: Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 2nd ed., WAW 7 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995, 1999); Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, WAW 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995). Although Kitchen actually dates the exodus to the thirteenth century BC, he nonetheless argues that the form does not allow a composition date later in time.

5. Adapted from Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 285. Used by permission of Eerdmans.

6. Steven Ward Guest, "Deuteronomy 26:16–19 as the Central Focus of the Covenantal Framework of Deuteronomy" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 55.

7. Norbert Lohfink, "Dtn 28,69 — Überschrift oder Kolophon?" *BN* 64 (1992): 40–52; Lohfink, "Deuteronomy," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume*, ed. Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 229–32.

8. Personal communication from Daniel I. Block, January 21, 2011.

9. Adapted from Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 285. Used by permission of Eerdmans.

10. Adapted from Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 287. Used by permission of Eerdmans.

11. Adapted from Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 287. Used by permission of Eerdmans.

12. Adapted from Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 288. Used by permission of Eerdmans.

13. Huddleston's major study confirms this conclusion.

14. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 289 (emphasis original).

15. Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh Clayton White (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991).

16. For a list of Deuteronomic phrases in Jeremiah, see Louis Stulman, *The Prose Sermons of the Book of Jeremiah: A Redescription of the Correspondences with the Deuteronomistic Literature in the Light of Recent Textual Research*, SBLDS 83

(Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 31–44.

17. Bruce K. Waltke, “The Book of Proverbs and Old Testament Theology,” *BSac* 136, no. 544 (1979): 302–17.

18. Some scholars have argued that the section containing the specific stipulations (Deuteronomy 12–26) is arranged according to the Ten Words/Commandments. See Stephen A. Kaufman, “The Structure of the Deuteronomic Law,” *Maarav* 1, no. 2 (1978–1979): 105–58; John H. Walton, “Deuteronomy: An Exposition of the Spirit of the Law,” *GTJ* 8, no. 2 (1987): 213–25; and more recently, John D. Currid, *Deuteronomy* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2006). Daniel I. Block, however, does not find this persuasive. See Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 301–2; cf. also Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy = [Devarim]: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), ad loc.

19. Viktor Korošec, *Hethitische Staatsverträge: Ein Beitrag zu ihrer juristischen Wertung* (Leipzig: T. Weicher, 1931).

20. Quoted in George E. Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” in *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, ed. Edward F. Campbell and David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 3:33.

21. *Pace* R. Frankena, “The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon,” in *Oudtestamentische Studiën* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 122–54, who sees the notion of wholehearted devotion as influence from the later neo-Assyrian treaties, this idea of loyalty is clearly stated, sometimes in exactly these words (“wholehearted”), in the earlier second-millennium BC treaties. See, e.g., Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 27–28, 55–56, 105. For a view similar to that of Frankena, see Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 7. I am indebted to John D. Meade for these references.

22. Hans W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 46–47.

23. Note Anne Murray’s old album *Heart over Mind*.

24. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 11–25.

25. Second Kings 23:25 is a direct allusion to Deut. 6:5. Thus the evidence for מְאֹד as a noun is based only on interpretation of Deut. 6:5.

26. Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*, trans. Margaret Kohl, OTS (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 13–32.

27. Guest, “Deuteronomy 26:16–19 as the Central Focus.”

28. Ibid., 155–56.

29. Ibid., 158. Used by permission of the author.

30. Ibid., 164–65.

31. Ibid., 210.

32. Ibid., 152.

33. Our own translation; for Guest’s, see ibid., 126.

34. Ibid., 126. Used by permission of the author.

35. Ibid., 119. Used by permission of the author.

36. Ibid., 117.

37. Ibid., 126.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., 122.

40. See chart, ibid., 133.

41. Ibid., 142.

42. Ibid., 228.

43. Ibid., 230 (emphasis original).

44. R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*, JSOTSup 53 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 223.

45. Recently, some Christian scholars have interpreted Deuteronomy 29–30, understood separately from Deuteronomy 1–28, as referring to the new covenant in Jeremiah. John Sailhamer suggests that Deut. 30:11–14 should be taken as conjoint with the new covenant prophecy of 30:1–10 and that 30:11–14 explains the nature of the new covenant by comparing it to the Sinaitic covenant. See John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 349, 399–415; Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 473. This view has been furthered by Peter Link, “A Composition Criticism of Deut. 28:69–30:20: An Analysis of the Pericope’s Intentional Repetition as a Part of the Pentateuch with the Pentateuch, the Prophets and the Writings” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012). See also Steven R. Coxhead, discussed on p. 433.

46. Quoted in Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 1:240.

47. Douglas Moo, “*Kingdom through Covenant*: A Review by Douglas Moo,” The Gospel Coalition, September, 12, 2012, http://thegospelcoalition.org/article/kingdom-through-covenant-a-review-by-douglas-moo. This was a constructive critique that I took to heart.

48. See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907, 1953), s.v. בָּד; and see, e.g., Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, ed. Walter Baumgartner, Johann Jakob Stamm, and Benedikt Hartmann, 3rd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1967–1995), s.v. בָּד.

49. 2 Kings 23:3 is to be interpreted in exactly the same way.

50. Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 1st ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 357–88.

51. Guest, "Deuteronomy 26:16–19 as the Central Focus," 55.

52. Words of the narrator actually divide the text into seven sections, but these naturally fall into four sections prior to the song in chap. 32 and the blessing in chap. 33. See Huddleston, "Deuteronomy as *Mischgattung*."

53. Here I have done my own analysis of narration versus speech but am influenced by Lohfink, "Deuteronomy," 229–32.

54. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 274, 397–98.

55. H. F. van Rooy, "Deuteronomy 28,69—Superscript or Subscript?," *JNSL* 14 (1988): 215–22; cf. Eckart Otto, *Deuteronomium 12–34*, part 2, *23,16–34,12*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2017), 1983–1984, 2019.

56. N. Lohfink, "Dtn 28,69—Überschrift oder Kolophon?," *BN* 64 (1992): 40–52.

57. Van Rooy, "Deuteronomy 28,69—Superscript or Subscript?," 221.

58. Georg Braulik, "Die Funktion von Siebenergruppierungen im Endtext des Deuteronomiums," in *Ein Gott, Eine Offenbarung: Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese, Theologie und Spiritualität—Festschrift für Notker Füglister*, ed. Friedrich V. Reiterer (Würzburg: Echter, 1991), 37–50.

59. 4:13, 23, 31; 5:2, 3; 7:2, 9 || 7:12; 8:18; 9:9, 11, 15; 10:8; 17:2.

60. Huddleston, "Deuteronomy as *Mischgattung*," 147–51. Understanding 29:1 (28:69 MT) as a heading rather than a colophon is further supported by Eckart Otto, *Deuteronomium 1–11*, part 1, *1,1–4,43*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2012), 311; Otto, *Deuteronomium 1–11*, part 2, *4,44–11,32*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2012), 642–43.

61. R. N. Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 97.

62. John D. Meade, "Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart: The Typology of the Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 134.

63. In Deut. 10:16, circumcision of the heart is used with a verb in deontic modality, while in 30:6 it is used with a verb in assertive modality. What we can say, then, is that circumcision of the heart is actually mentioned and described as unfulfilled in the first instance, with the second instance promising that Yahweh will fulfill it.

64. For example, the recent work by Block, *Deuteronomy*, 673.

65. Steven R. Coxhead, "Deuteronomy 30:11–14 as a Prophecy of the New Covenant in Christ," *WTJ* 68, no. 2 (2006): 305–20.

66. See Mark Baker, "In Your Mouth and in Your Heart: The Future Promise of Deuteronomy 30:11–14" (paper presented at the Southeastern Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, Alabama, March 21–22, 2014).

67. Here I agree with Jerry Hwang, "The Rhetoric of Remembrance: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation into the 'Fathers' in Deuteronomy" (PhD diss., Wheaton College, 2009). No doubt Hwang is right to see the different ways in which the term "fathers" is used in Deuteronomy as a rhetorical device to connect the present generation to the past. He is also right to see the covenant at Sinai and the covenant at Moab fused as one in the mind of Moses. Nonetheless, he argues that 29:1 is a colophon rather than a superscript, and hence, his view of the literary structure leads to differences in interpretation from ours in particular passages.

68. Peter J. Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2000), 106.

69. Indeed, apparently all the covenants to this point are double: (1) the covenant with creation is reaffirmed in the cosmic covenant with Noah; (2) the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 is reaffirmed in Genesis 17; and (3) the covenant with Israel at Sinai (Exodus 19–24) is reaffirmed in the covenant with Israel on the plains of Moab in Deuteronomy. For this observation I am indebted to Georges-Émile Durand of Montréal, Québec.

70. On the function and meaning of the participle in Hebrew, see Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed., rev. and expanded by John C. Beckman (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 88; Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, Biblical Languages: Hebrew 3 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), §20.3; Peter T. Nash, "The Hebrew Qal Active Participle: A Non-Aspectual Narrative Backgrounding Element" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1992).

71. According to the covenant stipulations, God "[visits] the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate [him], but [shows] steadfast love to a thousand generations of those who love [him]" (Deut. 5:9–10 ESV; cf. Ex. 20:5–6). Nonetheless, when Israel broke the covenant, only one generation was destroyed in the desert. What a demonstration of Yahweh's name as compassionate and gracious (Ex. 34:5–7)! I owe this insight to Stephen G. Dempster.

72. See David Andrew Dean, "Covenant, Conditionality, and Consequence: New Terminology and a Case Study in the Abrahamic Covenant," *JETS* 57, no. 2 (2014): 281–308.

73. See David J. MacLeod, "The Biblical Covenants and Covenant Theology," *Journey Magazine* 10, no. 1 (2012): 30–37; MacLeod, "Covenant Theology, Part 3: A Dispensational Alternative," *Journey Magazine* 11, no. 1 (2014): 30–38.

74. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 399–404.

75. Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 113.

76. Also helpful is the comparison of covenant and law by George E. Mendenhall, which was followed by John Walton. See George E. Mendenhall, “The Conflict between Value Systems and Social Control,” in *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Hans Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 169–80; John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 299–301.

11

The Davidic Covenant

Another key point in the narrative plot structure of Scripture is the agreement or covenant that God initiated with David, king of Israel.[1] As a convenient and short title we shall call this agreement the Davidic covenant, observing the language of the biblical text.

As we shall see, the Davidic covenant functions in the larger story in a number of significant ways. In the history of the people of Israel, it inaugurates a divinely designed model of kingship for the nation. Furthermore, it implements the kingship of Yahweh among his people at a deeper and higher level. In addition to addressing concerns and problems of the developing nation of Israel, the Davidic covenant carries forward in specific ways the intentions and purposes of God expressed in the Sinai covenant and, even further back, in the covenant with Abraham.

First, we shall look at the context and historical situation in which kingship was inaugurated. Then, we shall examine the main passages on the covenant with David and also look at how this was appropriated and understood by later texts of the Old Testament, particularly Isaiah 55. Finally, we shall briefly describe the connections and relations between the Davidic covenant and the Sinai covenant and the covenant with Abraham.

Joshua

Joshua was a leader like Moses. He led the people into the land of Canaan, the land promised to the patriarchs in the covenant with Abraham. The book of Joshua is divided into two parts: the first half describes the conquest of the land; the second half describes the division of the land among the

twelve tribes of Israel according to their "clans" (מִשְׁפָּחוֹת). This result was a clear fulfillment of the Israelite covenant, but it also led Israel to a higher level of commitment, as we see when the book ends with a ceremony of covenant renewal (Josh. 24:25).

The expression employed for this ceremony is *kārat bĕrît*, "to cut a covenant." Some scholars have falsely assumed from such texts that the expression *kārat bĕrît* does not always refer to covenant initiation but can be used for covenant renewal. This is an erroneous conclusion. What in fact happened is that Joshua *made a covenant* with the people *to keep the covenant*—the Israelite covenant inaugurated through Moses at Sinai and Moab. So technically, from a linguistic point of view, *kārat bĕrît* refers only to covenant initiation.[2]

Another example, precisely similar to Joshua 24, is 2 Kings 23:2–3:

> And the king went up to the house of the LORD, and with him all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the prophets, all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD. And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people joined in the covenant. (ESV)

Here King Josiah makes a covenant (*kārat bĕrît*) to keep a covenant, that is, "to perform the words of this covenant" (*hēqîm-eth dibrê habbĕrît hazzō't*).

Judges

The next period is dark in every way. The nation of Israel is constantly breaking the covenant at this time. The writer of the book of Judges portrays recurring cycles in which (1) the people break the covenant and sin against Yahweh; (2) Yahweh disciplines them by allowing foreign nations to oppress and harass Israel; (3) the people are called to repentance and cry out for help; and (4) Yahweh raises up a hero or deliverer, called a judge, who rescues the people from their enemies and rules them for a time.

At the end of this book, the author comments, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25). Here the author is really referring to the condition of the people and how the covenant would be preserved. He is saying that despite the lack of human support that might have preserved a political or religious ideal and in spite of the fact that there was no king and that each person followed his own standard, Yahweh, by direct intervention through the judge or savior figures, preserved the covenant with Israel at this time. The book of Judges, then, suggests that, in any age, the people of Israel would not owe their existence to political constitutions devised by themselves, such as the monarchy. It would owe it to the faithfulness of its covenant partner, who would never defect from his obligations to which he was bound by oath and promise.[3]

Samuel and the Beginning of the Monarchy

When the book of Samuel opens, the worship of God is debased among the people of Israel. Eli, the high priest, is primarily responsible because he was not able to discipline his sons, Hophni and Phineas. God prepares Samuel as the man to rescue his people from this crisis.

In 1 Samuel 8, the elders of Israel ask Samuel to appoint a king to lead them, like the nations surrounding them. This request reveals a number of issues confused in the minds of the people. First, Samuel was a judge. Normally, Yahweh appointed the judges by his Spirit. It was not an office that was passed to one’s natural sons as in a dynasty. Second, they wanted a king like the nations surrounding them. Here the problem was not in wanting a king per se. God had planned for this from the start. Man was created as the divine image in order to “rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gen. 1:26–28). He was placed in the garden in Eden to exercise sovereignty over it and over all things. Later, when God made his last new start, he told Abraham and Sarah that kings would come from them (Gen. 17:6, 16), and this promise was reaffirmed to Jacob (Gen. 35:11). Jacob’s blessing on the tribes, given at the time of his death, announced that “the scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his

feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his" (Gen. 49:10). Even Balaam, in his second oracle, says, "The shout of a king is among them" (Num. 23:21), and in his fourth oracle, "A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel" (Num. 24:17). Finally, in Deuteronomy 17:14–20, Moses lays down provisions and regulations for a monarchy brought about according to God's choice and God's timing. The king must be the man of Yahweh's choice (17:15) and must govern the people according to the principles of the Israelite covenant (17:18–20).[4] The problem was not, then, in wanting a king. It was in wanting one like the nations. Kingship in Canaan at this time was centralized, was absolute, and contained the potential abuse of power. In addition, there was a danger that through alliances, compacts, and treaties, the Israelites would depend on others and not on the Lord. Moreover, since kings would come to the throne by dynasty and not by direct intervention from the Lord, God's direct rule of the people could be thwarted.

Saul: 2 Samuel 6

The book of Samuel relates that, because of the degeneration of worship and disobedience of the people under King Saul's reign, God allowed the Philistines to capture the ark. Symbolically, this indicated that Yahweh had departed from his people and gone into a self-imposed exile. The return of the ark in 2 Samuel 6 and the choosing of a site for the temple indicate that Yahweh is returning to live in the midst of his people as king. The fact that 2 Samuel 6 precedes 2 Samuel 7 shows that only when the kingship of Yahweh is firmly established can the issue of kingship in Israel be discussed. A sanctuary for the Lord comes before the monarchy.[5]

Another significant factor is the emergence of the office of prophet in Israel at this time. Samuel is the beginning of the prophets. The office of prophet also comes directly from the Israelite covenant (Num. 12:6–9; Deut. 18:15–22). And it arises at this time because it provides a check against the absolute rule of the king and makes sure that Yahweh—that God—is ruling the people through the king of Israel. For every David there must also be a Nathan who can come directly into the king's presence and confront his decisions and actions by the authority of the word of God.

David: 2 Samuel 7

The main passages in the Old Testament dealing with the Davidic covenant are 2 Samuel 7 (with its parallel text in 1 Chronicles 17) and Psalm 89 (esp. 89:3–4, 19–37). While 2 Samuel 7 does not specifically call the arrangement a covenant, the term *bĕrît* is in fact used in 2 Samuel 23:5; Psalms 89:3, 28, 34, 39; 132:11; and 2 Chronicles 13:5. Moreover, *ḥesed*, the term used of the Davidic covenant in Isaiah 55:3, *is used* in 2 Samuel 7:15.

Literary Structure

Let us begin by carefully determining the literary structure of the text so that we can observe how this communication is shaped.

Outline of 2 Samuel 7

I. God's Promise to David 7:1–17
   A. David's plan (David proposes to build a house for Yahweh) 7:1–3
   B. God's promise 7:4–17
      1. Will you build a house for me? 7:4–7
      2. I will build a house for you! 7:8–17
         a. Promises to be realized during David's lifetime 7:8–11a
         b. Promises to be realized after David's death 7:11b–16
            i. The covenant promises: Yahweh's part 7:11b–13
               (1) Seed
               (2) Kingdom
               (3) Throne (eternal)
            ii. The covenant relationship: The king's part (obedience in a father-son relationship) 7:14–15
            iii. Summary of the covenant promises 7:16
               (1) An eternal seed
               (2) An eternal kingdom
               (3) An eternal throne

II. David's Prayer to God 7:18–29
   A. David's praise and worship 7:18–24
      1. Wonder 7:18–20

2. Praise 7:21–24

B. David's requests 7:25–29

1. David asks God to confirm his word 7:25–27
2. David expresses trust in God's word 7:28
3. David asks God to bless his house 7:29

The passage is divided in half, with the first half narrating the revelation of divine promises given to David and the second half recording David's response in worship. When it says in 2 Samuel 7:18 that "King David went in and sat before the LORD," it means that he entered the sanctuary to reflect, worship, and pray.[6]

Again, the first half is divided into two parts: in the first part David proposes to build a grander sanctuary of cedar paneling than the present temporary tent. In response, God promises to build a house for David. There is a play on the word "house" (בַּיִת). The "house" that David wants to build for Yahweh is a sanctuary or temple. The "house" that Yahweh will build for David is a dynasty or royal family line. This play on words is taken up again and again in both the Old and New Testaments. For example, in Amos 9 the prophet predicts a future time when the sorry state of the Davidic dynasty, a "fallen hut," will be rebuilt. Since the context also refers to bringing down the temple (9:1), which had become devoted to corrupt worship, both dynasty and temple are involved in the reference to the "fallen hut" of David (9:11).

David's initial plan is approved by the prophet Nathan and then revoked when Nathan is given a divine revelation by dream or vision in the night. This is significant because it is part of a theme in 2 Samuel that kingship in Israel must be subservient to Yahweh, the Great King.[7]

In 2 Samuel 7:8–16, the section detailing the divine gift and promises to David, several key markers of the literary structure need to be observed. First, the shift from perfect and *waw*-consecutive imperfect verb forms marking past time in 7:8–9a to *waw*-consecutive perfect forms marking future time in the middle of 7:9 clearly marks the break between past blessings and future promises. Second, the messenger formula that opens 7:8 (כה אמר יהוה צבאות) is repeated in 7:11b, albeit in a different form (והגיד לך יהוה). This is a clear marker in the text, along with the temporal

clause beginning 7:12 and the reference to a time after David's death, to separate the promises to be fulfilled during David's life from the promises to be fulfilled after David's death.

The covenant clearly demarcates both divine and human obligations. The divine obligations or promises are divided by the literary structure into promises to be fulfilled during David's lifetime and promises to be fulfilled after David's death. The former are listed in 7:8–11a: (1) a great name, (2) a firm place for Israel as the people of God, and (3) rest for David from his enemies. The latter are listed in 7:11b–13 and 16. Here what Yahweh promises David is a lasting dynasty, kingdom, and throne. The promises are given initially in 7:11b–13 and are repeated in 7:16. At the center of this a-b-a' chiastic structure is the covenant between Yahweh and David, defined as a father-son relationship. This stresses the need for obedience to Yahweh on the part of the king. Traditionally, theologians have viewed the Davidic covenant as unconditional. It is true that the content of the covenant consists in the mighty promises made by Yahweh. Nonetheless, as 7:14–15 shows, faithfulness is expected of the king, and these verses foreshadow the possibility of disloyalty on the part of the king, which will require discipline by Yahweh. In effect, 7:14–15 is saying that the covenant will be fulfilled not only by a faithful father alone (i.e., Yahweh keeping his promises) but also by a faithful son (i.e., the obedience of the king to Yahweh's Torah). The chiastic literary structure actually portrays in a visual manner the nature of the covenant: faithfulness and obedience in the father-son relationship is crucial, but it is supported on both sides by the faithfulness and sure promises of Yahweh to David of descendants, kingdom, and throne (the order is the same before and after the chiastic center). This same chiastic literary structure is observed in Psalm 132:11b–12, a later commentary on the Davidic covenant. Second Samuel 7:11a and 12b emphasize the promises of God, and 7:12a speaks of the need for an obedient son. Thus once more, the promises of God undergird and support on both sides the need for a faithful, obedient son.

Yahweh and the Davidic King

The consideration given by later texts to both divine and human obligations in the covenant will be noted shortly. First, however, what it means to describe the relationship between Yahweh and the Davidic king as “father” and “son” must be fully explained. Factors involved in this include the use of the word בֵּן in Hebrew, the cultural context of kingship in Canaan and in the ancient Near East, the use of familial language in treaties, and the canonical context of the passage.[8]

A literal, physical family relationship is clearly contrary to the context. Nonetheless, בֵּן, the term for “son” in Hebrew, has a much broader field of meaning than *son* in English. In an agrarian, preindustrial economy and society, trades were normally transmitted within a family setting. In this way, sons customarily did what their fathers did in addition to displaying common characteristics passed on from family setting, genetics, and upbringing. Thus the term “son” can be used to mean “possessing the characteristics” of something. In the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1, the beloved has a vineyard (בְּקֶרֶן בֶּן־שָׁמֶן, lit. “on a horn, the son of fatness”). The horn, that is, a hillside or terrace on a mountain spur or slope, is “a son of fatness,” that is, characterized by abundant produce. An idiomatic English translation would be “a fertile hillside.”

The ancient Near Eastern and Canaanite cultural context is significant. In Egypt, from at least 1650 BC onward, people perceived the king as the image of god because he was the son of god. The emphasis was not on physical appearance. For example, a male king could be the image of a female goddess. What is stressed is that the behavior of the king reflects the behavior of the god. The king as the image of god reflects the characteristics and essential notions of the god.[9]

So, for example, from Ugarit we have the story of King Keret, who is described as the son of El.[10] His excellent health must indicate his divine origin.[11]

The Old Testament records an Aramean king of Damascus known as Ben-Hadad (1 Kings 15:18, 20; 2 Chron. 16:2, 4).[12] By his name, he is the son of his god. The prosopography of the Amarna Letters and also of the Ugaritic Texts show a number of people from various levels of society whose names follow the format “son of Divine Name.”[13] Thus we do not

know if the name Ben-Hadad proves that he considered himself as the representative of Baal to his people. It might depend on whether the name was a birth name from his parents or a name taken upon accession to the throne.[14]

The Canaanite and ancient Near Eastern culture shows that the notion of the king as a son of god was well established.[15] The meaning may have differed in Egypt, Canaan, and Mesopotamia, but the common denominator is the idea that the king represents the character of the god in some way to the people.

Also in the ancient Near East, those bound by suzerain-vassal treaties may refer to each other as father and son.[16] This has a significant bearing on 2 Samuel 7. Earlier theologians discussed covenants in terms of unconditional or conditional promises. More recently, covenants have been evaluated according to suzerain-vassal models on the one hand or royal-grant models on the other. The former emphasizes the obligations of the vassal king to the suzerain, the latter the obligations of the great king to his noble or vassal. The Davidic covenant has frequently been classified as a royal grant, yet it does not fit neatly either the unconditional-conditional categories or the more recent suzerain-vassal versus royal-grant models.[17] Second Samuel 7:14–15 clearly emphasizes the need for obedience on the part of the son, yet the literary structure shows that this is undergirded primarily by the promises of the father.[18]

Second Samuel 7 must also be read according to the arrangement of the books in the Hebrew canon.[19] A canonical reading indicates that the Davidic king is inheriting the role of both Adam as son of God and Israel as son of God according to the instructions of Deuteronomy 17. This can be briefly reviewed and summarized at this point.

First to be considered is the fact that humans are created as the divine image, according to Genesis 1:26–28, which we discussed at greater length earlier in the book.[20] The divine image defines human ontology in terms of a covenant relationship with the creator God on the one hand and with the creation on the other hand. The former may be captured by the term *sonship* and is implied by Genesis 5:1–3. The latter relationship may be reflected in the terms *kingship* and *servanthood*. As we noted earlier, the ancient Near

Eastern data confirm and correspond exactly to this exegesis of the biblical text.

Second, Israel inherited this Adamic role.[21] Yahweh refers to the nation as his son in Exodus 4:22–23. The divine purpose in the covenant established between God and Israel at Sinai is unfolded in Exodus 19:3–6. As a kingdom of priests, they will function to make the ways of God known to the nations and also to bring the nations into a right relationship to God. Since Israel is located geographically on the one and only communications link between the great superpowers of the ancient world, in this position she will show the nations how to have a right relationship to God, how to treat each other in a truly human way, and how to be faithful stewards of the earth's resources. This is the meaning of Israel's sonship.

Third, Deuteronomy 17 intimates that the king will be the leader in this role. Verses 16–20 describe the manner in which the future king is to exercise his responsibilities. After 17:16–17 issues three negative commands, 17:18–20 specifies three positive commands, all relating to Torah: (1) the king shall copy the Torah, (2) the king shall have the Torah with him, and (3) the king shall read the Torah. In other words, the only positive requirement is that the king embodies Torah as a model citizen.[22] This is exactly the point of the father-son relationship set out in 2 Samuel 7.

Fourth, the author *avoids* using the word "king" (*melek*) and instead employs the word *nāgîd*, "leader" (2 Sam. 5:2; 6:21; 7:8). As Murray has shown, this is to counteract the notion of kingship in the culture surrounding Israel and to portray a kingship in Israel based not on autonomous power but on representing the kingship of Yahweh.[23] In addition, twice in 2 Samuel 7, Yahweh refers to David as "my servant."[24] This is *hugely significant*. This is the highest title a human can receive in the Old Testament. In an exhaustive study of the term "servant of the Lord" in the Old Testament, Stephen Dempster shows that David is the "servant of the Lord" par excellence in the book of Kings.[25] The term "servant" connects with *nāgîd* to emphasize a servant kingship and clearly marks David in an *Adamic role*.

Excursus: Son of DN in Amarna/Ugaritic Texts

What follows is an analysis of all personal names in the Amarna and Ugaritic texts of the type “son of DN [Divine Name].”

1. Amarna Texts[1]

Name	Meaning	Comments	Reference(s)
Bin-Ana	son of Ana	detained with Aziru in Egypt[a]	EA 170:37
Ben-Elima	son of Elu	(honorific plural?) identity unknown[b]	EA 256:15
Šum-Adda	child of Adda	son of Balume[c]	EA 8:8, 13, 35; 224:3 (GAGI, 222)
Šumu-Haddi	child of Haddu	mayor(?), detained in Egypt[d]	EA 97:1 (GAGI, 222)

a. Hess, *Amarna Personal Names*, 381. b. Ibid. c. Ibid, 384. d. Ibid.

2. Texts from Ugarit[2]

Name	Text Reference	Comments
bnil	PRU 3:253	(van Soldt, 32n259, 139, 163)
	PRU 4:201 (RS 18:2): 18	= 4.623:6 (van Soldt, 11)
	Ug 5 2 rev. 12'	
	Ug 5 3 rev. 6'	
	3.10:17	
	4.86:12	
	4.297:3	
	4.377:19	
	4.609:8, 19	
	4:616:10	
	4.623:6	list of maryannus[a]
	4.723:1	
	4.791:13	
bn‘myn	4.69 III 5	
	4.75 IV 8	
	4.77:11	
	4.280:12	(van Soldt, 17, 139)
	4.290:11	of high rank? (van Soldt, 37)

	4.356:5	of high rank? (van Soldt, 37)
	4.357:25?	of high rank? (van Soldt, 37)
	4.677:5	
	4.755:9?	
	4.785:19	
bn‘n	4.33.32	royal guard from Rqd
	4.35 II 19	persons grouped by profession[b]
	4.232:47	buyer from Rqd
	4.753:14	
	9.423:8 (RSOu 14 46)	
bn‘nt	PRU 3:194 (RS 11.839:12) PRU 3:194 (RS 11.839:16)	? (’Ilî-’abu also possible[c])
	4.307:6	serf on royal farm at village of Yny
	4.320:4	
bin-ba‘alana	PRU 3:193 (RS 12.34:15)[d]	From village of Bekani
bnhd(d)	see below	
bnpdr	4.655:8	
bn rpiyn	4.232 (I) 8	From village of Rqd
bnršp	4.33:12	guard from Ary
	4.155:15	
	4.170:9	
bnršpy	4.69. I 22	titular of war-chariot
	4.93 II 17	cf. PRU 3:20 (RS 15.63:11, 12, 19)
bin-šapši	PRU 3:195 (RS 15.09 B I 17)	
	PRU 6:79 (RS 19.42:5)	
	RSOu 7 3:7 =	
	dumu-dutu dumu Idingir-silim	= Bin-šapši mār ilī-šalim?[e]
bnšpš	4.63 IV 6	
	4.194:18	
	4.227 I 11	
	4.628:5	
	4.666:4	

	4.422:43 broken context	
btšpš?	RSOu 14 44:6 or bnšpš?	
bnymn	4.64 IV 9	
	4.69 II 3	
	4.123:4	
	4.617 (I) 19	
	4.785:9	
DUMU ad-dá	AT WO5 p. 63 (136,4)	(cf. GAGI, 222)
šùm-adì	PRU 3:59 (RS 16.133:6)	son of Giše (Akkadian Text)
šu-um-daddu	PRU 3:151 (RS 16.197:14)	(Akkadian Text)

a. Member of social group (< titular of war chariot), DULA, 580.
b. Should be read “son of Annu”; *bn* is not part of name. Profession = *ṯnn* (archer?), cf. van Soldt, 38.
c. So John Huehnergard, *The Akkadian of Ugarit*, HSM 34 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 400n85.
d. Cf. also DULA, 226.
e. So Pierre Bordreuil, *Une bibliothèque au sud de la ville: Ras Shamra-Ougarit VII* (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1991), 20. See also Gröndahl, *Die Personennamen der Texte aus Ugarit*, 326, 354.

David’s Response to God

The response of David to this revelation through the prophet Nathan in 2 Samuel 7:18–29 reveals David’s own understanding of the covenant. In this regard, the problematic verse 19 is critical. In verse 18, David expresses the fact that he and his house have been highly exalted. Now, however, in verse 19, he says that this honor is dwarfed by the promises concerning the distant future: *zô’t tôrat hā’ādām*. This clause has been enigmatic for scholars. The NLT rendering, “Do you deal with everyone this way?” represents a standard interpretation. However, this interpretation is problematic. First, reading the clause as an affirmative, declarative statement is far more normal when no contextual or grammatical signals exist to indicate a question.[26] Second, although “manner” is suggested as the possible meaning of *tôrâ* by the Oxford Lexicon,[27] “instruction,” or “law,” is by far the first meaning that comes to mind. In the bound phrase, the free member may be subjective or objective. When the free member is a person, it is frequently a subjective genitive, but construing it as an objective genitive makes good sense here.[28] Thus we should translate it, “This is the instruction for humanity.” Dumbrell and Kaiser note that the

expression “law of man” has been shown to have parallels in the similar Akkadian phrase, *tērīt nīshē*, which has the sense of a “charter for humanity.”[29]

What could David mean when he says that the covenant revealed through Nathan is Yahweh’s instruction for humanity? In 2 Samuel 7:14–15, the human obligations in the relationship between Yahweh and the Davidic king are indicated by establishing a father-son relationship. We saw that, in the ancient Near East, a country or region was thought to be ruled by the god of that territory, and the king was considered the representative of the local god. This explains how the king could be called the son of God. Therefore, as the divine son, the Davidic king was to effect the divine instruction, or Torah, in the nation as a whole and was, as a result, a mediator of the Mosaic Torah. However, since the god whom the Davidic king represented was not limited to a local region or territory but was the creator God and Sovereign of the whole world, the rule of the Davidic king would have repercussions for *all* the nations, not just for Israel. This is developed in Psalm 2 and many other psalms but is *already* suggested in 2 Samuel 7. Thus, faithfulness on the part of the Davidic son would effect the divine rule in the entire world, much as God intended for humanity to do in the covenant of creation, as indicated by the divine image in Genesis 1:26–27. This, I submit, is the logic behind David’s response in 2 Samuel 7:19, and this is why he claims that a covenant that makes the Davidic king son of God is the instrument of bringing Yahweh’s Torah to all the nations. David’s own understanding of divine sonship is clearly indicated by his statement in 7:19 that the covenant is God’s charter or instruction for humankind.

The parallel text in 1 Chronicles 17:17 is textually problematic but is also instructive. The clause corresponding to *zô’t tôrat hā’ādām* is *ûre’îtanî ketôr hā’ādām hamma‘ălāh*. The most thorough treatment of the problem and the best proposal for the meaning of *tôr* (not an error for *tôrâ*) is in *Critique Textuelle de l’Ancien Testament*: “You see me according to the rank of the man placed high.”[30] This is equivalent to the last words of David in 2 Samuel 23:1, where he refers to Nathan’s oracle as a בְּרִית and

calls himself “the man set on high” (הַגֻּבַר הֲקִם עָל). The statement in Psalm 89:28 (89:27 EV) is similar:

> I will also appoint him to be my firstborn,
> the most exalted of the kings of the earth. (NIV)

The second line explicates the meaning of the Davidic sonship as being “the most exalted of the kings of the earth.” All these texts represent interpretations of 2 Samuel 7:19 and show that since the god who is represented by the Davidic king is both supreme and universal, the Davidic king has the highest rank among human beings. Despite critical textual problems,[31] 2 Samuel 7:19 is the key to the universalization of the messianic vision in the Psalms and Prophets.[32]

In the response section, 2 Samuel 7:18–29, the word “good” can be used to refer to the covenant. The comment of I. Höver-Johag is apt: “In 2 S. 7:28, *ṭôḇâ* refers to the covenant of Yahweh with the house of David (cf. v. 29; 1 S. 25:30; 2 Ch. 24:16; Akk. *dabābu ṭābūta* = Heb. *dabbēr ṭôb*).”[33] This observation demonstrates that the term *bĕrît* need not occur in a text for the author to be speaking about a covenant.

Some have wondered whether the divine promises to David indicate a particular son, such as Solomon. We duly note that the word “son” is in the singular in 2 Samuel 7:14–15. And it is David’s son who will be the temple builder. Nonetheless, 7:14b–15 speak of the future son’s possible disobedience and consequent discipline by Yahweh. This suggests a sequence of kings in which some are more faithful than others. More significantly, God promises David a “house,” which clearly indicates a dynasty or family line going beyond one son. Later we shall discuss how this promise is fulfilled. The promise of an eternal house could be fulfilled by each member having a son guaranteed into the eternal future. It could also be fulfilled by some king having an eternal son. This latter solution was probably not imagined by writers of the Old Testament.

Later Interpretations of 2 Samuel 7

Brief observations are now in order on the consideration given by later texts to both divine and human obligations in the covenant between Yahweh and

David.[34] These are also crucial in a correct interpretation of Isaiah 55:3, and frequently scholars have depended heavily on intertextual links, particularly with Psalm 89. In one of the most enlightened treatments of intertextual links between Psalm 89 and Isaiah 55:3, Knut Heim addresses concerns of scholars who hold that Nathan's oracle has been reinterpreted or altered in different directions based on current political realities in Israel and Judah. Heim responds to Michael Fishbane as follows:

> Fishbane's notion that the psalm's developments or changes were introduced mainly to protect the validity of the original oracle loses conviction when we note that more effective changes to this effect could have been introduced. Yet Psalm 89 still maintains that the Davidic promise-covenant is unconditional, although changing the unconditional nature of the psalm into a conditional one would have brought the covenant more in line with political reality and resolved the theological problem. Such a transformation would have been part of the psalmist's toolbox, for many other texts employed exactly this type of change (e.g., Ps. 132:12; 1 Kgs 2.3–4, 6.12, 8.25).[35]

Heim's main point is well taken. Yet what has not been noted sufficiently in recent scholarship is that while later writers do adapt and apply Nathan's oracle to their present contexts and theological tensions, their exegesis is more firmly rooted in the original oracle than is frequently allowed.[36] This is because the oracle itself has elements that are both conditional and unconditional. Later writers may focus more on the unconditional aspects found in 2 Samuel 7:11b–13 and 16 (e.g., 2 Sam. 22:51 = Ps. 18:51 [18:50 EV]), or on the conditional aspects found in 2 Samuel 7:14–15 (Ps. 132:12; 1 Kings 2:3–4; 6:12; 8:25; 2 Chron. 6:16; 7:17–18; Jer. 22:1–5, 24). Indeed, in Psalm 89, which is so focused on the unconditional aspect, the conditional side does surface. Two verses in particular should be highlighted:

Psalm 89:31–34 (89:30–33)

אִם־יַעַזבוּ בָנָיו תּוֹרָתִי
וּבְמִשְׁפָּטַי לֹא יֵלֵכוּן
אִם־חֻקֹּתַי יְחַלֵּלוּ

וּמִצְוֹתַי לֹא יִשְׁמֹרוּ
וּפָקַדְתִּי בְשֵׁבֶט פִּשְׁעָם
וּבִנְגָעִים עֲוֹנָם
וְחַסְדִּי לֹא־אָפִיר מֵעִמּוֹ
וְלֹא־אֲשַׁקֵּר בֶּאֱמוּנָתִי׃

If his sons abandon my Torah
and do not walk in my ordinances,
if they profane my statutes
and do not keep my commands,
I will punish their transgression with a rod
and their offense with strokes,
but my covenant loyalty I will not cancel from him,
and I will not prove false in my faithfulness.

Verse 31 relates directly to Deuteronomy 17 and emphasizes that the Davidic king must know and keep Torah in order for this to be the basis of his rule of the nation (as in Isa. 11:3a). While the emphasis is on the faithfulness of Yahweh, the need for Torah keeping on the part of the king is duly noted.

Psalm 89:50 (89:49 EV)

אַיֵּה חֲסָדֶיךָ הָרִאשֹׁנִים אֲדֹנָי
נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְדָוִד בֶּאֱמוּנָתֶךָ׃

Where are your former *ḥăsādîm*, O LORD,
which you swore to David in faithfulness?

This text appeals to the acts of *ḥesed* promised by Yahweh in the Davidic covenant and performed by the Lord for at least some of the descendants of David, although apparently not in the life situation of the psalmist. Williamson proposes that when the referent is God, it is normal to think of him as demonstrating *ḥesed*, and so the subjective genitive is standard. He argues that in the first instance where the referent is certainly postulated of a human, the meaning is spelled out to avoid misunderstanding.[37] I would argue that the pronominal referent is normally subjective, regardless of whether God or a human is the referent. Here, Hebrew *ḥăsādêkâ* must be

read as a subjective genitive, as Williamson acknowledges.[38] But in order for the psalmist to clarify that the acts of covenant kindness performed by Yahweh are previous in time and promised in the Davidic covenant, the modifier "former" and a relative clause are added to the bound phrase. Thus, clarifying modifiers can be added regardless of whether the referent is divine or human.

First Kings 3:6 and the parallel 2 Chronicles 1:8 are illuminating in revealing Solomon's understanding of the role of David's faithfulness in the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise:

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלֹמֹה אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ עִם־עַבְדְּךָ דָוִד אָבִי חֶסֶד גָּדוֹל
כַּאֲשֶׁר הָלַךְ לְפָנֶיךָ בֶּאֱמֶת וּבְצֶדֶק וּבְיֹשֶׁר לֵבָב עִמָּךְ
וַתִּשְׁמָר־לוֹ אֶת־הַחֶסֶד הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה
וַתִּתֶּן־לוֹ בֵן יֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסְאוֹ כַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה

> Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day." (NIV)

Here Yahweh performs his covenant obligation, but David performs his as well, and thus the promise is fulfilled.

Lastly, before considering the exegetical issues in Isaiah 55, 2 Chronicles 6:42 must be treated as the only other place where the bound phrase *ḥasdê dāwīd* occurs. Without repeating the excellent observations of W. A. M. Beuken,[39] we may note here that the emphasis is not only on Yahweh fulfilling his covenant obligations but also on the Davidic son fulfilling his.

The first section of 2 Chronicles 6 (verses 1–11) entails the blessing of Solomon. Verse 4 contains references to Yahweh's promises to David. Two promises are mentioned in verse 5: (1) choosing a city for the temple, and (2) choosing a leader over Israel. Then verse 6 observes the fulfillment of these two promises: (1) Yahweh chose Jerusalem for the temple, and (2) he chose David to rule his people Israel. Verses 7–11 go on to explain why it would be David's son and not David who would build the temple that stores the documents of the Mosaic Torah, or Israelite covenant. The explanation

appeals directly to Nathan's oracle. The two themes established in verses 1–11, choice of Jerusalem for temple and choice of David for leader, are important for understanding the Chronicler at the end of the prayer.

The second section, 2 Chronicles 6:12–42, records the prayer of Solomon. In verse 14, Solomon begins by praising Yahweh as the God who keeps covenant and *ḥesed* to those who walk before him in complete devotion. This is central. Certainly, the covenant with David entails promises that Yahweh must keep to be faithful. But the oracle through Nathan makes clear that Yahweh will keep them only to and through a faithful son. Therefore, from the Chronicler's point of view, the promises of Yahweh will be fulfilled only when the throne is occupied by an obedient son. What the subsequent course of history shows is that Yahweh must not only keep the promises but also provide the obedient son if the covenant is to be maintained.

Verse 15 emphasizes that Yahweh spoke with his mouth and fulfilled with his hands the commitments he made in regard to David, Solomon's father. In verse 16, Solomon asks Yahweh to fulfill his promises to David concerning David's sons only if the sons faithfully follow Torah, *as David did*. Verse 17 repeats the request for Yahweh to fulfill his promise.

To this point Solomon is calling on Yahweh to be faithful to his promises to David, but he has underlined (1) the obedience of David and (2) the necessity of the obedience of the sons for the promises to work.

Verses 18–40 constitute a request that God hear prayers made in and toward this temple. The various situations are all based on the Mosaic covenant (Exodus and Deuteronomy).

At the end of the prayer something interesting happens in the Chronicler's account, which is different from the prayer in 1 Kings 8. First, 2 Chronicles 6:39b–40 quickly summarizes 1 Kings 8:50–53. Then in 2 Chronicles 6:41–42, the Chronicler quotes, almost verbatim, Psalm 132:8–10. Beuken's comments on this use of Psalm 132 need not be repeated here. Beuken's argument, which supports understanding David as subject of the acts of kindness, may be strengthened, however, by a few significant observations. When we recall that the book of Psalms was Israel's hymnal, the reader of Chronicles immediately picks up Psalm 132

as part of the context in 2 Chronicles 6. This is because Psalm 132 addresses the concerns raised at the beginning of 2 Chronicles 6: (1) the choice of Zion for the temple and (2) the choice of David and his sons as leaders of Israel. From the historical point of view of the Chronicler, both of these have been in grave jeopardy. Yet Psalm 132 is a *prayer* for Yahweh to keep his oath to David based on a faithful David. This is the clear meaning of verse 12 and especially of the phrase in verse 10, "on account of David your servant." The Hebrew for "on account of" is the preposition *ba'ăbûr*, employed in forty-nine instances in the Hebrew Bible: in eighteen instances *ba'ăbûr* is bound to an infinitive or prefixed verb form and means "in order that." In the thirty-one remaining instances the preposition is bound to a proper noun/pronoun or suffixed verb form[40] and means "on account of" or "for the sake of."[41] In every case where the preposition is bound to a proper noun, the prepositional phrase means "on account of what a person did" and not "on account of doing something on behalf of a person." An interesting confirmation of the use of *ba'ăbûr* is found in Genesis 26:24, where *ba'ăbûr 'abrāhām* is a shorthand equivalent of *'ēqeb 'āšer šāma' 'abrāhām beqôlî* ("because Abraham obeyed my voice") in Genesis 26:5.[42] In 2 Chronicles 6:42, the phrase *ḥasdê dāwīd* substitutes for *ba'ăbûr dāwīd* in the citation of Psalm 132:10 and therefore probably intended the same thing.[43] In this way, the Chronicler has Solomon praying for Yahweh to keep his promises on account of the faithfulness of David. It would work well in the context that Solomon is appealing for Yahweh to be faithful because of the obedience of his father.[44] However, in the context of Chronicles, with its messianic focus, this is more likely a hope in a future king who will at last be an obedient son, so that the promises may be fulfilled by Yahweh.

In sum, some of the later texts emphasize the part of the son (1 Kings 2:2–4; 6:12; 8:25; 9:4–9; 2 Chron. 6:42; 7:17; Ps. 132:11–12), while others stress the faithfulness of the father (2 Sam. 22:51; 1 Kings 3:6; 8:15, 24–26; 1 Chron. 17:13; 2 Chron. 1:8; 6:4, 10, 14–15, 16; 7:10; Ps. 89:28–37; Jer. 33:19–26) in the covenant relationship.

Interpretation of Isaiah 55:3

Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.
Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know,
and a nation that did not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you. (Isa. 55:3–5 ESV)

Isaiah 55:3–5 is an extremely important text in relation to understanding both the Davidic covenant and the new covenant in Scripture. Debate has raged for some time over the interpretation of the phrase *ḥasdê dāwīd* in verse 3, a phrase rendered in the KJV by "the sure mercies of David." We will engage the major players in the debate and challenge the standard view by rethinking the evidence from the grammar of the Hebrew language and from the versions. We will argue, contrary to the consensus of scholarship, that the "sure mercies" are *by David* rather than *for David*. Moreover, by properly relating the text in a canonical and theological trajectory from Genesis 1 through Deuteronomy 17 and 2 Samuel 7 to Isaiah 55:3, the passage in Isaiah can be interpreted as applying 2 Samuel 7:19 to the future Davidic servant-king who brings about the everlasting covenant in Isaiah 53–54. The citation in Acts 13 is seen as providing strong support for this interpretation.

The Construct Phrase in Scholarly Debate

In 1965, André Caquot challenged the standard view[45] that *dāwīd* is to be construed as object in the bound noun phrase *ḥasdê dāwīd* in Isaiah 55:3 and argued instead that *dāwīd* is to be understood as the subject of the acts of covenant kindness and love.[46] His analysis was adopted and developed further by Beuken in 1974 but was rejected by Hugh Williamson in 1978 and by Walter Kaiser in 1989.[47] Recent commentators follow Williamson directly or simply maintain the standard view.[48]

First, Williamson scrutinizes the ancient versions and concludes that the Septuagint, contrary to claims by Caquot, in fact supports construing David as an objective genitive (in the phrase *ḥasdê dāwīd*). He further maintains that not only the Vulgate, as Caquot admits, but also the Targum preserves the ambiguity of the Hebrew. Only the Peshitta supports the subjective genitive. Later we shall return to the ancient versions and in particular to the Septuagint of Isaiah 55:3 and the citation of it in Acts 13:34.

Second, Williamson considers the claim from grammatical observations that when *ḥesed* is bound to a noun or pronominal suffix, virtually everywhere the free member or pronominal suffix indicates the subject or agent of the kindness. With Caquot he notes that the plural of *ḥesed* occurs eighteen times in the Hebrew Bible. Apart from Genesis 32:11, the noun is always in a bound phrase, and the free member is always subjective—aside from the disputed passages, Isaiah 55:3 and 2 Chronicles 6:42. But do these facts, he argues, necessarily require that we read Isaiah 55:3 as subjective?

As an alternative approach, Williamson claims that in every text that chronologically precedes Isaiah 55:3, the one who exercises *ḥăsādîm* is God. Thus, the readers of Isaiah would have construed the phrase in 55:3 as referring to the covenant loyalty of God rather than of David. He bolsters this claim by asserting that in the first instance where *ḥăsādîm* is certainly postulated of a human, the meaning is spelled out to avoid misunderstanding: *ḥăsāday ’ăšer ‘āśîtî* (Neh. 13:14). Williamson then turns attention to the far more common singular use of *ḥesed* and argues that in Psalm 5:8; Ezra 7:28; 9:9; Nehemiah 13:22b; and especially Psalm 144:2 and Jonah 2:9, we have examples where the objective use is possible, probable, or even certain.

Lastly, Williamson considers the context of Isaiah 55:3. He argues that the use of *ḥesed* and *ne’ĕmān* link the passage strongly to 2 Samuel 7, and he critiques the proposals of Beuken and Caquot to demonstrate that the context emphasizes the faithfulness of God to David and not the reverse. He presents evidence to show that *ḥasdê dāwīd hanne’ĕmānîm* must be read in apposition to *bĕrît ‘ôlām*, and that construing the text this way is not only the most natural reading but also requires the interpretation that David is objective rather than subjective.

In responding to Williamson, we must begin by affirming that both Beuken and Caquot are correct in observing that the normal way to construe the bound phrase is to interpret David as agent or subject. Out of eighteen instances in the plural in the Old Testament, only two are considered objective, and after Williamson thoroughly scoured the materials, out of 228 occurrences of the singular only six can be found that may possibly or probably be read as objective.[49] There is no point in debating the interpretation of these six texts. The extreme paucity and debatable interpretation of these texts only supports the contention of Beuken and Caquot and strongly suggests that arguments to the contrary constitute special pleading. Linguistic usage demands, then, that the first notion to enter the mind of the native reader is to construe the free member as subject. That the free member in Isaiah 55:3 and 2 Chronicles 6:42 is human and not divine is an interesting point that does not necessarily support construing the free member as objective.[50] Williamson argues that in the first case where *ḥăsādîm* is certainly postulated of a man, the meaning is spelled out to avoid misunderstanding, *ḥăsāday ’ăšer ‘āśîtî* (Neh. 13:14), but he fails to observe that the construction in Nehemiah 13:14 is basically the same as in Genesis 32:11, where God is agent of the acts of loyal love. The addition of the relative clause in Nehemiah 13:14 is motivated only by the fact that it emphasizes the agent and does not function to avoid misunderstanding over whether the pronominal suffix is objective or subjective. In Genesis 32:11, however, Williamson fails to note that the speaker is the recipient of the acts of loyal love, and this may be the reason why here, and only here, *ḥesed* (in the plural) is not and perhaps, according to usage, cannot be used in a construct phrase.

The use of *ḥesed* in bound phrases, however, is only one factor in the correct interpretation of this text. Other important contextual, grammatical, and lexical considerations are as follows. The most natural reading of the bound phrase in relation to the whole is to construe it in apposition to the *bĕrît ‘ôlām* of Isaiah 55:3a. This Williamson has defended well, as have many scholars before him. For דָּוִד, one normally thinks of the historical person who was king over Israel after Saul and who began the only lasting dynasty in Israelite monarchy. Here, then, is the *crux* of the matter. We

know of a covenant relationship established between Yahweh, God of Israel, on the one hand and David and his descendants on the other (2 Samuel 7). Yet what *ḥăsādîm*, that is, what acts of covenant kindness on the part of David or his sons, what acts fulfilling the human obligations in this covenant, could possibly constitute an everlasting covenant and so satisfy the context of Isaiah 55? Here is where scholars are driven to consider other possibilities, and the conventional interpretation has for the most part opted for construing דָּוִד in the bound phrase as objective. At this point, rebuttals of and rejoinders to Beuken and Caquot by Williamson and Kaiser are persuasive. Acts of grace and kindness by King David do not satisfy the context in Isaiah 55. Yet neither is the conventional interpretation free of problems. Williamson understands the phrase to mean God's covenant faithfulness to David, "giving rise to such translations as 'my steadfast, sure love for David' (RSV)."[51] The NIV renders it "my faithful love promised to David." Kaiser's translation is similar: "the unfailing kindnesses promised to David."[52] The fact of the matter, however, is that reading David as an objective genitive does not yield a translation such as that of Kaiser or the NIV. The term *ḥasdê* in the bound phrase means the acts performed either by David (subjective) or for David (objective). *Ḥasdê dāwīd* cannot, therefore, mean "blessings" or "faithfulness promised" to David. It can only mean actions that fulfill covenant obligations/stipulations.

Exegesis of Isaiah 55:3

We may now turn directly to the exegesis of Isaiah 55:3. At once the major problem for Williamson, who readily admits that *ḥesed* nearly always governs a subjective genitive, is to understand how acts of *ḥesed* performed by David can possibly satisfy the context of Isaiah 55:3. Here one can sympathize with objections raised by Williamson and others to the proposals of Beuken and Caquot. Nonetheless, there is a third option, and that is to construe David as a rubric for the future king who will arise from the Davidic dynasty and not as the founder of the line.[53] Clear evidence exists for this in the context in that Isaiah 55:3b is expressed in the future tense. In 55:4, however, although נְתַתִּיו is a perfect tense, it refers to the fact

that Yahweh *has planned* a *future* role for the Davidic king to play. This interpretation fully preserves standard usage for the Hebrew perfect and shows how the future orientation is maintained.

This option was considered—and rejected—previously by Franz Delitzsch and more recently by Walter Kaiser, following Delitzsch.[54] Delitzsch says, "The directly Messianic application of the name 'David' is to be objected to, on the ground that the Messiah is never so called without further remark."[55] This objection is not serious. It wrongly assumes that the manner of reference in Isaiah must match that in other prophets and fails to note the patterns of reference in Isaiah itself. The name David in Isaiah refers elsewhere to the historical personage in the expression "the city of David" (22:9; 29:1). In addressing Hezekiah, Isaiah calls Yahweh the "God of David your father" (38:5). The phrases "house/tent of David" (7:2, 13; 16:5; 22:22) and "throne of David" (9:7) are expressions used to refer to descendants of David, whether in the author's present or future. Thus the use of the name David in Isaiah shows that a future descendant is uppermost in the author's thought. Daniel I. Block's study "My Servant David: Ancient Israel's Vision of the Messiah" provides strong evidence that the figure of the servant of Yahweh in Isaiah is both Davidic and royal.[56] The figurative language in which the Davidic king and kingdom are portrayed as a majestic tree cut down (Isa. 6:13) and the reference to the shoot and root in Isaiah 53:2 clearly connect this text to the vision of the future king who is the shoot and root of Jesse in Isaiah 11:1, 10. As Alec Motyer notes, "The reference to *Jesse* indicates that the *shoot* is not just another king in David's line but rather another David."[57] The connection between the future king of Isaiah 9 and 11 and the servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 53 in the history of interpretation is as old as the Septuagint. The rendering of *yônēq* in 53:2 by παιδίον shows a clear connection with 9:5 (9:6 EV) in the mind of the Greek translator.[58] Key to the identity of the servant of Yahweh is Isaiah 49:3 and 6 in the Second Servant Song.[59] One text says the servant is Israel; another affirms that the servant will restore the tribes of Jacob (= Israel). The servant is Israel, yet he restores Israel. How can we resolve this enigmatic and apparently contradictory situation? When the servant is seen as a royal figure, we can propose a solution. There

is a sense in which the king *is the nation in himself* and yet can also be the deliverer of the nation. If *dāwīd* in 55:3 refers to the future king, a precedent would already be set by Hosea 3:5, a usage more similar than those in Jeremiah (30:8–9) and Ezekiel (34:23, 24; 37:24, 25).

With the above exposition of "sonship" in the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7 and the understanding that Isaiah 55:3 refers to a future David, the pieces of the text can now be put together. This approach best suits the flow of thought in Isaiah and best explains what the phrases "witness of the peoples" and "leader and commander of the peoples" mean in context; it best explains the apposition of "faithful acts of loyal love by David" to "eternal covenant" and why "faithful" is used as a modifier. These arguments can be unpacked as follows.

The first vision of a future restored Zion is found in Isaiah 2, where Mount Zion becomes the highest mountain in the new world and all the nations stream to it to receive instruction (*tôrâ*) and the word of the Lord. This vision, along with the one in chapter 4, shows that the future Mount Zion has inherited the role of both Eden and Sinai and that the city, once a whore (1:21) is now characterized by social justice (1:26), as the term "holy" (4:3) indicates.

The visions in 9:5–6 (9:6–7 EV) and 11:1–10 bring a new twist. A future king, a new David, will arise. He will delight in the fear of the Lord, here a synonym for Torah as in Psalm 19. Thus he will fulfill the command of Deuteronomy 17:18–20 and as a result will implement the social justice of the Torah (Isa. 11:3b–5). According to 11:10, the King himself will become a banner for the nations. Here we see that the nations who stream to Zion in 2:1–4 will receive the Torah of Yahweh *through* the Davidic king. The servant of Yahweh—already connected to this future king—will bring justice to the nations in 42:1, 3–4; 49:1, 6. Also in the context of a Servant Song, the fact that a banner is raised to the nations is repeated in 49:22. In short, as the son of God, a future David will bring God's instruction and rule to all the nations, as indicated in 2 Samuel 7.

Scholars have emphasized that *ḥasdê dāwīd hanne'ĕmānîm* in Isaiah 55:3b functions in apposition to *bĕrît ʻôlām* in 55:3a. What acts of *ḥesed* on the part of the future David can constitute an eternal covenant? The arm of

Yahweh is part of the new exodus theme that permeates all of Isaiah. The occurrence in 50:2 initiates a focus (51:5, 9; 52:10) on the arm that reaches a climax in the Fourth Servant Song in 53:1. Nevertheless, when Yahweh rolls up his sleeves and bares his arm, no one would have believed it. The future king does not crush his enemies and rid the land of evil (11:3–5) by military force, prowess, and strategies but simply by his word (11:4; 49:2; 50:4) and by offering himself as an *ʾāšām* (53:10).[60] Thus the means and manner in which Yahweh's Torah is brought to the nations and in which his kingship is effected among them (a commander and leader of the peoples) are detailed by the four Servant Songs, and in particular by the Fourth Song (52:13–53:12). It is the acts of *ḥesed* on the part of the servant that establish and initiate the discussion on the eternal covenant in Isaiah 54, of which 55:3 continues the thread.[61] It is because the servant is the "covenant of the people" in himself (42:6; 49:8) that the apposition of *ḥasdê dāwīd* and *bĕrît ʿôlām* in 55:3 makes sense.

Isaiah 55:4–5 speaks of the future David being a witness to the nations and a leader and commander of the peoples. This speaks far more of fulfilling the human obligations in the Davidic covenant than of a specific focus on fulfilling the divine obligations. In explaining the phrase עֵד לְאוּמִּים, Beuken concludes that "David's witness had consisted neither of his lot in itself nor of the trustworthiness of the connection between proclamation and fulfillment of rescue. More properly it consisted of the outspoken praise of God among the nations."[62] Williamson counters by appealing to John Eaton:

> Eaton here finds three aspects to this royal role, each of which fits the context, namely, of the king as one who exhorts and admonishes, as one who is able out of his own experience to testify to God's revelation and salvation, and thirdly as one who, by his very existence, is an "evidential sign" to the nations.[63]

John Eaton argues that the second is the most significant. This fails to consider the central function of the king to effect the instruction of Yahweh in the lives of the people and even to the nations: "This is the instruction for

humankind" (2 Sam. 7:19). This is what is prominent in Isaiah. The servant of Yahweh brings Yahweh's Torah to the distant islands.

A false start was made in trying to connect David as witness in Isaiah 55:4 and Psalm 89:38 (89:37 EV). The idea that David or his seed is the witness in Psalm 89:38 (89:37 EV) is suggested by Eaton and found "attractive" by Williamson.[64] As Timo Veijola has shown, *ne'ĕmān* in Psalm 89:38 (89:37 EV) is a predicate adjective,[65] not attributive, and 89:37ab–38a (89:36ab–37a EV) form a tricolon so that 89:38b (89:37b EV) is not parallel to 89:38a (89:37a EV).[66] Consequently, we cannot translate this phrase "the faithful witness in the sky," as does the NIV. Williamson's rendering, "and he is established to be witness in the clouds,"[67] does recognize the grammatical problem in construing *ne'ĕmān* as attributive, but this is not a natural reading of what is a simple nominal sentence. In Psalm 89:38 (89:37 EV), therefore, Veijola suggests that Yahweh, not the Davidic seed, is the witness: "The Witness in the sky is faithful."

A careful examination of all instances of *'ēd* in the Hebrew Bible points in a different direction than earlier proposals for Isaiah 55:4 and better suits the interpretation proposed. The role of the Davidic king in fulfilling his covenant obligations is defined by divine sonship, based on 2 Samuel 7:14–15 and Deuteronomy 17:18–20. The king's rule is to exhibit the justice and righteousness of Yahweh himself. Foundational to this is the Torah that the king must copy for himself and keep with him. Then the divine justice and righteousness in the Torah will shine through every aspect of the king's decisions and government. The logic of being a son of a universal deity and the statement of 2 Samuel 7:19 together show that this instruction is not only for Israel but for all the nations. This argument explains how and why the Davidic king is a witness and is more to the point than that given by Eaton and Williamson.

Nonetheless, there is much more. A lexical study of *'ēd* shows that a witness functions in *covenant* relationships, especially with a view to restoring broken relationships. When Laban and Jacob make a covenant, a heap of stones functions as a witness. As Timo Veijola explains, "When a treaty is violated, it is the duty of the witness to stand forth and accuse the partner who transgressed the treaty (cf. Gen 31:50)."[68] This is what the

Davidic king is for the nations. Note that in the Servant Songs, twice the servant of Yahweh is informed that he will become in his person a covenant with the people (Isa. 42:6; 49:8). Just as the term "witness" can sometimes replace "covenant"—so that, for example, the "ark of the covenant" becomes the "ark of witness"—so here to say that David is a witness to the peoples correlates with the statements in the Servant Songs that he is a covenant to the people. Moreover, the background of Isaiah 19 is significant. *David* is to the *nations* what the *altar* is to *Egypt* in Isaiah 19:20.[69] He speaks to the nations of their covenant disloyalty, of their broken obligations to the creator God, and he brings about the restoration of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the nations. As stated earlier, the means and manner in which Yahweh's Torah is brought to the nations and in which his kingship is effected among them are detailed by the four Servant Songs and in particular by the Fourth Song in 52:13–53:12. And this is why a nation that does not know Israel and also one that Israel does not know comes running to her through the work of her king as witness.

The king is also a leader and commander of peoples (*nāgîd ûmeşawweh le'ummîm*). The most recent and thorough treatment of *nāgîd*, particularly in the context of 2 Samuel 5:17–7:29, is that of Donald F. Murray. His conclusion is worth citing:

> In our texts the *melek* is one who sees his power from Yahweh as susceptible to his own arbitrary manipulation, who obtrudes himself inappropriately and disproportionately between Yahweh and Israel, and who treats Israel as little more than the subjects of his monarchic power. The *nāgîd*, on the other hand, is positively portrayed as one who sees his power as a sovereign and inviolable devolvement from Yahweh, who acts strictly under the orders of Yahweh for the benefit of Yahweh's people, and holds himself as no more than the willing subject of the divine monarch.[70]

No description better fits the role of the future king in Isaiah 1–39 and the role of the servant of the Lord in Isaiah 40–66 in implementing Yahweh's

kingship. Thus Isaiah employs *nāgîd* because the future David fulfills the role of obedient son in the framework of the Davidic covenant.

Finally, one must adequately explain the description of *ḥasdê dāwīd* as *hanne'ĕmānîm*. Williamson finds that Caquot "merely suggests an interpretation that suits his view" while Beuken "sees the problem posed by *hanne'ĕmānîm* more clearly."[71] He then seeks to show that when associated with *ḥesed*, *dāwīd*, and *bĕrît*, *ne'ĕmān* must surely point to Nathan's oracle. If we grant this, it may support interpreting it as a subjective genitive as much or more than an objective genitive, since the oracle is just as concerned with the faithfulness of an obedient son as it is with the faithfulness of Yahweh to his promises. Even here, Williamson is somewhat unfair in his treatment of the evidence:

> In Ps. lxxviii. 37 we find that the Israelites "were not true to his covenant." However, since this unique explicit application of *n'mn* to the human partner in a covenant with God is cast in the negative, it would be precarious indeed to seek to use it in any way to elucidate the quite different atmosphere of Isa. lv. 3 (*contra* Beuken, p. 53). Finally, in Neh. ix. 8 it is said that God found Abraham's heart faithful (*n'mn*), so that he made his covenant with him. However, whilst this is certainly the closest parallel to Isa. lv. 3 which could suggest a subjective genitive, it should be pointed out against this conclusion that whereas in Neh. ix. 8 *n'mn* qualifies Abraham's heart (and hence Abraham himself), in Isa. lv. 3 the plural *hanne'emānîm* must be construed with *ḥasdê*, and not with the singular *dwd*.[72]

This can only be classified as specious linguistic reasoning. Whether the person or the person's deeds are counted faithful does not affect whether one is speaking of God or of human beings. And whether the actions are negative in one place and positive in another does not change the fact that the term can be applied to humans. What Williamson has missed is the atmosphere of Isaiah, where in both the section concerning bad King Ahaz (Isaiah 7–9) and the section concerning good King Hezekiah (Isaiah 36–39), the history of the monarchy shows that we are still desperately awaiting an obedient Davidic son. While the faithfulness of Yahweh may be questioned in Psalm 89, it is not an issue in Isaiah.

Williamson summarizes his approach to the problem as follows:

> Thus far we have sought to show, first, that the versions cannot legitimately be invoked to settle the issue of how to construe *ḥsdy dwd*, and secondly, that although it is true that *ḥsd* nearly always governs a subjective genitive, there are indications that this need not necessarily be so in every case, but that the context should be the deciding factor.[73]

This is largely sound. The ancient versions do hold weight in the history of interpretation, but they cannot settle the issue. The pattern of constructions used with *ḥesed*, however, carries great weight. While I am not persuaded that Williamson has succeeded in showing that genuine cases of the objective genitive exist, the first datum in the context is the predilection of the native speaker to construe *ḥasdê dāwīd* as subjective. So the burden of proof lies in showing that the context requires a meaning other than the subjective genitive. The main reasons interpreters have sought to interpret the text from the point of view of an objective genitive are a failure to see that a future, not historical, David is in view and a failure to observe properly the trajectory of the covenants in the Old Testament and the flow of thought both in the book of Isaiah as a whole and in the near context of chapter 55. While some interpreters use such renderings in English as "the promises of grace to David"[74] or "the unfailing kindnesses promised to David,"[75] paraphrases that actually go beyond linguistic parameters for a literal translation as an objective genitive, these renderings really show how awkward it is to construe it this way. The blessings do come to the nations, not because Yahweh's promises to David are democratized in the way some think[76] but because a new David who is an obedient son succeeds in bringing Yahweh's Torah to all humans. If we follow through on the subjective genitive, the kindnesses of David could involve sharing the victory of the one with the many (see Isa. 53:10–12)[77] so that all are now sons and daughters of God, just as all are now servants. This might be a way in which the future David democratizes the covenant.

The Citation of Isaiah 55:3 in Acts 13:34

The question remains, do the Septuagint of Isaiah 55:3 and the citation in Acts 13:34 support an objective genitive, as Williamson claims? He notes that the neuter plural ὅσια occurs only in Deuteronomy 29:19, where *šālôm yihyeh-lî* is rendered idiomatically by ὅσιά μοι γένοιτο. Then he appeals to independent studies by J. Dupont[78] and Evald Lövestam,[79] who argue that ὅσια signifies "a general expression for blessings and good gifts which may be expected from the deity."[80] Finally, he argues that according to the majority of commentators, this meaning best suits the citation in Acts 13:34.

First, one should begin by considering the normal meaning of ὅσιος and the translation technique used for *ḥesed* in Isaiah. As our standard Greek lexica show, ὅσιος has two basic meanings: (1) it refers to what is divinely permitted or sanctioned, and (2) it describes persons or their deeds as devout, holy, or pious. There are actually two parallel passages where the neuter plural is found: Deuteronomy 29:19 and Wisdom of Solomon 6:10. In both passages, the first meaning, "sanctioned by divine law," fits well. Thus ὅσιά μοι γένοιτο in Deuteronomy 29:19 may be rendered "may I be allowed to,"[81] and οἱ γὰρ φυλάξοντες ὁσίως τὰ ὅσια may be translated "those who have kept the holy ordinances in holiness."[82] Whether these parallels assist in interpreting Isaiah 55:3 remains to be seen.

The term *ḥesed* was encountered in eight instances by the Greek translator of Isaiah, and normally he employed ἔλεος, a standard equivalent among Septuagint translators (Isa. 16:5; 54:8, 10; 63:7 [2x]). The rendering of *ʾanšê ḥesed neʿĕmānîn* in 57:1 by ἄνδρες δίκαιοι and the use of δόξα in 40:6 for the charm or grace of a blossom illustrate well that the translator is sensitive to context and capable of fully idiomatic renderings. Since the rendering τὰ ὅσια Δαυιδ in 55:3 deviates from the norm, it is likely a contextually motivated idiomatic rendering. If divine sanctions are in view, it could mean "the divine decrees of David." This seems an odd way to refer to the divine promises made to David in 2 Samuel 7. An objective genitive is possible, but such English renderings as "divine blessings/promises to David" stretch the field of meaning permitted for ὅσιος beyond the norm.[83] The phrase may also mean the divine duties or holy deeds/things of David. Again, an objective genitive is also possible,

but a subjective genitive seems less awkward. Honesty, however, compels one to admit that either a subjective or objective genitive is possible and that the meaning of the Septuagint translator is not readily transparent. Nonetheless, one might argue that he avoided the usual ἔλεος to show that God's kindnesses were not in view. Williamson does not explain why the Isaiah translator deviated from a more straightforward way of expressing that God's mercies were in view and used instead a unique expression.

Lastly, we note the citation of Isaiah 55:3 in Acts 13:34. Although this text has been discussed extensively and the majority view favors an objective genitive, an alternative interpretation is briefly argued here.

According to the context, in Acts 13 Paul is attending a meeting of the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, where he speaks to an audience consisting of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles (13:16, 26). His address is a retelling of the story of Israel, so one must pay attention to what is included and what is omitted. Doubtless, what we have recorded in Acts constitutes only the main points. Nonetheless, the election of the fathers, the exodus, and the period of the judges get only the barest mention as he hurries to the time when Israel requests a king. After discussing how Saul is given and also removed, Paul comes to David. He makes only one comment about David, but it is important: he will do everything that God wants. This is the faithful king of 2 Samuel 7. Next, he attempts to show that Jesus is the Savior God promised to bring to Israel from the line of David (Acts 13:23). Finally, Jesus's death and resurrection fulfill the words of the prophets (13:27). In 13:32, Paul offers good news to "you" (second-person plural), that is, his audience. What God promised to the fathers was now fulfilled for Paul and his hearers, their descendants, when he raised Jesus from the dead. Paul cites Psalm 2:7 and then affirms that God raised Jesus, no longer to return to corruption. That the resurrection of the Davidic son of Psalm 2 is to an incorruptible life is demonstrated by two further texts: Isaiah 55:3 and Psalm 16:10. In Isaiah 55:3, he (i.e., God) said, "I will give to you the faithful ὅσια of David." (Note that the "you" is second-person plural. The recipients, according to Paul, are his audience in Pisidian Antioch, the descendants of the people first promised "the faithful ὅσια of David." This makes perfect sense in view of Isaiah's doctrine of a remnant.) Now if Paul

meant τὰ ὅσια Δαυιδ τὰ πιστά to be a subjective genitive and if he understood "David" not as the historical David but as a rubric for the Messiah, his argument in context becomes plain. The explanation that David served his *own* generation is a clear statement that the historical David is not in view in verse 34. Instead, Isaiah refers to the Messiah. Since the pious deeds of David in the context of Isaiah 55:3 are the sufferings and death of the servant in Isaiah 53, the reference to resurrection becomes clear. Isaiah 53:11 affirms that "after the suffering of his soul he will see the light of life and be satisfied." Isaiah 53:12 shows the servant sharing his victory with the many. And it is natural for Paul to cite 55:3 and not a verse or two in chapter 53 because this is the text that applies the work of the servant to the nations. Once again, perhaps the reason why scholars have labored so hard to find an appropriate meaning for τὰ ὅσια in Acts 13:34 is that they are thinking of the wrong David.[84] This interpretation, then, for Acts 13:34 is plausible and also matches the proposal for Isaiah 55:3.

Finally, not only seasoned scholars but even beginners should cast a doubtful eye at an entry in the lexicon that allocates a meaning for ὅσια in one instance that is apparently so disconnected in meaning from standard usage. The new third edition by F. W. Danker removes Acts 13:34 from the section on "things divinely sanctioned" and gives it a numbered paragraph of its own. The explanation, however, is almost identical to that in the previous edition:

> The ref. to ὅσ. in δώσω ὑμῖν τὰ ὅς. Δαυὶδ τὰ πιστά *I will grant to you* (pl.) *the unfailing divine assurances* or *decrees relating to David* **Ac 13:34** is of special interest (for τὰ ὅσ. in the sense of divine decrees ordinances s. Wsd. 6:10; Jos., Ant 8,115—). This quot. fr. Is 55:3 is evidently meant to show that the quot. fr. Ps 15:10 [16:10 EV], which follows immediately, could not refer to the Psalmist David, but to Christ alone (cp. a sim. line of argument relating to a referent Hb 2:6–9). The promises to David have solemnly been transferred to "you." But David himself served not you, but his own generation (vs. 36). So the promises of God refer not to him, but to his Messianic descendant.[85]

The movement from “assurances” or “decrees” to “promises” is an unwarranted jump linguistically. If we supply from regular usage a meaning like “the pious deeds of David,” the comment in the lexicon would make good sense.

Conclusion

In conclusion, “the faithful kindnesses of David” mentioned in Isaiah 55:3 are kindnesses performed by David—a rubric for the future king in this text. The faithful or obedient acts of loyal love are those of the servant-king in Isaiah 53, whose offering of himself as an *’āšām* and whose resurrection enable him to bring to fulfillment the promises of Yahweh in the Davidic covenant and who is at the same time the basis for the new or everlasting covenant. This future king, then, fulfills the roles required for the king in Deuteronomy 17 and 2 Samuel 7 by bringing the divine instruction, or Torah, to Israel (Deuteronomy 17) and, indeed, to all the nations (2 Sam. 7:19). He is therefore a leader and commander of the peoples, and he becomes a covenant witness in himself to the nations. This is exactly how Acts 13:34 interprets Isaiah 55.

The Fulfillment of Promises to David

The promises entailed in the covenant with David are divided by the text into two: (1) those to be fulfilled during his lifetime and (2) those to be fulfilled after his death. Second Samuel 7:8–11a gives the promises to be fulfilled during David’s lifetime: (1) a great name, (2) a firm place for Israel as the people of God, and (3) rest for David from his enemies. Second Samuel 8 gives a list of David’s victories and is placed by the author strategically after chapter 7 to show the fulfillment of these three promises. According to 8:13, “David made a name for himself when he returned from striking down 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt” (ESV). The defeat of the enemies listed in chapter 8 shows that God made a firm place for his people Israel through these victories. In 1 Kings 5:4, Solomon attests to the fact that he has rest on every side—a legacy received from his father David.

The promises to be fulfilled after the death of David are also three: (1) an eternal house, (2) a kingdom, and (3) a throne. There are two ways in which

God could give David an eternal house. It could be that every descendant would be successful in producing a male heir—something that has always created problems for every human royal house. Or it could be that someday, a descendant would be born who would never die. According to the New Testament, this is what happened: the eternal house/seed is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, a descendant of David, who according to his resurrection is an eternal person. And through the coming, person, and work of Jesus Christ, an eternal kingdom has already begun (2 Pet. 1:11). The authors of the New Testament make plain that ever since Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father after his resurrection, he has been ruling from an eternal, heavenly throne (Acts 2:29–36; Heb. 12:22–24).

Relationship of the Davidic Covenant to the Israelite Covenant

As we have seen in the exposition of 2 Samuel 7, the king of Israel was to be the administrator of the Israelite covenant.[86] By depending on Yahweh for military victories, the king would point the people to the kingship of Yahweh. In his rule of the people he would represent God's social justice and also embody in his person the obedience of the people. Thus kingship in Israel was to be a means of accomplishing Exodus 19:3b–6: the king would be a devoted servant and son of God and would also function as a priest, instructing the nations in the righteousness of God and inviting them to come under the rule of Yahweh.

We see the priestly role of David in that he wears an ephod. The description of David in 2 Samuel 6:14 is identical in the Hebrew text to that of Samuel in 1 Samuel 2:18. We further see the priestly role of the Davidic king in Psalm 110:4. All this indicates that the king will accomplish in his person the purpose that God had for the nation of Israel as a whole, to be a kingdom of priests. The king will embody the nation in himself.

Above, in the discussion of the Fourth Servant Song (Isa. 52:13–53:12), we saw that there is a sense in which the king *is the nation in himself*, and yet can also be the deliverer of the nation. Genesis 20:4 is an excellent illustration of the corporate solidarity between king and people that was part and parcel of the culture of the ancient Near East:

> Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.
>
> But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman."
>
> Now Abimelech had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands." (Gen. 20:1–5 NIV)

Notice in this text that God communicates to Abimelech that he is a dead man because he has taken a married woman. Abimelech responds, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation?" Therefore the culture assumes that to kill the *king* is to destroy the *nation* (גּוֹי). This is a clear illustration of federal headship: the king *is* the nation *in himself*. Thus it is natural in the plan of God for the king of Israel, as Israel, to accomplish for the nation as a whole what the group of individuals have failed to do.[87]

Relationship of the Davidic Covenant to the Abrahamic Covenant

First, God will use David to bring rest to his people and to give them a place. Compare for a moment Genesis 15:18–21; Deuteronomy 11:24; and 1 Kings 4:20–21 (EV):

> On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites." (Gen. 15:18–21 ESV)

> Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours. Your territory shall be from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the western sea. (Deut. 11:24 ESV)

> Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy. Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. (1 Kings 4:20–21 ESV)

The borders of the land as envisaged in Genesis 15:18–21 are defined in Deuteronomy 11:24 as Israel's "place." First Kings 4:20–21 indicates that this geographical "place" belonged to Israel during the time of Solomon, David's son. So the covenant with David was a means to fulfill the promises in the Abrahamic covenant.

Second, God will use David to bring blessing to the nations as promised in the covenant with Abraham. The covenant with David is the charter or instruction for mankind. Isaiah 55 shows how the future king will by his acts of loving-kindness be a witness and a commander and leader of the peoples as he brings the divine instruction, or Torah, to all the nations.

The relation of the Davidic king to the Abrahamic covenant is described precisely by Psalm 72:17:

יְהִי שְׁמוֹ לְעוֹלָם
*יִנּוֹן שְׁמוֹ לִפְנֵי־שָׁמֶשׁ יָנִין
וְיִתְבָּרְכוּ בוֹ
כָּל־גּוֹיִם יְאַשְּׁרוּהוּ

> May his name endure forever,
> his fame continue as long as the sun!
> May people be blessed in him,
> all nations call him blessed! (ESV)

Verse 17b begins with another instance of the *hithpael* form of *bārak*. The rendering "may people be blessed in him" in the ESV is passive, as is common in the English versions. Keith Grüneberg argues that a speech action *hithpael* is more suitable:

> The verse begins with a request that the king's name endure. This would neatly introduce a statement that his fame will be such that other nations will use it in their blessings. . . . Gen 48:20 provides a

> clear example of how a person's name might be thus used. More importantly, יתברכו is parallel to יְאַשְּׁרוּהוּ, "call him happy"; this parallelism is close if the "blessing" is an utterance on the part of the nations.[88]

Benjamin Noonan, however, has shown that the analysis of Grüneberg makes several questionable assumptions concerning the relationship of Genesis 48:20 and the general usage of the *hithpael* of *bārak*. The use of the *beth* preposition there may not necessarily be the same as in the uses with the *hithpael*.[89]

Although the word that the ESV translates as "continue" in verse 17aβ is a bit obscure, it seems to belong to the plant/tree imagery employed for kings and kingdoms. We could render the verse thus:

> May his name endure forever,
> his name make shoots as long as the sun!
> May they consider themselves blessed by him,
> all nations call him happy!

The flow of thought in the psalm is simple. Whether "by" or "for" Solomon, it begins in 72:1 as a prayer to God to give his judgments and righteousness to the king. In 72:2, the result is that the king will judge with social justice.[90] In such a kingdom the needy and weak are given justice. His rule is extended to universal space and time. In 72:10, kings from the ends of the world pay tribute, and in 72:11, all nations serve him. So far we have an excellent exposition of 2 Samuel 7:19. In Psalm 72:12–17, the same theme is developed in another "round of discourse" on the same topic. The needy and weak receive help. The psalmist prays that many will offer prayer all day long for this king so that his name and the prosperity of his rule continue. Verse 17 fits appropriately into this flow of thought, where the psalmist prays that his fame might endure and that individuals of all nations might declare themselves blessed by him and call him happy. Noonan's analysis is similar:

> Recent analysis of Psalm 72 has focused on its structure and content vis-à-vis ancient Near Eastern ideologies of kinship, in which the king is portrayed as a mediator of prosperity and blessing. While the

> specific structure of this psalm is debated, many scholars acknowledge that verses 8–11 constitute a distinct unit portraying the king's international domination. These verses, which describe the world's nations as ingratiating themselves to the king in terms of submission, service, and tribute, are structurally and thematically linked to verse 17b. In light of this, the parallelism of וְיִתְבָּרְכוּ with יְאַשְּׁרוּהוּ should be understood in terms of ingratiation. . . . The preposition ב signifies the instrument of blessing since the king is the one whom the people rely upon for blessing and favor. . . . Thus, the point of this verse is not the uttering of blessings, but the nations' acts of ingratiation as a response to the king's role as mediator of blessing.[91]

Grüneberg notes, as many have observed, that the wording of 72:17bα is identical to the promises to Abraham: we have the same verb in the *hithpael*, the preposition *beth*, and the subject "all nations." Regardless, he is not inclined to see an allusion to Genesis:

> Some commentators propose that Psalm 72:17 alludes to the patriarchal promises, the Psalmist suggesting that those promises are fulfilled in or through the Davidic monarch. While this is hard to disprove, the Psalm seems perfectly comprehensible without seeing any allusion, and little else in the context suggests dependence on patriarchal traditions.[92]

Nonetheless, the idea that all nations are elated with the rule of the Davidic king could be expressed otherwise. In Psalm 2, the kings of the nations are invited to "kiss the Son" and develop an appropriate relation to him. Yet the wording in Psalm 72:17 is identical to the patriarchal promises. According to Genesis 28:14, the blessing of the nations comes through the nation of Israel. While the ideas in Psalm 72 are developed logically from the covenant promises to David in 2 Samuel 7, we see that the blessing of the nations comes through the king of Israel. It is hard to avoid the thought that here in Psalm 72 Solomon sees, as did David, that the Davidic covenant narrows the mediator of blessing to the nations from the nation of Israel as a whole to the king, who represents and stands for the nation.

The Septuagint translation of Psalm 72:17 is significant, because there the connections between this verse and the promises to Abraham are absolutely clear:

> καὶ εὐλογηθήσονται ἐν αὐτῷ πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς, πάντα τὰ ἔθνη μακαριοῦσιν αὐτόν. (Ps. 71:17b [72:17b EV])

The phrase πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς clearly recalls כֹּל מִשְׁפְּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה in Genesis 12:3 and the *inclusio* verse Genesis 28:14. While we need not pause to declare whether the parent text of the Septuagint is inferior or superior to the Masoretic Text, one may certainly say that it is possible that the rendering in the Masoretic Text arose from a scribe's eye skipping over phrases beginning with the same letters (כל), causing him to accidentally omit text. The poetic line verse 17bα also seems short and lacks an explicit subject. On the other hand, the text in the Septuagint may be due to the interpretation of the translator. Either way, the text in the Septuagint, probably from 200 BC, clearly connects Psalm 72:17 to the Abrahamic covenant, and its witness cannot be set aside lightly.

These considerations of Psalm 72 are strengthened by the arrangement in the final redaction of the Hebrew Psalter. David Mitchell, in his classic work on the eschatological program in the book of Psalms, notes the placement of Psalms 2 and 72 at the beginning of the first book and ending of the second book in the Psalter, respectively.[93] The former announces a victory for Yahweh's king, and the latter speaks of the kingdom established. These connections indicate that the blessing to the nations promised to Abraham is coming through the Davidic king/kingdom.

Third, an extremely important passage in Jeremiah shows that the Davidic covenant continues and guarantees the Abrahamic covenant because the promise of seed as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore *is now inherited by the seed of David*.

> "See, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will fulfill the good word I spoke to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause righteous growth to sprout for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be delivered, and Jerusalem will dwell securely.

> And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'"
>
> "For thus says the Lord: a man belonging to David sitting on the throne of the house of Israel will never be cut off, and a man of the Levitical priests will never be cut off forever from offering burnt offerings, burning grain offerings, and making sacrifices before me."
>
> The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "Thus says the Lord: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests as my ministers. The fact that the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured—in this way I will multiply the descendants [seed] of David my servant, and the Levitical priests who minister to me."
>
> The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "Have you not seen what these people have spoken, saying, 'The Lord has rejected the two clans that he chose'? Thus they have despised my people so that they are no longer a nation in their sight. Thus says the Lord: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth, then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his descendants to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them." (Jer. 33:14–26)

Clearly, the promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:17 is narrowed down and will be fulfilled specifically through the seed of David.

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1. Much of chap. 11 is adapted from Peter J. Gentry, "Rethinking the 'Sure Mercies of David' in Isaiah 55:3," *WTJ* 69, no. 2 (2007): 279–304. Used by permission of *Westminster Theological Journal*.

2. It is common today for couples to renew their marriage vows on their silver wedding anniversary in what is essentially a covenant-making ceremony. This is a modern-day example of "making a covenant to keep a covenant." It does not mean that the expression "make a covenant" in and of itself now refers to covenant renewal.

3. See William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1984), 132.

4. Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 190.

5. See John H. Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 65–73.

6. David's prayer in 2 Sam. 7:18–29 is remarkably *unique* in the entire Deuteronomistic history (Joshua–Kings) for the sheer repetition and variety of names for God: יהוה, 7:18, 24; אדני יהוה, 7:18, 19 (2x), 20, 22, 28, 29; אלהים, 7:22, 23, 24, 28; יהוה

אלהים, 7:25; יהוה צבאות, 7:26, 27; אלהים על ישראל, 7:26; אלהי ישראל, 7:27. I owe this insight to Florence White, a former student of Stephen G. Dempster.

7. See Donald F. Murray, *Divine Prerogative and Royal Pretension: Pragmatics, Poetics, and Polemics in a Narrative Sequence about David (2 Samuel 5.17–7.29)*, JSOTSup 264 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 281–301.

8. In the following literature consulted, the most useful article was that of Hoffmeier: John Day, "The Canaanite Inheritance of the Israelite Monarchy," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, JSOTSup 270 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 72–90; Ivan Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967); Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 300–301; James K. Hoffmeier, "The King as God's Son in Egypt and Israel," *JSSEA* 24 (1994): 28–38; T. Jacobsen, "The Concept of Divine Parentage of the Ruler in the Stela of the Vultures," *JNES* 2 (1943): 119–21; T. Kleven, "Kingship in Ugarit (= *KTU* 1.16 I 1–23)," in *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie*, ed. Lyle Eslinger and Glen Taylor, JSOTSup 67 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 29–53; Marjo C. A. Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds: Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine* (Münster, Germany: Ugarit-Verlag, 1990), 252–61; Antti Laato, "Second Samuel 7 and Ancient Near Eastern Royal Ideology," *CBQ* 59, no. 2 (1997): 244–69; Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings*, ConBOT 8 (Lund, Sweden: Gleerup, 1976), 259–74; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 152–56; Juan-Pablo Vita, "The Society of Ugarit," in *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies*, ed. W. G. E. Watson and N. Wyatt, HdO 39 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 455–98; K. W. Whitelam, "Israelite Kingship: The Royal Ideology and Its Opponents," in *The World of Ancient Israel*, ed. R. E. Clements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 119–40. I am grateful to John Walton for assistance in locating literature on this topic.

9. See P. E. Dion, "Ressemblance et image du Dieu," *Suppléments aux Dictionnaire de la Bible*, ed. H. Cazelles and A. Feuillet (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1992–), 55:365–403.

10. See Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, trans. W. G. E. Watson, HdO 67 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 226. Also noteworthy are K. A. Kitchen, "The King List of Ugarit," *UF* 9 (1977): 131–42; Kleven, "Kingship in Ugarit (*KTU* 1.16 I 1–23)," 29–53.

11. Cf. also P. Kyle McCarter Jr., "Two Bronze Arrowheads with Archaic Alphabetic Inscriptions," *ErIsr* 26 (1999): 123*–128*.

12. See Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 10 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 399–400.

13. See the excursus "Son of DN in Amarna/Ugaritic Texts" for a listing of all names in texts from Amarna and Ugarit of the type "son of DN."

14. Some argue that this is a dynastic name, but there is no clear evidence to support such an assertion. See K. Lawson Younger Jr., "Shalmaneser III and Israel," in *Israel—Ancient Kingdom or Late Invention?*, ed. Daniel I. Block (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 225–56.

15. See especially Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship*, 80.

16. For Mesopotamia, see, e.g., Wolfgang Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari: A New Translation, with Historical Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, MC 12 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 48; note texts such as 26:347 (p. 311) and 26:372 (p. 326), where "father" is used to refer to the suzerain. For Egypt and Canaan, "father" and "son" are terms used in the Amarna Letters (EA) of parties in suzerain-vassal treaties—for example, EA 44, 73, 82, in William L. Moran, ed. and trans., *The Amarna Letters*, new ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). Similar language comes from Phoenicia, as in the Kilamuwa and Karatepe inscriptions; see John C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, vol. 3, *Phoenician Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 47–48, 130–31. I am indebted to Gregory Smith and Jim Harriman for helping me locate these texts.

17. Anderson believes 2 Samuel 7 involves three overlapping concepts: adoption, covenant, and royal grant. A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, WBC 11 (Waco, TX: Word, 1989), 122. A main proponent that the Davidic covenant follows the model of royal grant is Moshe Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 90, no. 2 (1970): 184–203; and Weinfeld, "בְּרִית *berîth*," in *TDOT* 2:253–79. Yet evidence to demonstrate that 2 Samuel 7 lacks essential elements of the royal grant and may better fit a suzerain-vassal-treaty model was provided by Paul Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, AnBib 88 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1982), 181. See also the critique of Weinfeld by Gary N. Knoppers, "Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants and the Davidic Covenant: A Parallel?," *JAOS* 116, no. 4 (1996): 670–97. Thus Anderson is more to the point. More recently, Gordon Johnston has demonstrated that Weinfeld's dichotomy between royal-grant and suzerain-vassal treaties is too rigid and not supported by a reexamination of the evidence. Gordon Johnston, "A Critical Evaluation of Moshe Weinfeld's Approach to the Davidic Covenant in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants: What Did He Get Right and What Did He Get Wrong?" (unpublished paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November, 2011, San Francisco, CA).

18. Note in particular the connection between servant and sonship in the context of covenant in 2 Kings 16:7, and see Stephen G. Dempster, "The Servant of the Lord," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 136–37.

19. For this approach, see especially Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

20. See esp. chap. 6 and "Exodus 19–24 within the Larger Story of Scripture" in chap. 9.

21. Exodus 15:17 shows that Canaan becomes for Israel what the garden sanctuary was for Adam.

22. See Daniel I. Block, "The Burden of Leadership: The Mosaic Paradigm of Kingship (Deuteronomy 17:14–20)," in *How I Love Your Torah, O Lord! Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 118–39 (originally published in *BSac* 162 [2005]: 259–78).

23. Murray, *Divine Prerogative and Royal Pretension*, 299.

24. Note how Psalm 89, the psalm on the Davidic covenant par excellence, picks up on this point and also twice speaks of "my servant David" (Ps. 89:3, 20).

25. Dempster, "The Servant of the Lord," 128–78; cf. also Daniel I. Block, "My Servant David: Ancient Israel's Vision of the Messiah," in *Israel's Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 17–56.

1. The analysis is based on the following sources: Richard S. Hess, "Amarna Proper Names" (PhD diss., Hebrew Union College, 1984); Hess, *Amarna Personal Names*, ASOR Dissertation Series 9 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993); Moran, *The Amarna Letters* = EA; Daniel Sivan, *Grammatical Analysis and Glossary of the Northwest Semitic Vocables in Akkadian Texts of the 15th–13th C.B.C. from Canaan and Syria*, AOAT 214 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener, 1984) = GAGI.

2. The analysis is based on the following sources: Frauke Gröndahl, *Die Personennamen der Texte aus Ugarit*, StPohl 1 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967); del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* = DULA. References given according to abbreviations and format in DULA. All references were carefully checked in the best editions using Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places* (= *KTU*), 3rd ed. (Münster, Germany: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013); AT WO5 = Alalah Tablets, *Die Welt des Orients* 5, no. 1 (1969): 57–93; PRU = Claude F.-A. Schaeffer, ed., *Le Palais Royal d'Ugarit*, MRS 6–9 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1955–); RSOu = P. Bordreuil, ed., *Ras Shamra-Ougarit*, Publications de la Mission Française Archéologique de Ras Shamra-Ougarit (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1991–); Ug = Claude F.-A. Schaeffer, ed., *Ugaritica*, MRS 3, 5, 8, 15–18 (Paris: P. Guethner, 1939–). Additional information is provided from Richard S. Hess, "The Onomastics of Ugarit," in *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies*, ed. W. G. E. Watson and N. Wyatt, HdO 39 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 499–528; Wilfred H. van Soldt, *Studies in the Akkadian of Ugarit: Dating and Grammar*, AOAT 40 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener, 1991); W. G. E. Watson, "Ugaritic Onomastics (1)," *AuOr* 7 (1990): 113–27.

26. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Blessing of David: The Charter for Humanity," in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of Oswald Thompson Allis*, ed. John H. Skilton, Milton C. Fisher, and Leslie W. Sloat (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974), 311–12.

27. So Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907, 1953), s.v. Yet 2 Samuel 7:19 is the only instance provided for this meaning of *tôrâ*.

28. Fokkelman follows the JPS translation in construing the clause as precative but nonetheless views *hā'ādām* as objective: "May that be the law for the people." See J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses*, vol. 3, *Throne and City (II Sam. 2–8 & 21–24)* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1990), 240n67, 242.

29. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 151–52; Kaiser, "Blessing of David," 314–15.

30. Dominique Barthélemy, *Critique Textuelle de l'Ancien Testament*, vol. 1, *Josué, Juges, Ruth, Samuel, Rois, Chroniques, Esdras, Néhémie, Esther, Rapport final du Comité pour l'analyse textuelle de l'Ancien Testament hébreu institué par l'Alliance Biblique Universelle, établi en coopération avec Alexander R. Hulst, Norbert Lohfink, William D. McHardy, H. Peter Rüger, coéditeur, James A. Sanders, coéditeur*, OBO 50/1 (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 457–58.

31. On which, see P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, AB 9 (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 233; Hans J. Stoebe, *Das zweite Buch Samuelis*, KAT 8/2 (Gutersloh, Germany: Gutersloher, 1994), 231.

32. I owe this precise wording to Daniel I. Block. One major contribution to the study of 2 Samuel 7 is William M. Schniedewind, *Society and the Promise to David: The Reception History of 2 Samuel 7:1–17* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). His approach focuses on diachronic and synchronic aspects of interpretation as well as the function of the literature in the society at the time and yields important insights. While he is to be commended for dating the texts earlier than previous scholars, his analysis of editorial layers in the history of the text is seriously flawed because he does not consider the linguistic science of discourse grammar / text linguistics. See, e.g., Stephen G. Dempster, "Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative: A Discourse Analysis of Narrative from the Classical Period" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1985). It is also strange that, in a work dedicated to reception history, Schniedewind's analysis is limited to verses 1–17 of 2 Samuel 7 and that he does not consider the first step in the reception history of the promise: the response of King David himself in verses 18–29. His brief comments on the connection between the promise to David and Isaiah 55 follow the standard view and do not illuminate the problems under discussion here.

33. I. Höver-Johag, "טוֹב *ṭôḇ*," in *TDOT* 5:296–317, esp. 312. For discussion of the cognate Akkadian phrases, see Höver-Johag, "טוֹב *ṭôḇ*," in *TDOT* 5:301–2. In addition, note in the Sefiré Treaty from the eighth century BC that one may break the treaty

by overturning “good” and by establishing “evil” (KAI 222 [Sefiré I] C. 16–23). I am indebted to Chip Hardy for help on this point.

34. For a recent study of texts related to 2 Samuel 7 governed by the methodology of redaction criticism, see Petri Kasari, *Nathan’s Promise in 2 Samuel 7 and Related Texts* (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2009).

35. Knut M. Heim, “The (God-)forsaken King of Psalm 89: A Historical and Intertextual Enquiry,” in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, JSOTSup 270 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 296–322.

36. It is not uncommon in recent studies to set the different texts addressing the covenant with David as disparate traditions at odds with one another—for example, Steven L. McKenzie, *Covenant* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2000).

37. See below for analysis of his discussion of Neh. 13:14.

38. H. G. M. Williamson, “‘Sure Mercies of David’: Subjective or Objective Genitive?,” *JSS* 23, no. 1 (1978): 36.

39. W. A. M. Beuken, “Isa. 55,3–5: The Reinterpretation of David,” *Bijdr* 35 (1975): 49–64.

40. The only occurrence of *ba‘ăbûr* bound to a suffixed verb in the Masoretic Text is Mic. 2:10.

41. This analysis is based on Avraham Even-Shoshan, ed., *A New Concordance of the Bible*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Kiryat-Sefer, 1982). About five years after analyzing all instances, I had forgotten my work and asked Stephen Dempster about the use of *ba‘ăbûr*. He analyzed all instances and came up with the same analysis independently. He noted Exodus 9:16 as an excellent example of a minimal pair showing the two uses of *ba‘ăbûr*. Personal communication, January 27, 2010.

42. This insight I owe to Stephen Dempster.

43. This was noted by Beuken, but the point is strengthened by the above considerations on the use of *ba‘ăbûr*. See Beuken, “Isa. 55,3–5: The Reinterpretation of David.”

44. Thus (*pace* Williamson) Griphus Gakuru, *An Inner-Biblical Exegetical Study of the Davidic Covenant and the Dynastic Oracle* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2000), 222.

45. For the standard view, cf. H.-J. Zobel, “חֶסֶד *ḥesed*,” in *TDOT* 5:44–64; H. J. Stoebe, “חֶסֶד *ḥesed*,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 2:449–64. For the meaning of *ḥesed*, a plethora of studies have appeared in the last fifty years. Still fundamental is Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, trans. Alfred Gottschalk, ed. Elias L. Epstein (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1927, 1967). For a more recent study, see Sung-Hun Lee, “Lament and the Joy of Salvation in the Lament Psalms,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller Jr., VTSup 94 (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

46. André Caquot, “Les «Grâces de David»: A Propos d’Isaie 55/3b,” *Sem* 15 (1965): 45–59.

47. Beuken, “Isa. 55,3–5: The Reinterpretation of David,” 49–64; Williamson, “‘The Sure Mercies of David,’” 31–49; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Unfailing Kindnesses Promised to David: Isaiah 55.3,” *JSOT* 14, no. 45 (1989): 91–98. Williamson’s interpretation of Isaiah 55:3–5 is essentially unaltered in more recent statements; see H. G. M. Williamson, *Variations on a Theme: King, Messiah and Servant in the Book of Isaiah* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 113–31.

48. For example, John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 438. Also maintaining the standard view are Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 470; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 367, 370; Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, vol. 2, *40–66* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 158–59; Gakuru, *Inner-Biblical Exegetical Study*, 205–7, 229; John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, NIBCOT (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 313–14; J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 121; Christopher Seitz, *Word without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 160. Occasionally one encounters interpreters influenced by postmodernism who think they can have it both ways (objective and subjective).

49. Of the 228 singular instances of *ḥesed*, 129 occur in a bound phrase where the free member is a person. See Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Bible*, s.v. חֶסֶד.

50. In 4QMMT e.25, David is called איש חסדים. See E. Qimron and J. Strugnell, *Miqśat Ma’aṣe Ha-Torah*, Qumran Cave 4, vol. 5, DJD 10 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 62–63, 91. The editors correctly render this “a man of righteous deeds.” The text shows an exegesis of Isa. 55:3 at Qumran that construed the free member of the bound phrase as subjective. I am indebted to Simon Gathercole for drawing my attention to this text.

51. Williamson, “‘Sure Mercies of David,’” 44, 31.

52. Kaiser, “Unfailing Kindnesses Promised to David,” 91.

53. George Adam Smith seems to favor this view; see George Adam Smith, *The Book of Isaiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1927), 2:430–31 and n1.

54. Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950), 2:355. The English translation was based on the fourth edition (1875) of the German original. See also Kaiser, “Unfailing Kindnesses Promised to David,” 95.

55. Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 2:355.

56. Block, “My Servant David,” 17–56. See also Ivan Engnell, “The ‘Ebed Yahweh Songs and the Suffering Servant Messiah in ‘Deutero-Isaiah,’” *BJRL* 31 (1948): 93; E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah: Translated from a Critically Revised Hebrew Text with Commentary* (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1943), 2:179–80.

57. Motyer, *Prophecy of Isaiah*, 121 (emphasis original).

58. This insight I owe to Stephen Dempster.

59. I am painfully aware of the brevity of my statement concerning the identity of the servant in contrast to the difficulties in interpretation and the voluminous literature on this topic.

60. Kaiser seems to be moving in this direction. Concerning Isaiah 55:3 he states, "What the Servant of the Lord has provided for and accomplished by his great act of suffering in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is now offered in 55:1–13." Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, SOTBT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 182. Yet in spite of this, he interprets the *ḥasdê dāwīd* as an objective genitive.

61. Similarly, Ivan Engnell, in a statement that begs further elaboration, states, "The passage liv: 1ff. forms a hymnic conclusion of the 'Ebed Yahweh song. . . . Here the consequences of the Servant's resurrection and exaltation are depicted: the restoration of Zion and the erection of the new Jerusalem on the basis of the Davidic covenant, fulfilled in 'Ebed Yahweh." Engnell, "The 'Ebed Yahweh Songs," 89.

62. Beuken, "Isa. 55,3–5: The Reinterpretation of David," 60.

63. Williamson, "'Sure Mercies of David,'" 47–48.

64. John Eaton, "The King as God's Witness," *ASTI* 7 (1970): 25–40; Williamson, "'Sure Mercies of David,'" 48.

65. Carl Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener, 1956), §58.

66. Timo Veijola, "The Witness in the Clouds: Ps 89:38," *JBL* 107, no. 3 (1988): 413–17.

67. Williamson, "'Sure Mercies of David,'" 48.

68. Veijola, "Witness in the Clouds," 417.

69. Isaiah 19 is a judgment oracle against Egypt. The judgment involves civil strife and war and government by a harsh king. The rivers and streams will dry up, affecting the agrarian and fishing economy. Conventional Egyptian wisdom and religion will fail them. They will be in fear of Judah and of Yahweh. At that time an altar to Yahweh will be in the center of Egypt and a monument to Yahweh at the border. "It will be a sign and a witness to Yahweh of armies in the land of Egypt." The Egyptians will cry out to the Lord because of their oppressors, and he will send a savior to them. Thus Yahweh will make himself known to the Egyptians, and they will become worshipers of Yahweh. There are some similarities between this text and Joshua 22:34. There the witness reminds the two and a half tribes that they belong to Yahweh. In a similar way, this altar functions to bring those outside the border of Israel into a relationship with the Lord. Only in Joshua 22, those outside are Israelites, whereas here they are Egyptians. The altar functions to restore relationship to the Lord.

70. Murray, *Divine Prerogative and Royal Pretension*, 299.

71. Williamson, "'Sure Mercies of David,'" 41.

72. Ibid., 43.

73. Ibid., 41.

74. So Otto Eissfeldt, "The Promises of Grace to David in Isaiah 55:1–5," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper, 1962), 196–207.

75. So Kaiser, "Unfailing Kindnesses Promised to David," 91–98.

76. For example, Claus Westermann, *Das Buch Jesaia: Kapitel 40–66*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 227–30. No doubt a significant work on this topic is Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). His discussion of methodological principles distinguishing allusion, influence, and echo is most incisive and illuminating. Sommer completely fails, however, to provide convincing evidence of allusion to Psalms 89 and 132 in Isaiah 55. Obviously, all three texts are dealing with the covenant with David and so share common vocabulary and themes. But Sommer ignores the foundational role of 2 Samuel 7, and the connections between Isaiah 55 and the Psalms are not worked out rigorously according to the principles he initially sets forth. Sommer's exegesis of Isaiah 55:1–3 is based on that of Eichrodt (see Sommer, *Prophet Reads Scripture*, 265n25) and does not advance beyond the traditional view.

77. See Peter J. Gentry, "The Atonement in Isaiah's Fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13–53:12)," *SBJT* 11, no. 2 (2007): 20–47.

78. J. Dupont, "ΤΑ ΄ΟΣΙΑ ΔΑΥΙΔ ΤΑ ΠΙΣΤΑ (Ac XIII 34 = Is LV 3)," *RB* 68 (1961): 91–114.

79. Evald Lövestam, *Son and Saviour: A Study of Acts 13, 32–37*, ConBNT 18 (Lund, Sweden: Gleerup, 1961).

80. Lövestam, *Son and Saviour*, 75, cited by Williamson, "'Sure Mercies of David,'" 32.

81. This is, in fact, the interpretation and rendering of T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint, Chiefly of the Pentateuch and the Twelve Prophets* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2009), s.v. ὅσιος.

82. Translation from David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, AB 43 (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 151.

83. The Hellenistic inscriptions in pagan temples that Dupont and Lövestam adduce actually belong to the regular use meaning "things divinely sanctioned" and hardly support a rendering such as "divine blessings." While Williamson accepts this, Bauer's lexicon does not seem to acknowledge the research of Dupont or Lövestam. See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, 2nd ed. rev. F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v.

84. Stephen G. Dempster has reminded me that the same distinction between the historical David and future David is made in Acts 2:22–32 (private communication).

85. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. F. W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957, 1979, 2000), 728.

86. See further Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan*, 68–69.

87. For a detailed discussion of the corporate solidarity between king and people in the Fourth Servant Song, see Gentry, "Atonement in Isaiah's Fourth Servant Song," 20–47.

88. Keith N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in Its Narrative Context*, BZAW 332 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 213.

89. Benjamin J. Noonan, "Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Reexamination of the Niphal and Hitpael of ברך in the Patriarchal Narratives," *HS* 51 (2010): 80.

90. Note the split word pair "righteousness" and "justice."

91. Noonan, "Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations," 81.

92. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations*, 216.

93. David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*, JSOTSup 252 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 243–53.

12

The New Covenant

Introduction and Isaiah

The metanarrative of Scripture begins with a creator God who made our world, our universe.[1] As the Creator, he is committed to caring for and sustaining all his creation. He governs and rules over all his creatures and works wisely. The apex and crown of his creative work is humankind. He has entrusted to the human race the administration and stewardship of his world. This *covenantal arrangement* was violated by disloyal and rebellious humans. The first man decided to act and manage things independently of the Creator. Everything is now riddled with chaos and evil.

God responds to human rebellion in various ways as the story unfolds. As we have seen, at the center of a plan to restore his ruined world and bring it to serve his original intentions are a series of agreements called covenants. First, the covenant with Noah reestablishes the commitment of the Creator to his creation as a whole. Then God begins to work through one individual, Abraham, and through his family to model a new humanity in right relationship with the creator God and with one another. The Mosaic covenant at Sinai (supplemented and renewed by Deuteronomy) forges the nation into the people of God and governs life in the land. The covenant with David institutes a kingship where the rule of God is better established among his people since the king is to function as covenant administrator. What God planned for the nation as a whole will now be implemented through the king and his leadership.

Later on, largely between 750 and 550 BC, several men who functioned as spokesmen for God were raised up to call attention to the failure of the people to be covenant keepers. These were the prophets, servants of God who spoke for him. They confronted the people of God and exposed the clever and devious ways by which they had gradually slipped away from a proper relationship with God and with one another as defined by the Israelite/Mosaic covenant. They were given visions from God, and they announced coming events. Some events would happen fairly soon; others would not happen for some time. They announced various ways in which God would act to deal with his faithless people and bring his overall plan of restoring his broken creation to fulfillment. Because the people had broken and violated the Israelite covenant, the prophets announced that God would put in place a new covenant in which not only he would be faithful but his people would be faithful too.

References to the New Covenant

The prophets spoke of the new covenant in different places at different times in a variety of ways. Five times they refer to the "everlasting covenant," three times to a "covenant of peace," and three times to a promise that God will give his people a new heart and a new spirit. Only once is the phrase "new covenant" actually used. But all these phrases are referring to the same thing.

Major Texts Dealing with a New Covenant

1. Everlasting covenant: Isaiah 55:1–5; 61:8–9; Jeremiah 32:36–41; 50:2–5; Ezekiel 37:15–28 (esp. 37:26)
2. Covenant of peace: Isaiah 54:1–10 (esp. 54:9–10); Ezekiel 34:20–31 (esp. 34:25); 37:15–28 (esp. 37:26)
3. Promise of a new heart and a new spirit: Ezekiel 11:18–21; 18:30–32; 36:24–32 (esp. 36:26) [cf. Isa. 59:21]
4. New covenant: Jeremiah 31:31–34 (also 32:36–41)

It is interesting to note that when we look at the New Testament, we find that the same covenant is referred to as the "new covenant" five times (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8; 9:15) and only once as the

“everlasting covenant” (Heb. 13:20). Therefore the title for this covenant most used in the Old Testament is employed only once in the New Testament, and the title employed only once in the Old Testament is the one most commonly used in the New Testament.

The New Covenant in the Prophets

Previous works on the covenants in the Old Testament have tended to deal with the topic of the new covenant by discussing a number of passages selected from the Prophets presented *together*. Here, the contribution of each of the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) will be considered *separately*. The Prophets *do not give a monolithic presentation* on how God will restore things, although variation does not mean contradiction. The contribution of each prophet needs to be considered in the context of his ministry and, especially, within the flow and literary structure of his work. There is also chronological development as Jeremiah meditates on the prophecy of Isaiah and as Ezekiel reflects on the work of Jeremiah. When the contribution of each prophet has been heard *separately* and *chronologically*, then the multifaceted presentation can be put together into a *whole*. In addition to discussing passages that treat the topic of the new covenant, it is important to analyze passages in which a prophet deals with the relationships of the new covenant to any of the previous major covenants. In this way, the assembling of the biblical teaching on the covenants from the fundamental passages will be put together into a superstructure that is derived from Scripture and not from our own imagination or human philosophy.[2]

Isaiah 54:1–55:13

Isaiah 54:1–55:13 is a major text dealing with the new covenant. We see the term “covenant of peace” in 54:10 and “everlasting covenant” in 55:3. First, we need to situate this text within the larger literary structure of the book as a whole. Although recent studies of Isaiah have focused more on the canonical shape of the text rather than on fragmentary sources adduced by critical scholarship, few have labored to discover the larger literary structure inherent to the work as a whole.[3]

Prophetic preaching and writing certainly do not follow the patterns of Aristotelian rectilinear logic so fundamental to our discourse in the Western world. Instead, the approach in ancient Hebrew literature was to take up a topic and develop it from a particular perspective and then to stop and take up the same theme again from another point of view. This pattern is recursive in order to present full-orbed ideas. As we noted earlier, when one discourse is heard against the background of another, together they function like the left and right speakers of a stereo, and we have an idea that is like Dolby surround sound or a holographic image. The book of Isaiah is no exception to this technique. The main theme is the development from corrupt Zion in the old creation to restored Zion in the new creation. After the topic is presented in approximately seven major sections, the reader ends up with a full-orbed, multidimensional mental picture.[4] The major recursive sections of Isaiah may be roughly delineated as follows:

The Book of Isaiah: From Zion in the Old Creation to Zion in the New

1. The judgment and transformation of Zion—part 1 1:2–2:5
2. The judgment and transformation of Zion—part 2 2:6–4:6
3. The judgment of the vineyard and Immanuel 5:1–12:6
4. The city of man versus the city of God 13:1–27:13
5. Trusting the nations versus trusting the word of Yahweh 28:1–37:38
6. Comfort and redemption for Zion and the world 38:1–55:13
7. Keeping Sabbath in the new creation 56:1–66:24

Isaiah 1–37

Isaiah makes the first round of his theme in 1:2–2:5, beginning with the broken covenant between God and Israel—excoriating the people for their sins—and concluding with the vision of a future transformed Zion. From 2:6 to 4:6, Isaiah makes the second round of his theme, moving again in a short treatment from sin and judgment in the present corrupt Zion to the vision of a future transformed Zion.

Chapters 5 to 37 comprise at least three subunits that treat in detail the issues of failure to keep the covenant/Torah and the threat of judgment. Isaiah focuses on the failure of the people to practice social justice in spite

of many, many acts of divine discipline. The covenant is broken and irreparably violated. Everything is in order in their services of worship, but the people have failed to demonstrate the lifestyle required of them as God's new humanity. The instruction in the covenant can properly be summarized by the term "social justice."[5] As a community in covenant relationship to Yahweh, they are called to mirror to the world the character of Yahweh in terms of social justice and to be a vehicle of divine blessing and salvation to the nations. But the way that the people of God have treated each other is characterized by social injustice. The "city of truth" has become a whore (Isa. 1:21). The Lord has no choice now but to fulfill the gravest curses and threats entailed in the covenant in Deuteronomy 28. The final threat is exile, and this theme is taken up in Isaiah 5–37.

The Literary Structure of Isaiah 38–55

The sixth section of thematic treatment (covering chapters 38 to 55) is focused in particular on comfort and redemption for both Zion and the world. The following outline, adapted from the commentaries by Alec Motyer,[6] is effective in clarifying the movement of thought in this cycle, dealing with the transformation of Zion in the old creation to Zion in the new creation:

Isaiah 38–55: The Book of the Servant

a Historical prologue—Hezekiah's fatal choice 38:1–39:8
- **b** Universal consolation 40:1–42:17
  1. The consolation of Israel 40:1–41:20
  2. The consolation of the Gentiles 41:21–42:17
- **c** Promises of redemption 42:18–44:23
  1. Release 42:18–43:21
  2. Forgiveness 43:22–44:23
- **c'** Agents of redemption 44:24–53:12
  1. Cyrus: liberation 44:24–48:22
  2. Servant: atonement 49:1–53:12
- **b'** Universal proclamation 54:1–55:13
  1. The call to Zion 54:1–17
  2. The call to the world 55:1–13

Two Distinct Issues and Stages

First, the outline of the literary structure of Isaiah 38–55 shows that the return from exile involves two distinct issues and stages. As already noted, Isaiah 38–55 looks further into the future, beyond the judgment of exile, to the comfort and consolation of Israel, that is, to God's bringing them back from exile. Then the Lord will establish Zion as the people/place where all nations will seek his instruction for social justice. This is described in the language of the exodus, so that the return from the Babylonian exile will be nothing less than a new exodus—indeed a greater exodus![7] This new exodus is also described by the term "redeem" (*gā'al*), which refers to the duties of the nearest relative. Since by virtue of the Israelite covenant Yahweh is Israel's nearest relative, he will "buy back" his people from exile as he once delivered them from bondage and slavery in Egypt. The return from exile, however, is not a momentary or short task. The promises of redemption are divided into two distinct events: release (42:18–43:21) and forgiveness (43:22–44:23). Release refers to bringing the people physically out of exile in Babylon and back to their own land; forgiveness entails dealing fully and finally with their sin and the broken covenant. It has been neatly expressed that you can take the people out of Babylon, but how do you get Babylon out of the people?[8] The books of Ezra and Nehemiah show that the people have returned from exile but have not changed at all in terms of their relationship to God: the failure to practice social justice remains a central problem. That is why for a postexilic prophet like Zechariah the return from exile is both a present reality and a future hope. The exile will be over only when God deals with the people's sin and renews the covenant, the temple is rebuilt, and the Lord returns to dwell in their midst as King.

Zechariah 3:9 and 5:5–11 show that the forgiveness/removal of sins is still future. Indeed, the major point of Daniel's vision of seventy weeks is that the exile will not be over in seventy years but rather in seventy weeks of years: "Seventy sevens are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place" (Dan. 9:24). So there are two issues in the return from

exile: physical return from Babylon and spiritual deliverance from bondage and slavery to sin. And corresponding to these two issues are two distinct agents of redemption: Cyrus and the servant. The former will bring about the first task: physical return to the land of Israel (44:24–48:22); the latter will bring about the second task: the forgiveness of sins (49:1–53:12).

Gap in the Servant Songs

Second, the larger literary structure clarifies why there is a gap in the text between the first of the Servant Songs (42:1–9) and the last three (49:1–13; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12). The First Servant Song belongs to the introductory opening section, which is devoted to the theme of the consolation of Israel and of the nations (40:1–42:17). The Abrahamic covenant undergirds this introductory section. At the heart of the covenant with Abraham is the promise that blessing will come to the entire world through Abraham and his family, Israel.

The arrangement in this section is important. The consolation of Israel comes first because at this time Israel is under a curse; she is part of the problem and not part of the solution. First, God must console and restore Israel, and only then can he use Israel to be an instrument of consolation and restoration for all the nations. After consolation is defined in 42:14–44:23 in terms of redemption (1) from exile and (2) from sin, Isaiah describes in 44:24–53:12 the work of Cyrus to accomplish the former before proceeding to develop the work of the servant of the Lord to accomplish the latter.

At this point, three passages on the servant of the Lord are placed together to focus on redemption from sin. Each passage consists of a first presentation of the topic, a comment as a second presentation of the topic (except for the third section, per the outline below), and a response section:[9]

Outline of Isaiah 49:1–55:13

a The servant's double mission: Israel and the world 49:1–6
  b Comment: mission to the world and Israel confirmed 49:7–13
    c Response: Zion despondent and unresponsive 49:14–50:3
a' The servant obedient and responsive in suffering 50:4–9
  b' Comment: the obedient and the self-willed 50:10–11

c' Zion summoned to respond 51:1–52:12

a''–b'' The servant successful, sin bearing, and triumphant 52:13–53:12

c'' Response: invitation to Israel and the world 54:1–55:13

The Identity of the Servant

Third, the literary structure sheds light on the identity of the servant. Debate over the identity of the servant has raged for centuries and continues to the present time unabated.[10] One good reason for this debate is in the text itself: it is characteristic of Isaianic style to begin discussing a topic in an ambiguous and mysterious manner and to add critical information bit by bit until the matter is plain.[11] For example, in the oracle against Babylon in 21:1–9, Isaiah begins by talking about the wilderness by the sea. Only at the end, in 21:9, does one realize that the prophet is speaking about Babylon. Isaiah's presentation of the servant of Yahweh is similar. At the start, in 41:8, the servant is Israel, who in the biblical-theological scheme of the larger story has inherited the Adamic roles of son of God and servant-king, and who in the covenant at Sinai in Exodus 19:5–6 was called to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. The servant, however, seems to be deaf and disobedient in Isaiah 42:18–19. This contradicts the picture of the servant in 42:1–9 and especially in 50:4–11. Israel as a servant is in dire need herself, not just of rescue from exile and all that that entails but also of a full resolution of the problem of a broken covenant relationship (e.g., 43:22–28). Idolatry and social injustice are endemic in Israel. This is the dilemma: How can God keep his promises to Abraham when Israel has completely failed as the servant of the Lord? Israel was to model three things to the rest of the nations: (1) faithfulness and loyalty in their relationship to God, (2) social justice in their human relationships, and (3) responsible stewardship of the creation/environment.

The answer to this question, developed at length elsewhere, is addressed immediately in the Second Servant Song, which begins the detailed response to this question (49:1–13). At the beginning of this Second Song, in 49:3, we hear again the affirmation that Israel is the servant, as in 41:8. So the servant is the nation. Yet in 49:5–6, the servant's task is to bring the

nation back. This is a return from exile, both physically and spiritually, as described earlier. How can the servant be both the nation and the deliverer of the nation? There is only one possible solution that resolves this conundrum fairly, and Isaiah has prepared us for this in the first part of his work: the servant must be the future king described earlier (e.g., 11:1–10). As an individual, the king can say, "I am Israel." The king can represent the nation as a whole, yet he can be distinguished from Israel. This is difficult for Americans to grasp because we have no monarchy. In monarchies, both ancient and modern, there is a sense in which the king *is* the nation. At the same time, the king is the deliverer of the nation and fights her battles for her. Many Christians move too quickly to identify Jesus of Nazareth as the servant of Yahweh without following carefully the progression in the text. The main problem with the standard Jewish interpretation of identifying the servant as the nation is that the nation of Israel is neither in the text nor in history able to rescue itself, let alone atone for its own sins.[12]

For each of the latter three Servant Songs, a pattern is repeated in the text. First, Isaiah presents the topic; then, there is a comment that further develops the ideas; and finally, there is a response section. The Fourth Song, in chapter 53, contains four stanzas in two pairs: a stanza providing details and describing events, followed by a stanza explaining its meaning. We could consider the first pair of stanzas the basic text and the second pair the comment. Chapter 54 begins the section inviting Israel to respond. She is called to burst out in a ringing cry/shout/song of joy. She is to sing because her family, her marriage, and her city of righteousness are restored. This is essentially a discussion of the new covenant.

Isaiah 54

The theme of chapter 54 is bringing back the exiles, bringing about reconciliation between God and his people, restoring the covenant relationship, and rebuilding Zion, since the city of God, in terms of people, has been decimated. What ties together the diverse paragraphs and sections is a metaphor in which the people of God are represented as a woman. In 54:1–3, the people of God are pictured as a barren woman who now has more children than the married woman. In 54:4–10, the people of God are

portrayed as a forsaken wife (i.e., divorced woman), someone who has long borne the reproach of widowhood but who is now reconciled and married to her creator God. Included in this section is a comparison of the promise of the new covenant to the promise of the Noahic covenant; just as God promised that never again would he judge by a flood, so now he promises never again to be angry with his people. Finally, in 54:11–17, the woman is the city of Zion, lashed by storms but now fortified by redoubtable foundations and battlements and rebuilt with stunning precious jewels and stones. Thus, in the brief span of seventeen verses, the new covenant is in some way either compared or correlated and linked to all the previous major covenants in the Bible.

Isaiah 54, then, discusses the new covenant, which is based on the death and resurrection of the servant-king in Isaiah 53. Certain key words join the Servant Song in chapter 53 to this chapter. The "many" in 53:11–12 are the many in the miracle family in 54:1—the exact same word in Hebrew. The seed or offspring of the servant, seemingly cut off in 53:8 but appearing after his resurrection, are now the descendants who possess the nations in 54:3. The just one justifies the many in 53:11; he makes them righteous. The city is established in righteousness in 54:14, which is almost equivalent to vindication from accusing opponents in 54:17. And the servant in the singular in chapter 53 becomes the servants of the Lord in the plural in 54:17.

Outline of Isaiah 54:1–17

A. Sarah: The Barren Woman 54:1–3
B. Israel: The Deserted Wife 54:4–10
C. Zion: The Afflicted Woman 54:11–17
    1. The city rebuilt 54:11–14a
    2. The city secure 54:14b–17

The Miracle Family (Isa. 54:1–3)

God's people are called to burst out in ringing shouts of joy. They need to prepare for a massive expansion in the family. Why? Isaiah 54:3 says that their descendants will inherit/occupy/possess the nations. This statement is somewhat vague in itself. It might be interpreted to mean that Israel will at

last conquer the nations surrounding and troubling them. But 54:1 will not permit this interpretation. It talks about the children of the desolate woman far outstripping those of the married woman. What does this mean? The married woman is Israel during the days of the old covenant. The desolate woman is the decimated Israel who comes back from the destruction of exile. The family restored after the exile is far more numerous than before. From the point of view of the New Testament, it becomes clear: Israel inherits the nations because they become part of the family.

The barren woman in the history of Israel is Sarah. The allusion to the times of Abraham and Sarah is also clear from the allusion to the tent and the mention of seed/descendants. Thus the reference to the barren woman is a way of referring to the Abrahamic covenant and so recalls the promise to Abraham of descendants as numerous as the sand on the seashore and as the stars of the sky. But the covenant with Abraham also promised blessing to the nations through Israel. Thus Israel dispossesses the nations not as a destructive military conquest but as the blessing brings them into the family. Simply bringing the exiles back to the land to grow and prosper as a nation does not explain sufficiently the need for a massive enlargement of the family tent.

The Reconstituted Marriage (Isa. 54:4–10)

The next section, Isaiah 54:4–10, speaks of God as Husband, Maker, and Redeemer. This is a clear reference to the Israelite/Mosaic covenant, the covenant made between God and Israel at Sinai. This marriage relationship was broken by Israel's unfaithfulness, and God brought the curse of exile on Israel, and so he forsook (i.e., divorced) his unfaithful wife. This display of wrath was only for a moment, so to speak. The marriage relationship was broken, the wife forsaken/widowed, but now reconciliation brings about the renewing of the marriage.

Verse 4 begins with commands that call the woman out of disgrace, humiliation, and shame. She must forget the shame of her youth. This represents the four hundred years of bondage and slavery in Egypt, when Israel was at the beginning of her life as a nation. She must no longer remember the reproach of her widowhood. This represents the seventy

years of exile in Babylon. She had been married to the Lord, but she was an unfaithful wife and ended up deserted and alone like a widow; all her lovers (i.e., idols, alliances with foreign nations) and even her husband turned their backs on her.

Verse 5 speaks of the Lord as her Husband and Maker. God is not only the creator God, the God of all the earth, but he is the Creator and Maker of Israel as a nation. Through the covenant at Sinai, he married Israel and so is her Husband and now the Redeemer—that is, the nearest relative—who has the duty to buy her back from exile and slavery.

According to 54:6, Israel may feel like a woman who was married as a high school sweetheart and then rejected. This, however, is only a momentary turning away. God will now show her compassion, mercy, and covenant loyal love forever. The marriage relationship will be restored. There will be a new covenant, called a "covenant of peace" in 54:10 to emphasize the fact of reconciliation. God's anger has been appeased and finished. Israel may now benefit from the healing of a broken relationship in a new covenant. The new covenant renews and restores the broken old covenant. But it is more than that. It is a new covenant, different from the old one and superior to it, because it depends not on God's people but instead on the everlasting kindness of God. Momentary wrath is contrasted with everlasting love and mercy.

This new exhibition of love and mercy is illustrated by a comparison between the new covenant and the covenant that God made with Noah. Just as he promised there that never again would he judge the entire world by a flood, so here he is promising never again to be angry with his people. The mountains will give way and the hills will totter, but his *ḥesed*, his covenant faithfulness and love, will never be taken away in the new covenant. That is why it is called a covenant of peace.

The City of Righteousness (Isa. 54:11–17)

1. The City Reestablished/Rebuilt (Isa. 54:11–14a). Verses 11–17 speak of the woman as a city, the city of Zion. She has been afflicted and lashed by storms but will be rebuilt and reestablished. Her new foundation will be with a solid construction of mortar and stone. She will be adorned by

precious jewels and fiery, sparkling stones. This construction represents the fact that all will know the Lord—that the city will be rebuilt in righteousness, as 54:13–14 makes plain.

The city of Zion brings to mind the Davidic covenant and the place where Yahweh rules in the midst of his people as King and where his Son, always a descendant of David, represents his rule to the people and to the nations beyond.

In 54:13, we read that "all your sons will be taught by the LORD." This verse correlates perfectly with Jeremiah 31:33–34. What is new about the new covenant is that in the covenant community, all are believers. In the Israelite/Mosaic covenant—indeed, in the Abrahamic covenant, which the Israelite covenant seeks to implement in Iron Age Israel for the nation as a whole—one is born into the covenant community. This practice results in a situation where one may be a member of the covenant community but not a believer. In the new covenant community, the believing community and the covenant community will be perfectly coextensive. This is what Isaiah means when he says, "All your sons will be taught by the LORD," and this is the explanation of the statement that the restored city will be built with beautiful and lasting materials. It is comparable to Peter's picture of believers in the new covenant as living stones in the new temple (1 Pet. 2:5). Since every covenant member knows the Lord, every member or "piece" of the city will constitute beautiful and lasting materials—the jewels. The proof that this is the correct interpretation lies in the fact that the Hebrew word translated as "taught" is לִמּוּד, which means "disciple." The same word is used of the servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 50:4 and applies to the people of the Lord here because, according to 54:17, they too are servants of the Lord.

2. THE CITY SECURE (ISA. 54:14B–17). The city is established in righteousness. This is part of her foundation and will characterize this community. This righteousness will also protect and save her in the end. The same word is used in 54:17 almost in the sense of vindication against those who accuse her in court.

The Lord does not promise that the renewed city will have no enemies or experience no attacks, but she is not to be afraid. There is no need for terror.

In terms of destroying weapons, Yahweh is in charge of the manufacturer, the product, and the intent of the user. Nothing will harm the city of God. Any weapon forged against her will not prosper or succeed. Any accusing tongue will in fact be pronounced guilty by the city of God, and God's people will triumph in court. Peace between God and his people results in peace and wholeness for them.

This city is the final resting place of the servants of the Lord, the reward and vindication for all that they have suffered because of their faithfulness to God (54:17). Subtly and quietly, but also unmistakably, Isaiah links them to the greatest servant of all. As he was a disciple, taught by the Lord (50:4), so are they (54:13). They have suffered affliction (54:11), as did he (53:4). And as he will surely be vindicated (50:8), so will they be (54:17). They are called servants of the Lord because they follow in the footsteps of the perfect servant. They share his sufferings and will also share in his glory. They are "his offspring," the fruit of his sacrifice (53:10), and the city of God will be their home.

The new covenant therefore brings to fruition God's promises and purposes in all the others: (1) it brings the numerous seed promised in the Abrahamic covenant, (2) it brings the righteousness between God and humans and among humans aimed at in the Israelite covenant, and (3) it establishes the city of God ruled by the Davidic king. All this is as certain as the promises to Noah.

Isaiah 55:1–5

In Isaiah 55:3, God announces that he is initiating an everlasting covenant. This covenant is described as the acts of loyal love performed by David—specifically, the atoning death of the servant-king in chapter 53. Here Isaiah is connecting the Davidic covenant and the new. The new covenant will accomplish what was promised in God's covenant with David. Second Samuel 7:19 reveals that the covenant with David is God's instruction for all mankind. Isaiah follows up this teaching by speaking of the Gentiles being called by Israel, who then look to Israel's king as their commander and leader, who, as witness, brings the instruction (Torah) of the Lord to

them. This is exactly what happened when Peter and Paul began proclaiming the good news to the nations in the book of Acts.[13]

Isaiah 56:1–8

Chapter 56 begins the last section of the book, where the prophet develops his themes from yet another perspective. His ideas follow the pattern at the beginning of the book. First the people are accused of idolatry and injustice and are condemned. Next comes a vision of the future restored and transformed city of Zion. This is followed by descriptions of the coming anointed conqueror and his work in bringing about this transformation as an act of deliverance and salvation. Finally, the book closes with prayers and promises for the future.

Although Isaiah 56 begins a new major section in the book, it nonetheless is also directly linked to the preceding and shows the next step in the divine program of salvation for Israel and the world. Those being gathered as the new Zion are to practice social justice and keep Sabbath.

Outline of Isaiah 56:1–8

I. The Renewed Zion to Practice Righteousness and Keep Sabbath 56:1–2
II. Membership in the Community Worshiping Yahweh 56:3–8
  a The foreigner's complaint 56:3a
    b The eunuch's complaint 56:3b
    b' The eunuch's place in the temple 56:4–5
  a' The foreigner's place in the temple 56:6–8

The Renewed Zion to Practice Righteousness and Keep Sabbath (56:1–2)

Isaiah 56:1–8 forms an introduction to the last section of the book, and many of the main themes of this final section are expressed here in broad outline. The first half of 56:1 is a call and command to keep or observe justice and to do righteousness. Right away we can see the word pair "justice-righteousness" distributed over a poetic couplet in parallelism, which forms the idiomatic phrase for social justice. The second half of 56:1 gives a motive or reason for the command: "because my salvation is about to happen and my righteousness is about to be revealed." So the first half of

56:1 is a command to practice social justice, and the second half of 56:1 bases the command on the sovereign work of God, who provides his righteousness as an act of deliverance and salvation.

Before proceeding any further, it is important to see that this final section of the book of Isaiah is interlocked and interwoven with the first two sections by Isaiah 56:1. The word pair "justice-righteousness," frequently split over poetic parallelism, has occurred so far only in the first major section of Isaiah, chapters 1–37: 1:21, 27; 5:7, 16; 9:6 (9:7 EV); 11:4; 16:5; 26:9; 28:17; 32:1, 16; 33:5. This word pair is also found six times in the third section: 56:1; 58:2 [2x]; 59:4, 9, 14.[14] The word pair "righteousness-salvation" or "salvation-righteousness" in the second half of 56:1 speaks of righteousness as an attribute or characteristic of God; it is the way he works in all his relationships. And since humans do not possess this characteristic in their relationships, it must come from God as an act of deliverance and salvation, that is, as a gift. This word pair is found only in the second section of the book of Isaiah, constituted by chapters 38–55 (45:8, 21; 46:13; 51:5, 6, 8). This first verse of the third section of Isaiah, then, combines phrases that are found only in the first and second sections, respectively. This is a testimony to the unity of the book and also to the fact that this third section will now build programmatically on these two ideas.

The second verse pronounces a blessing on the person who keeps the Sabbath and who keeps his hand from doing any evil. Two things about this statement cry out for our attention. First, the blessing, expressed just like the beatitudes of Jesus in Matthew 5, is not directed specifically to Jews or Israelites. Instead, it is general. The first line uses the word "man" (אֱנוֹשׁ) as a generic term, and the line matching it uses the expression "son of man" (בֶּן־אָדָם), the normal Hebrew way of saying "a human being." Thus the invitation is not for Israelites specifically but for all who belong to the human race. This broad purpose will be made absolutely clear in 56:3–8, but for now we can note that chapter 55 summons all alike to the free banquet; 56:1–8 portrays the gathering people in which all are one, all are equal, and all are welcome in the house of prayer.

The second thing that cries out for our attention from 56:2 is that, unlike the first section of Isaiah, no specifics are given about practicing social

justice. There is only a general statement about keeping one's hand from doing any evil. He does not mention the orphan and the widow. He does not address specific issues of injustice. Instead, there is a call to keep the Sabbath. There is a focus on worshiping the Lord. What does all this mean? Verses 3–8 clarify and expand on these two ideas.

Membership in the Community Worshiping Yahweh (56:3–8)

First, instead of focusing on the orphan and the widow, this section focuses on the foreigner and the eunuch. The foreigner was excluded from the people of God. The eunuch was also excluded from the worship of God according to Deuteronomy 23:1. In addition, the eunuch had no descendants or posterity to carry on his name and leave a memorial for himself. And yet these verses explicitly show that the foreigner is joined to the Lord and the eunuch is keeping the Sabbath and that both are included in the one people of God. Many passages to this point have been somewhat vague. They could be interpreted to mean that Israel conquers the nations and takes over their lands. But not these verses. We shall look at them closely.

First, we see the foreigner and the eunuch cut off from the people of God. In Isaiah 56:3, the foreigner is complaining that the Lord will surely separate him from his people. The eunuch is complaining that he is a dry tree. Instead of being a tree that bears fruit and produces seeds that result in reproducing itself, he is a dry tree.

Second, according to 56:3 and 56:6, we see foreigners joining themselves to the Lord. According to 56:6, they are ministering to the Lord and loving his name. The verb "to minister or serve" (שׁרת) is most commonly used in the Old Testament of the work of the Levites and priests in the temple. So these foreigners are not just permitted in the temple, they are involved like the Levites and priests. At the end of 56:6, they become the servants (עֲבָדִים) of the Lord (cf. 54:17; 56:6; 63:17; 65:8, 9, 13, 15; 66:14). We were shocked to discover in 54:17 that those who are included in the new covenant community are called the servants of the Lord. The sins of the many have been borne by the servant, and the victory of the one servant is shared by the many, so that in the end they become servants too. Now we are further shocked because it is foreigners who are called the servants of

the Lord. The end of 56:6 shows them as Sabbath keepers and as firmly grasping and laying hold of the covenant. At the beginning of the book of Isaiah, Israel, those who were born into the covenant community, the nation, physical Israel, were not Sabbath keepers. They were Sabbath breakers. And now it is the foreigners who are Sabbath keepers. The same sorts of things are said about the eunuch. In 56:4, he is choosing what pleases the Lord and laying hold of his covenant. As a result, God gives to him a memorial and a name in his house (i.e., temple) and within his walls, which is better than sons and daughters. His name is carried on for eternity and never cut off. We see, then, that those who were formerly outside the people of God and excluded from worshiping in the temple are now joined to the Lord and characterized as true worshipers.

Third, not only are individuals who are extreme examples of excluded people now characterized as true worshipers of the Lord, but also they are considered to be included in the covenant community. Notice the expressions in 56:7–8: God will bring them to his holy mountain; he will give them joy in his house of prayer, and they will offer acceptable burnt offerings and sacrifices. There is a progression in these statements of belonging and being included. First, they are brought to God's holy mountain as the place where the Lord is to be found. Second, they are welcomed into his presence and into his family, as indicated by bringing them to celebrate in his house of prayer. Third, they participate in those ordinances that guarantee acceptance and fellowship—they bring offerings (עוֹלוֹת) and sacrifices (זְבָחִים) that are accepted at his altar.[15] Nothing could be clearer on just how far into the in-group are these foreigners! Verse 8 echoes this same theme. The first line speaks about gathering the exiles of Israel. Then the second line says that God will gather others in addition to his gathered ones. This passage plainly specifies what was also indicated in 49:6. First God will gather his own people; then the servant(s) will be a light to the nations.

Luke's account of the church's expansion beyond Jerusalem and Judea is clearly modeled on Isaiah 56. First the foreigners, the Samaritans, are brought into the new covenant community, and then the eunuch from Ethiopia is brought into the new people of God.[16]

Psalm 87

While we are considering passages in the Prophets that speak of foreign nations being included in the one people of God, we should note the conversation between Isaiah and the Psalms discussed by Norbert Lohfink and Erich Zenger.[17] An excellent example is Psalm 87, which deserves to be heard and briefly discussed (see table 12.1).

Literary Structure of Psalm 87

The poem consists of four short sections or stanzas arranged in concentric circles. The first stanza (Ps. 87:1–2) constitutes a heading for the entire poem and is separate from the concentric structure. It declares that Yahweh loves Zion. The second stanza (87:3) announces that grand things are being said (by the nations) about Zion and is matched by the fourth stanza (87:7), expressing the same thing. In the third stanza (87:4–6), Yahweh is speaking, and he recounts the birth registry of the nations. It is arranged in three sections according to the scheme a-b-a:

a This one was born there. (87:4)
  b Every single one was born in it. (87:5)
a This one was born there. (87:6)

Table 12.1 Text of Psalm 87

1a. Of the Korahites. A Psalm. A Song.
1b. His foundation in the holy mountains Yahweh loves; 2. the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.
3a. Glorious things are said about you, 3b. City of God. [*Selah*]
4a. “I mention Rahab and Babylon among those who know me. 4b. See—Philistia and Tyre along with Cush, 4c. “This one was born there.” 5a. Yes, of Zion it will be said: 5b. “Every single one was born in it.” 5c. Yes, he will establish it—the Most High. 6a. Yahweh counts them

6b. When he registers the nations: 6c. “This one was born there.” [*Selah*]
7a. They sing when they dance: 7b. “All my springs are in you.”

The repeated statement in 87:4 and 87:6 form a frame (*inclusio*) for which the background is the image of Yahweh registering the nations. The expression at the center is emphatic and thematic.

Around this middle section lie the second and fourth stanzas, which are connected by the two prepositional phrases “in you” (87:3a, 7b). Through these phrases, these two stanzas are interwoven with the center, which has the prepositional phrase “in it.” It may be that the first and second stanzas could be considered a unit, and thus the concentric pattern is perfect. The poetic structure is confirmed and supported by the fact that 87:3 and 87:6 end with the term *selah*.

Message of Psalm 87

The two outer sections/stanzas of the poem (87:1–3, 7) agree in presenting a coherent and unified picture of Zion typical in the Old Testament. Zion is the city of God situated on the “holy mountain,” which is both the cosmic mountain of the world and the mountain of paradise, where Yahweh is enthroned and dwells as King of the world and God of all-encompassing *shalom*. In the center of the city of God, or better, in the midst of the palace/temple of the God who dwells within it, the “springs of life” gush forth. The “springs” are integral to this picture, derived from the garden in Eden. It is noteworthy that Gihon is a name applied only to one of the four rivers just outside the garden in Eden (Gen. 2:13) and to the spring just outside the city wall of Jerusalem (1 Kings 1:33, 38, 45; 2 Chron. 32:30; 33:14). Zion is like Eden in possessing the same source of water.

The “gates of Zion” mentioned in 87:2b may possibly connote a number of things. City gates are peculiar to a city, which in contrast to a village is characterized by a wall with its gate or gates. The gates of the city in ancient Israel correspond to the town hall of cities in the Western world. This was the place where important business transactions and court

judgments took place. Therefore, it was key to the justice and righteousness of the city. By metonymy, the “gates of Zion” might also refer to the gates of the temple. The ordering of justice and life established by Yahweh is connected with “the gates” of the temple (cf. Psalms 15; 24; Isa. 33:14–16). Just as in the vision of future Zion proclaimed by Isaiah 2, where the nations are streaming to Zion to receive instruction from Yahweh, so here also the two outer sections proclaim Zion as a source of universal social justice and righteousness for the nations.

The middle section (Ps. 87:4–6) is thoroughly stamped by the image that Yahweh confers citizenship in the city of God on the members of the many nations, in that Yahweh enters them in the “citizenship rolls.” With artistic skill this idea is repeated three times. The background may be the heavenly book of destiny and life attested elsewhere in the ancient Near East. Within the Old Testament itself we find the institution of membership in the temple-congregation (Ex. 32:32; Ps. 69:28 [69:29 MT]; Isa. 4:3; Ezek. 13:9), and this is a better proposal as to the background of the text in Psalm 87. The first statement is the most shocking and significant: Yahweh has accorded a connection to Zion to the two great traditional enemy powers, Egypt (Rahab) and Babylon, as well as to the lands of Philistia, Phoenicia, and Cush in a legally binding way (with rights and obligations).

The enumeration of the five names is not intended to be exclusive. Rather, the whole world is in view, with Zion proclaimed as the center or navel of the earth.[18] The four names that are mentioned correspond to and mark the four compass points, West (Egypt), East (Babylon), North (Philistia and Tyre), and South (Cush). In this geographical and spatial perspective, Zion is a location, a place. But in Hebrew, “city” is feminine, and the image of birth and registration in Zion gives the idea that Zion is the mother of the nations. In the Greek translation an error in the copying and transmission of the text resulted in the city actually being called “Mother Zion.” This error in the textual transmission conveys the meaning of the passage quite well. Isaiah 66:7–14 also pictures Zion as a woman giving birth to her children, those who are citizens in Israel. In Psalm 87, Zion becomes the mother of the nations, not through natural birth but through Yahweh’s own determination and election. If one connects the middle

section in 87:4–6 to the statement of themes in 87:1–2, Yahweh gives the nations to Zion as “children” because Yahweh loves Zion.

The pattern of thought in Psalm 87 is similar to the eschatological vision of Zechariah 2:10–12 (2:14–16 MT), although the order of thematic elements in the two texts is opposite to each other (see table 12.2):

Table 12.2 Comparison of Zechariah 2:10–12 and Psalm 87

Zechariah 2:10–12 (2:14–16 MT)		**Psalm 87**
2:10 (2:14 MT)	Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! For see, I will come and dwell in your midst, declares the LORD.	87:7
2:11 (2:15 MT)	Many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in your midst.	87:4–6
2:12 (2:16 MT)	The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.	87:2

Two exegetical difficulties remain: (1) How do we interpret Psalm 87:5c, and (2) how do we interpret the nations mentioned in Psalm 87? Some interpreters avoid the idea that the nations are incorporated as citizens of Zion by saying that the mention of these nations refers to the Jews in the Diaspora. The correct interpretation of Psalm 87:5c is provided by considering the relationship of Psalm 87 to the Korah psalms; the correct interpretation of the nations is resolved by noting the relationship between Psalm 87 and the Asaph psalms, in particular Psalm 83.

Zenger discusses the editorial *arrangement* of the hymns in the Psalter in detail. Psalm 87 belongs to the psalms of Korah (Psalms 42–49; 84–85; 87–89) and is framed by the psalms of Asaph (Psalms 73–83).

In Psalm 87, Yahweh establishes Zion in 87:1 and equips Zion as a beneficent force in the world in 87:5c. Verse 5c is in fact a citation of Psalm 48:8 (48:9 MT); the psalms of the sons of Korah share a common linguistic and theological profile and also develop an argument in the collection as a whole. Concerning the connections between Psalm 87 and the Korah psalms, Zenger says,

> It is possible that in 87:5c there is also a reminder of the manner in which YHWH "equips" Zion to be the source of life for the nations. In Ps 48:9–11 [10–12] the equipping of Zion spoken of in 48:8 [9] is explicitly seen in the saving gifts of "righteousness and justice" that are present there or go forth from there; with these YHWH as king of the world "deprives" the enemy nations "of their power." This legal aspect is also found in Psalm 87: from the seat of power YHWH, the king of the world, takes the nations into YHWH's realm in a legal and binding way and obligates them from that time on to follow the laws of his realm. That YHWH declares in 87:4a that Rahab and Babylon are among "those who (ac)know(ledge) me," from the perspective of Ps 46:10 [11] ("Be still, and know that I am YHWH") means precisely this: the nations are prepared to take instructions from YHWH in his ordering of world peace. On the level of the book of Psalms, 87:4a has to be read from the perspective of Ps 25:14: Egypt and Babylon belong to those who acknowledge YHWH—because YHWH has given them knowledge about himself and the covenant.[19]

Psalm 87 is connected to Psalm 83, the concluding psalm of the Asaph group, by appropriating key words in three instances:

1. The geographical designations "Philistia and Tyre" occur in 83:7 (83:8 MT) and 87:4.
2. Psalm 83 culminates with a statement that Yahweh should show himself and demonstrate in a dramatic way that he alone is the Most High (83:18 [83:19 MT]). According to Psalm 87:5, Yahweh is shown to be the Most High by "equipping" Zion as the "center" and "source of life" for the nations.
3. Yahweh intervenes against the assault of the nations intent on annihilating Israel, and his goal, according to 83:18 (83:19 MT), is that the nations (ac)know(ledge) Yahweh and Yahweh's name; likewise, in 87:4, Yahweh lists the great powers as those "who (ac)know(ledge) me."

Psalm 86 is the prayer of a poor and persecuted person, whom the superscription identifies as David, making an urgent appeal that Yahweh let the vision laid out in Psalm 87—of the universal liberation of the nations by

the actualization of Yahweh's royal reign (86:8–10)—at long last become reality. Psalm 86 also anticipates eagerly the decisive eschatological turning when the God of the Sinai covenant is revealed, as it affirms with a citation of Exodus 34, which is the basis for extending the covenant to the nations in Psalm 25.

Thus the context of Psalm 87 decisively requires that we interpret the nations in Psalm 87 as the foreign nations and not as Diasporan Jews. Psalm 87 clearly teaches that the Lord will take the foreign nations, the enemies of Israel, and make them citizens of Zion. This teaching echoes the remarkable statement in Isaiah 19:24–25:

> In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance."

Here Isaiah predicts that the renewed and restored Zion will involve taking the worst enemies of Israel and incorporating them into the one people of God.[20]

Isaiah 59:21

Another significant text is Isaiah 59:21:

> "As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the LORD. "My Spirit, who is on you, will not depart from you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children and on the lips of their descendants—from this time on and forever," says the LORD. (NIV)

The comment of John Davies is both apt and concise:

> After a description of the lamentable situation of Zion in Isa. 59.1–15, the result of separation from God through the people's sins and offences (59.2), a turning point is reached at v. 16, where the arm of Yhwh intervenes on his people's behalf. There follows a sustained depiction of a glorious restoration of Zion, once again to be graced

with the divine presence and glory. This depiction continues without interruption through to the end of ch. 62.

The key to the restoration is Yhwh's return to Zion in zealous pursuit of the interests of his people and his glorious presence there (59.17–20), together with his declared "covenant" (v. 21) or commitment to remain forever with his people through his spirit and his words. Chapters 60–62 then draw on a rich store of imagery to portray the implications of this restoration of Zion (the remnant of Israel) to an exalted status.[21]

Isaiah 61:1–11

Many Christians are familiar with the first three verses of Isaiah 61, since Jesus cited them in the synagogue service recorded in Luke 4:16–21. Nonetheless, Christians in general are not so well versed in what the rest of Isaiah 61 has to say about the new covenant.

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD
for the display of his splendor.
They will rebuild the ancient ruins

and restore the places long devastated;
they will renew the ruined cities
that have been devastated for generations.
Strangers will shepherd your flocks;
foreigners will work your fields and vineyards.
And you will be called priests of the LORD;
you will be named ministers of our God.
You will feed on the wealth of nations,
and in their riches you will boast.
Instead of your shame
you will receive a double portion,
and instead of disgrace
you will rejoice in your inheritance.
And so you will inherit a double portion in your land,
and everlasting joy will be yours.
"For I, the LORD, love justice;
I hate robbery in a burnt offering.
In my faithfulness I will reward my people
and make an everlasting covenant with them.
Their descendants will be known among the nations
and their offspring among the peoples.
All who see them will acknowledge
that they are a people the LORD has blessed." (Isa. 61:1–9)

A coming king, anointed by Yahweh and filled by his Spirit, will bring about a great jubilee—no doubt the word דְּרוֹר in 61:1 is a direct allusion to Leviticus 25:10. The king anointed by the Spirit is also doubtless the same one described in Isaiah 11. As a result of his leadership, mourners in Zion are restored, and the long-standing ruins are rebuilt. Foreigners will care for the fields and the orchards, but Israel will be called priests of Yahweh (61:6). This simple statement is examined extensively by Davies,[22] who is surely right to see here an allusion to Exodus 19:6. Israel's role as a royal priesthood, lost through violation of the Israelite covenant, is restored by the new covenant. Significantly, the text expressly states in Isaiah 61:8 that in the new covenant it is the faithfulness of Yahweh that brings about or causes the giving of this reward: "In my faithfulness I will reward my

people and make an everlasting covenant with them." This is a clear reference to the new covenant, which is brought about by the faithfulness of Yahweh and entails a reward: the status (as priests) and the wealth mentioned in the context. It is also noteworthy that in 61:6, which specifies the restored status as priests, they are called "ministers of God," exactly the same term applied to foreigners in 56:6. The double portion was the inheritance of the firstborn son—another connection to the role given to Israel in Exodus (4:22).

Isaiah 62:12

> They will be called the Holy People,
> the Redeemed of the LORD;
> and you will be called Sought After,
> the City No Longer Deserted. (NIV)

The designation "Holy People" here in 62:12 confirms the interpretation of 61:6: the renewed people of God are given in the new covenant what Israel lost in violating the Israelite covenant—the status as holy nation and royal priesthood.[23] This, as we saw earlier, is an Adamic role—functioning as king-priest.

Isaiah 66:18–24

Many passages relating to the role of the nations in the new covenant could be examined with profit. Isaiah 66:18–24 is one of the more important texts:

> For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to

the house of the LORD. And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.

For as the new heavens and the new earth
that I make
shall remain before me, says the LORD,
so shall your offspring and your name remain.
From new moon to new moon,
and from Sabbath to Sabbath,
all flesh shall come to worship before me,
declares the LORD.

And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh. (ESV)

Outline of Isaiah 66:1–24

a Where is the temple of Yahweh and its worship? 66:1–4
b Assurance for those who tremble at God's word 66:5–14
b' Divine judgment on the false worshipers 66:15–17
a' Worldwide pilgrimage to the temple of Yahweh 66:18–24

Four paragraphs are arranged in chapter 66 in chiastic fashion. The last paragraph is 66:18–24. Here Isaiah speaks of a worldwide pilgrimage bringing a pure offering to the Lord's house (66:18–21), and then in 66:22–23, we see that all humanity is keeping Sabbath. This section returns to the themes raised in the important questions at the beginning of chapter 66: Where is the true temple of the Lord, and who are the people worshiping there? The answer is that God is not worshiped at a particular geographical location but by a certain type of people: the humble and lowly, who tremble at his word. At the same time, this section also returns to the theme at the beginning of chapter 65 of the nations playing a role in the future Zion and people of God. The issues of true Sabbath keepers and true worshipers raised in chapters 56 and 58 are brought to a conclusion as well.

There is also a way in which the end of the book of Isaiah matches its beginning. In chapter 1, Isaiah lambastes the people for corrupt forms of

worship, and here at the end of his work he returns to this theme, showing how the problem has at last been resolved.

Verse 18 is difficult because apparently some words are missing from the text in Hebrew. It begins with the words “and I.” Then follow the words “their deeds and their intentions.” After that the verb “is coming” is feminine, which rules out the translation of the NIV that it is the Lord who is coming. The best proposal is to translate, “And as for me, in view of their deeds and intentions, the time is coming to gather all the nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory.” In Ezekiel 21:12 and 39:8, we have the verb “coming” as a feminine form and the omitted subject is the word “time,” so this is a possible way to interpret this text as well. The question is whether this gathering of nations is negative or positive—that is, will God gather them for judgment or for salvation? According to the context, both are possible. But in 66:18–24, the emphasis is on gathering from the nations those who will become true worshipers of the Lord. So the emphasis here is a positive one. This passage reminds us of Isaiah 2:2–4, where the nations are streaming to Mount Zion to receive instruction, or Torah, from the Lord for daily living. It also reminds us of 11:10, where the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples, who will then rally to him. A parallel passage is Zechariah 2:15 (2:11 EV), which speaks of many nations being joined to the Lord in a future day. Another parallel is Psalm 22:27: “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him” (NIV). The end of this verse says that the nations will see the glory of Yahweh. The glory of the Lord in the Old Testament was a bright cloud, indicating that God was dwelling in the midst of the people. This seems to be the thought here. When the tabernacle was constructed, Israel saw the glory of the Lord as a bright cloud descending on it, showing that the creator God was coming to dwell with them and rule in their midst as King. Here, the nations will see the glory of the Lord.

How will the nations recognize that God is gathering them to see his glory? Verse 19 speaks of God placing a sign among the nations. Since this passage refers to the gathering of the nations into the new Jerusalem, we can see and understand from our vantage point that the sign probably refers

to the cross. Isaiah, however, knows and speaks only in a general way of some sign that will be a common cause to bring the nations to see the glory of the Lord.

Next, survivors are dispatched and sent to distant nations (66:19). Some interpret the survivors to be from Israel, but Isaiah 45:20 speaks specifically of survivors from the nations. These will be sent to distant countries. It is difficult to identify the countries listed here. Tarshish may be in Spain. The Hebrew text mentions Pul and Lud. According to Genesis 10:13, there is a Lud in Africa and, according to 10:22, a Lud associated with the Semites, possibly in Asia Minor. It could be that the NIV is right in speaking of Libya and Lydia as places in Africa and then Tubal and Greece as places in eastern and western Turkey. The Greeks known to Israel were the Ionians who lived in southwestern Turkey. At any rate, all these places represent those countries on the edge of the map as far as geography in Isaiah's time is concerned. And the amazing thing is that survivors are sent out to these distant nations because they have not heard about Yahweh or seen his glory. This is a hint in the Old Testament of the missionary enterprise in the New Testament. Normally in the Old Testament, all the nations come to Israel to learn about her God and the right way to treat each other. In the New Testament, Jesus sends his disciples out to the far ends of the earth. This text in Isaiah comes close to the Great Commission in Matthew 28.

Isaiah 66:20 states, "'And they will bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD on horses, in chariots and wagons, on mules and camels to my holy mountain, Jerusalem,' says the LORD." There are different interpretations of this verse. Some think that because the term "brothers" is used, Isaiah is speaking about gathering Israelites from the nations. But it is more probable that he uses the term "brother" to show that converts from the nations will become part of the one people of God.

Several considerations support the interpretation of "brothers" as referring to Gentiles. Every word in the text of Isaiah is carefully chosen and motivated. Note, for example, Isaiah 58:7, where true fasting is defined: "Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?" (NIV). Here Isaiah employs the

term בָּשָׂר (“flesh”) to show that the “poor” are *family*. They are not other people; they are our own, and we must feed them with the same responsibility with which we would feed our own family. Likewise, in 56:6, the text speaks of the foreigners as “ministers” and “servants” to show that they have the same status as priests. The same technique is employed in 66:20, where אָח is used to show that those drawn from the nations are *family* as well. Admittedly, “brother” is rare in Isaiah (3:6; 9:19; 19:2; 41:6; 66:5, 20) and refers to Israelites in 66:5. Nonetheless, if “brothers” were fellow Israelites, the point would be anticlimactic, and the comparison between offering the brothers as an offering just as the Israelites offer an offering would be tautological and meaningless. Romans 15:16 is directly dependent on this verse in Isaiah, and Paul is interpreting the text to refer to Gentiles, non-Jews, being joined to the people of God. This also agrees with the vision in Isaiah 2 of the nations streaming to Mount Zion. John 11:49–52 would confirm this:

> Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, *and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad*. (ESV)

Isaiah 66:21 goes one step further. Not only will people from the nations come to worship the Lord just as Israel used to bring a pure offering, but also some of them will be chosen for priests, for Levites, that is, to be leaders in the worshiping community (61:6). Again, the term “priest” is employed sparingly in the book of Isaiah: 8:2; 24:2; 28:7; 37:2; 61:6; 66:21. In 61:6, we saw that the renewed people of God are once more assigned the status proclaimed earlier in the Israelite covenant. Now Israel as a royal priesthood includes Gentiles; the context puts an emphasis on honor, privilege, absorbing the riches of the nations, and nearness to Yahweh.

To sum up where we have come in Isaiah 66:18–21, God will gather the nations and put a sign among them. He will dispatch survivors (of

judgment) to distant lands to bring the peoples there to know and see the glory of the Lord. These messengers will bring non-Jews as a kind of offering to the Lord, and the nations will worship in Jerusalem with some of them even being chosen as priests (cf. Rom. 15:16).

Isaiah 66:22 now offers a guarantee: "Just as the new heavens and new earth are before the LORD [i.e., so certain that he can already see them], so are your offspring and your name." This is a clear reference to God's promises to Abraham. His name and his offspring are preserved because now God has joined Jews and non-Jews into one family. The new world involves two things: a new place and a new people. Verse 22 shows that both of these are certain because they are in God's mind; he can actually see them before him. Verse 23 then refers to all the nations coming every new moon and every Sabbath to worship the Lord.

The last verse of Isaiah (66:24) indicates that those rescued will observe the final judgment of those who have responded negatively to Isaiah's message of salvation.

Isaiah 65:1–25

The transformation of Zion reaches consummation and conclusion with the announcement of a new creation/Jerusalem. Motyer demonstrates that Isaiah chapters 65 and 66 form one chiastically structured unit (see outline below). This important text deserves to be heard in full:

> "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me;
> I was found by those who did not seek me.
> To a nation that did not call on my name,
> I said, 'Here am I, here am I.'
> All day long I have held out my hands
> to an obstinate people,
> who walk in ways not good,
> pursuing their own imaginations—
> a people who continually provoke me
> to my very face,
> offering sacrifices in gardens
> and burning incense on altars of brick;

who sit among the graves
    and spend their nights keeping secret vigil;
who eat the flesh of pigs,
    and whose pots hold broth of impure meat;
who say, ‘Keep away; don’t come near me,
    for I am too sacred for you!’
Such people are smoke in my nostrils,
    a fire that keeps burning all day.

“See, it stands written before me:
    I will not keep silent but will pay back in full;
    I will pay it back into their laps—
both your sins and the sins of your fathers,”[24]
                says the Lord.
“Because they burned sacrifices on the mountains
    and defied me on the hills,
I will measure into their laps
    the full payment for their former deeds.”

This is what the Lord says:

“As when juice is still found in a cluster of grapes
    and people say, ‘Don’t destroy it,
    there is yet some good in it,’
so will I do in behalf of my servants;
    I will not destroy them all.
I will bring forth descendants from Jacob,
    and from Judah those who will possess my mountains;
my chosen people will inherit them,
    and there will my servants live.
Sharon will become a pasture for flocks,
    and the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds,
    for my people who seek me.

“But as for you who forsake the Lord
    and forget my holy mountain,
who spread a table for Fortune
    and fill bowls of mixed wine for Destiny,

I will destine you for the sword,
and all of you will fall in the slaughter;
for I called but you did not answer,
I spoke but you did not listen.
You did evil in my sight
and chose what displeases me.”

Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says:

“My servants will eat,
but you will go hungry;
my servants will drink,
but you will go thirsty;
my servants will rejoice,
but you will be put to shame.
My servants will sing
out of the joy of their hearts,
but you will cry out
from anguish of heart
and wail in brokenness of spirit.
You will leave your name
to my chosen ones to use in their curses;
the Sovereign LORD will put you to death,
but to his servants he will give another name.
Whoever invokes a blessing in the land
will do so by the one true God;
whoever takes an oath in the land
will swear by the one true God.
For the past troubles will be forgotten
and hidden from my eyes.

“See, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I will create,

for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy.
I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more.

"Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years;
the one who dies at a hundred
will be thought a mere child;
the one who fails to reach a hundred
will be considered accursed.
They will build houses and dwell in them;
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
No longer will they build houses and others live in them,
or plant and others eat.
For as the days of a tree,
so will be the days of my people;
my chosen ones will long enjoy
the work of their hands.
They will not labor in vain,
nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune;
for they will be a people blessed by the LORD,
they and their descendants with them.
Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
and dust will be the serpent's food.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,"
says the LORD. (Isa. 65:1–25 NIV)

Outline of Isaiah 65:1–66:21 (Chiastic Structure of the Lord's Promises)[25]

a The Lord's call to those who had not sought him 65:1
b God's repayment to a rebellious people 65:2–7
c Promise of a preserved remnant 65:8–10
d Those who forsake the Lord destined for slaughter 65:11–12
e Joys of the Lord's servants in the new creation 65:13–25
d' Those who forsake the Lord destined for slaughter 66:1–4
c' Promise of a preserved remnant 66:5–14
b' God's repayment to a rebellious people 66:15–17
a' The Lord's call to those who had not sought him 66:18–21

The purpose of the chiastic literary structure is twofold. The first purpose is to rivet our attention on the center section: the promise of a new creation, with a new Zion at its center. The second purpose is to show the conditions and steps to the fulfillment of this vision and, on the other side of the central section, to develop these truths in greater detail. While we might expect more space to be devoted to a description of the final state, Isaiah devotes more space to the process by which we get there.

The New People

We may begin by focusing on Isaiah 65:13. It starts with the word "therefore" and so summarizes the contrasting destinies outlined in the paragraphs of 65:2–12. The section comprising verses 13–18 brings together three streams of thought: the worldwide stream of 65:1; the judgment streams of 65:2–7, 11–12; and the remnant stream of 65:8–10.

The remnant is referred to as the servants of God. They will eat, but the rebels will go hungry. They will drink, but the rebels will go thirsty. They will know celebration and joy, while the rebels will know shame. They will be so filled with cheerfulness within that they will burst out with a loud cry of joy that echoes and rings, while the rebels will be filled with pain inside and will howl with broken spirits. These terms speak of both physical and spiritual well-being. Every external need is met, and internally, they are fully satisfied.

Both this paragraph and the paragraph in 65:8–10, which refers to the remnant, are amazing in speaking of these people as the Lord's servants. Already in 54:17, where the sacrificial death and suffering of the servant-king results in a new everlasting covenant, we see that those who are joined to the servant as the new covenant community are also referred to as servants. More astonishing is 56:6, which makes plain that individuals from the nations are included as the servants of the Lord. Then in 63:17, in the prayer of the watchman, the person praying asks for God to show mercy on his servants. And now this prayer is answered as we see the blessings to be poured out on the servants of the Lord.

Isaiah 65:15–16 shows that the promises to Abraham and the covenant with Abraham find fulfillment in the new covenant community, who are referred to as "the servants of the Lord." In an ironic reversal, the name of unbelieving Israel becomes a curse to God's chosen ones, and the Lord puts them to death. The new covenant community is given a new name, which is left unspecified. And the one being blessed or uttering a blessing in the land will be blessed or will utter a blessing by a "God of amen," and the one swearing in the land will swear by a "God of amen." The epithet "God of truth" (as it appears in most English versions) is actually "God of amen" in the Hebrew text. The English word "amen" is a transliteration of the Hebrew adverb אָמֵן, which means something like "surely" and is employed by someone who is acknowledging an oath or promise. In contrast to rebellious Israelites who have uttered a blessing by false gods who cannot back it up, members of the new community will utter blessings by a God who will acknowledge and back up blessings uttered in his name.[26]

There is a clear connection between this paragraph and the covenant made with Abraham. First, note that it was in the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17 that Abram was given a new name—Abraham (17:5). Second, note that the covenant promised blessing for those blessing Abram and his family. Third, note that there is a curse for the one—and it is specified in the singular—who rejects Abram's family. The blessing and cursing in Isaiah 65:15–16 clearly recall the promises of Genesis 12:2–3, but they redefine them according to the new covenant community and its "God of amen." The name "God of amen" is found only here in the Old Testament,

and it is explained in 2 Corinthians 1:20, where Paul says that it is in the new covenant community that all the promises of God receive a resounding "yes."[27]

Grüneberg argues that the *hithpael* of *bārak* means "utter an oath" since it is parallel to "swear" in verse 16b.[28] Nonetheless, the A line of the poetry need not be identical to the B line in meaning, and it seems as if Paul construes the form as passive, for those who hear a "yes" to God's promises are being blessed. Thus we can translate it, "Whoever is blessed in the land will be blessed by a God of amen."

Verse 17 begins with the conjunction "for," explaining the particular and worldwide blessings of the preceding section. That section ended by promising blessings for the one who is related to the God of "amen," or truth. This experience is so radical that the former distresses and troubles are forgotten—not just by humans but by God himself. The new section picks up the thought of the former things and shows why the former things will not be remembered: God is making all things new.

The New Place

The promise of a new creation—a new heavens and a new earth—shows that the divine plan of salvation is no half job. God has something bigger in mind. Yes, it involves return from exile and deliverance from the nations that have been oppressing God's people. Even more than that, it entails the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation so that the covenant is renewed, the temple is rebuilt, and Yahweh returns to Zion. God is dwelling once more in the midst of his people as King. Not only, then, do God's people have a right relationship to him, but they treat one another in genuinely human ways with faithfulness and truth, with justice and righteousness—social justice. And astonishing as it may seem, these blessings flow to the nations who are included now in the one people of God. But the creation itself has been subject to futility and destruction on account of human sin, and God is not finished until this is rectified. He will make a completely brand new universe: a new heavens and a new earth. We see, then, that the plan of salvation is no halfway fix-it job. God's plan of restoration brings us back to the pristine state of Eden—in a world now much better and much greater.

Augustine once said that he feared to entrust his soul to the great physician lest he be more thoroughly cured than he cared to be. God's plan of salvation is absolutely thorough, and he is not going to be satisfied with some half job of reformation and renewal in our lives.

God's forgetting of the old things results in our forgetting of the old creation. And we are commanded to delight and rejoice in the new, just as God finds his delight and joy in the new.

It must be emphasized that the final state is not heaven but rather life in a new creation. The gospel I heard as a child was one in which I was warned of eternal judgment in hell and told of heaven offered through faith in Jesus Christ. It is true to the Scriptures that, when a believer dies, he or she goes to "be with the Lord." And in Hebrews 12, we are given a glimpse of the heavenly Zion, where the spirits of just men made perfect are kept safe in the Lord's presence. But this is not our final goal. The final goal is not to get away from this world, full of evil and completely ruined by our poor stewardship, but to live in a new creation where we have a brand new start.

Isaiah 65:18b describes creating Jerusalem a delight and God's people a joy. It seems that Jerusalem is the new creation. As T. Desmond Alexander notes,

> Significantly, in verses 17–18 the creation of the "new heavens and a new earth" parallels the creation of Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 24:23). The repeated use of the Hebrew verb *bārā'*, "to create," suggests that Jerusalem is *deliberately equated* here with the new heavens and the new earth. They are one and the same.[29]

Possibly this is not the only way to understand the text, but in Revelation 21, we see that it is the correct interpretation. Jerusalem is not only at the center of the new world but in fact is coextensive with it. The new creation is the new Jerusalem, and vice versa. This conclusion is clear from Isaiah 65:25, where the new creation is described as God's holy mountain—Mount Zion has become the new Eden!

The order in producing the new creation is reversed from that in producing the old creation. In the old creation, God first made the place where we live and then made the creatures to live there.[30] In the new

creation, however, God will first make his new people and then make the home where they will live. This order is first observed in Genesis 12, where God makes his last new start with Abram and his family. The promises in 12:1–3 begin by announcing that God will make Abram into a great nation. Nothing is said about land, but surely this is implied. A great nation cannot exist apart from a place to call home. This is actually made explicit later on in 12:7, where God promises to Abram the land of Canaan. Nonetheless, as the history of the divine dealings with Abram show, God's priority is to create a covenant people first rather than settle the issue of the land where they will dwell. As we saw in the Davidic covenant, the land as defined in the covenant with Abram in Genesis 15:18–21 and described in Deuteronomy 11:24–25 as Israel's place becomes Israel's possession in the time of Solomon (1 Kings 4:24–25). But the Israelite covenant curses brought the loss of the land: first the area of Galilee, then the northern kingdom, then Judah, and finally Jerusalem itself. Yet in his treatment of the new covenant, Isaiah announces that the people of the new Zion will be far more numerous than those of the old (e.g., the barren woman, Isa. 54:1–3) because the nations will be drawn into the new Zion. Implicit in this is the fact that more land will be required than just the real estate entailed in historical Israel. How can the new Zion find enough space in the new Jerusalem/Israel? Isaiah 65 solves the puzzle: the new Jerusalem and new creation will be coextensive. As Paul says, "Abram believed he would inherit the world" (Rom. 4:13).

Some may find this discussion of the promises concerning the future of the city of Jerusalem and the land of Israel troublesome. It is extremely important to observe the *development* within the book of Isaiah in regard to the transformation of Zion. At the outset we noted that the main theme of Isaiah's prophecy is the change or movement from corrupt Zion in the old creation to restored Zion in the new creation, and that this topic is presented in seven major recursive sections. Five of these seven sections end with a vision of the future Zion (2:1–4; 4:2–6; 11:1–10; 25:6–12; 65:17–25). The first (2:1–4) pictures the temple mountain higher than all others, with the nations streaming to it to receive instruction (Torah). The second (4:2–6) combines images of a fruitful land, a city devoted to the Lord, and a place

of worship overshadowed by a canopy of glory as in the exodus. The third (11:1–10) portrays the future as an Edenic paradise (recall that Eden was on a mountain). The fourth (25:6–12) paints the scene of a mountain banquet with aged wine where death is swallowed up forever. The last (65:17–25) combines the new creation and the new Jerusalem together in one tableau. We must put all these pictures together holographically to see Isaiah's vision of future Zion. This is much better than a two- or even four-speaker audio system!

Let us note in particular the first and second visions, in Isaiah 2 and 4. In the vision of 2:1–4, the mountain of the temple of Yahweh becomes higher than all other hills and mountains. In the ancient Near East, mountains were viewed as a meeting place between heaven and earth and hence a place where humans could meet God. Consequently, it is no surprise that sanctuaries and temples and places of worship were all constructed on mountaintops. In the Tigris-Euphrates River valley, where the country was as flat as a pancake, the temples were built *as* mountains, the ziggurats. Here in Isaiah 2, the mountain of the temple of the Lord is a high and lofty mountain; all other places are mere hills by comparison. This is to say that the oracles in all other religions have been found wanting and are silenced. Zion has been restored as a place from which Yahweh speaks, and his word is supreme in and for the entire world.

This mountain temple city calls to mind other mountains in the past. First of all, the garden in Eden was on a high mountain. How else could one river divide into four and water the whole world? Although the word "mountain" does not occur in Genesis 2, it does occur in the description of Eden in Ezekiel 28:13–14. The garden in Eden was not only a mountain, it was also a sanctuary, a place of worship. It was characterized by the presence of the Lord God. There he gave his decrees to rule the lives of his creatures.

Second, Mount Zion as the source of the Torah reminds us of Sinai, called the "mountain of God" (Ex. 3:1), the place from which he issued the Ten Words (or Commandments), his instructions to rule and regulate the daily lives of his people. In Isaiah 2, we see that it is no longer from Sinai that Yahweh gives his word but from Mount Zion. Moreover, the Torah is not simply the law, a code of laws and regulations for just and righteous

living that pleases God. At the same time, it constitutes a covenant, the formalizing of a relationship of love, loyalty, and trust between God and his people. Torah is, in a way, the flip side of the word *covenant*.

We have a picture of the nations traveling up Mount Zion to worship there, and there they are given the Torah of Yahweh, instruction on daily living that involves not only giving God his proper place in their lives but also treating other people in a truly human way. Isaiah's use of the word Torah as the flip side of covenant subtly suggests that all the nations will be in a covenant relationship with God. In Isaiah 2:3, Torah and the word of Yahweh are in parallel lines. This occurs elsewhere in Isaiah only in 1:10. There Zion has rejected Yahweh's instruction and word; here his instruction and word are restored to their rightful place. Thus, in the vision of future Zion in 2:1–4, the future Zion has assumed roles earlier played by Eden and Sinai.

In the vision in Isaiah 4:2–6, the picture is of a fruitful land *and* a holy city (Israel and Jerusalem). Moreover, there is a canopy of glory over the whole site of Mount Zion and over all its assemblies. In the exodus desert wanderings, the canopy of glory was over the tabernacle. Thus it is as if the entire city of Zion is now the tabernacle or the temple (a precursor to Revelation 21–22). The future Zion, then, takes up the imagery of Eden and Sinai. It is not just the old city of Jerusalem or the land of Israel. It is that and more—it is a changed and transformed Zion: the whole new creation as the place where God's people dwell (land) and where God is worshiped (temple). Thus earlier sections of Isaiah prepare us to recognize in the vision in Isaiah 65 that the new Jerusalem and the new creation are coextensive.

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1. Parts of chap. 12 are adapted from Peter J. Gentry, "The Atonement in Isaiah's Fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13–53:12)," *SBJT* 11, no. 2 (2007): 20–47; Gentry, "Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph 4:15): Life in the New Covenant Community," *SBJT* 10, no. 2 (2006): 70–87. Used by permission of the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*.

2. Here, as elsewhere, we interpret the text according to the cultural setting, the linguistic data, the principles of Hebrew literature and structure, and also the larger metanarrative. It is important to realize, however, that there are different *genres* in the biblical canon. We cannot interpret the Prophets or read them the same way that we read Romans. The hermeneutical principles employed here are spelled out in greater detail in Peter J. Gentry, *How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

3. A notable exception is the commentary by J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

4. This outline is indebted in part to Motyer, *Prophecy of Isaiah*. Discourse grammar markers demand a major break between 37:38 and 38:1, which considerations of space do not permit to be defended here, but see Peter J. Gentry, "The Literary Macrostructures of the Book of Isaiah and Authorial Intent," in *Bind Up the Testimony: Explorations in the Genesis of the Book of Isaiah*, ed. Daniel I. Block and Richard L. Schultz (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2015), 227–54.

5. See Thomas L. Leclerc, *Yahweh Is Exalted in Justice: Solidarity and Conflict in Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001); and especially Gentry, "Speaking the Truth in Love," 70–87.

6. See Motyer, *Prophecy of Isaiah*; Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

7. For a discussion of exodus language and themes in Isaiah, see Bernhard W. Anderson, "Exodus Typology in Second Isaiah," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper, 1962), 177–95.

8. The vision in Zechariah 5:5–11 of the woman in a basket carried by flying women back to Babylon seems to symbolize the task of removing Babylon from the people.

9. Once again I have adapted my outline from Motyer, *Prophecy of Isaiah*, 383.

10. For documentation of more recent discussion, see Murray Rae, "Texts in Context: Scripture in the Divine Economy," *JTI* 1, no. 1 (2007): 1–21. His concern for a canonical interpretation is commendable, but his postmodern solution to keep both Christians and Jews happy is implausible. Even recently, discussion on the internet between Christians and Jews has been considerable. See now Frederik Poulsen, *God, His Servant, and the Nations in Isaiah 42:1–9: Biblical Theological Reflections after Brevard S. Childs and Hans Hübner*, FAT 2, reihe 73 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); Stéphane A. Beaulieu, *"Behold! My Servant": An Exegetical and Theological Study of the Identity and Role of the Servant in Isaiah 42:1–9*, Gorgias Dissertations 63 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2015).

11. Goldingay has noted this as well in his study of Isaiah: "As is often the case, the prophet begins by hinting at something that will receive further explication." John Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40–55: A Literary-Theological Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 492.

12. What clinches the argument for the servant being an individual is the fact that in Isa. 49:6 the servant delivers the nation and that in Isaiah 53 the detail is so rich that it could not be anyone but an individual. See Gentry, "Atonement in Isaiah's Fourth Servant Song," 20–47.

13. See Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*, NSBT 27 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

14. Leclerc, *Yahweh Is Exalted in Justice*, esp. 10–13, 88, 157.

15. According to the authors of the New Testament (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15–16; 1 Pet. 2:5), these prophecies are fulfilled by the gifts, hymns, and prayers of Christians (whether Jew or Gentile) engaged in the worship of the church.

16. See Thompson, *Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 116–18.

17. Norbert Lohfink and Erich Zenger, *The God of Israel and the Nations: Studies in Isaiah and the Psalms*, trans. Everett R. Kalin (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000). The discussion and translation of Psalm 87 here is dependent on the chapter by Erich Zenger, "Zion as Mother of the Nations in Psalm 87."

18. On Jerusalem as the center of the earth, see Thomas Renz, "The Use of the Zion Tradition in the Book of Ezekiel," in *Zion, City of Our God*, ed. Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 86–87.

19. Lohfink and Zenger, *God of Israel and the Nations*, 145.

20. The Septuagint translator could not stomach the literal meaning of Isa. 19:24–25!

21. John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, JSOTSup 395 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 212.

22. Ibid., 212–17.

23. Ibid., 215.

24. "Fathers" is my translation; the NIV renders the term "ancestors."

25. Adapted from Motyer, *Prophecy of Isaiah*, 522–23.

26. The relative particle אֲשֶׁר begins Isa. 65:16. Motyer assumes that "name" in 65:15 is the antecedent, but no resumptive pronoun within the clause supports such a reading. Motyer, *Prophecy of Isaiah*, 528–29. It may mark result (i.e., "so that"), or we may have a null-head relative identified by another null-head relative (i.e., a relative article on the participle). The effect of this is that the one being blessed in the land is necessarily restricted to the class of entities who are characterized as blessed by a God of amen. I am grateful to Robert Holmstedt of the University of Toronto for his assistance in analyzing this text.

27. Note that in the New Testament, Jesus uniquely begins his statements with "Amen, amen."

28. Keith N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in Its Narrative Context*, BZAW 332 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 211.

29. T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), 53–54; cf. Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 89–90.

30. See Craig G. Bartholomew, "The Theology of Place in Genesis 1–3," in *Reading the Law: Studies in Honour of Gordon J. Wenham*, ed. J. G. McConville and Karl Möller, LHBOTS 461 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 173–95.

13

The New Covenant

Jeremiah

Jeremiah's basic message can be summarized in a very few words: "The Babylonians are coming."[1] He ministered from 627 BC to just a few years after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC. During this time he witnessed the fall of the neo-Assyrian Empire and the rapid rise of the Babylonian Empire led by Nabopolassar and his famous son, Nebuchadnezzar. He knew that the attempts of kings like Josiah to reform the nation were inadequate, and in his famous "Temple Sermon" (Jeremiah 7–10), he warned the people about hypocritical worship, just as Isaiah before him and Ezekiel after him.

Serious differences between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint (that have not been resolved) plague our study of the text of Jeremiah. In spite of this, William Dumbrell rightly notes that the prophecy is intended to relate Judah to the world. His defense of the arrangement in the Masoretic Text is noteworthy:

> It is not insignificant that oracles against foreign nations conclude the prophecy in the Hebrew text. Admittedly, these oracles are placed between Jer 25:13a and 15 in the Greek OT, but this seems to have risen from a desire for a more consistent historical structure, as well as from the purpose of ending the book with the account of the fall of Jerusalem and what immediately preceded the fall. But the Hebrew placement of these oracles at the conclusion of the book, viewed together with the nature of the prophet's call, draws into obvious focus

the internationalism of the prophecy. This broader political perspective recognized that all the organized world as Jeremiah knew it was involved in a new societal structure under the leadership of Babylon.

Moreover, from a formal structural perspective, Jer 51:64 forms an inclusion with 1:1. In chapters 46–51 the oracles against the foreign nations are arranged geographically (Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Arabs, Elam and finally Babylon) and have the common theme of failure to submit to Babylon. Finally, Babylon herself is punished for *hubris*. These oracles underscore the tenor of Jeremiah's constant prophecy of Judah's need to recognize Babylonian hegemony as the new factor in the world situation.[2]

The Structure and Shape of Jeremiah

A brief outline of this longest of the Prophetic Books will assist us as we consider key texts within the work that deal with the new covenant and related matters.

Outline of Jeremiah

A. Superscription 1:1–3
B. Call of Jeremiah and Visions 1:4–19
C. Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem 2–25
   1. Israel's guilt and punishment 2–6
   2. Jeremiah's "Temple Sermon" 7–10
   3. Warnings and judgment 11:11–15:9
   4. Confessions, symbolic acts, and preaching 15:10–25:38
D. Jeremiah's Controversy with False Prophets 26–29
E. The Book of Consolation 30–33
F. The Days of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah 34–39
G. Jeremiah's Experiences after the Fall of Jerusalem 40–45
H. Oracles against the Foreign Nations 46–51
I. Appendix: Fall of Jerusalem 52

Jeremiah 4:1–2

Our attention is drawn, first of all, to Jeremiah 4:1–2, a passage early in the book of Jeremiah that focuses on Israel's relationship to Yahweh and its

impact and significance for all the nations:

> If you return, O Israel,
>
> declares the LORD,
>
> to me you should return.
> If you remove your detestable things from my presence,
> and do not waver,
> and if you swear, "As the LORD lives,"
> in truth, in justice, and in righteousness,
> then nations shall bless themselves in him,
> and in him shall they glory. (ESV)

To aid the discussion, the Hebrew text for 4:2 is as follows:

וְנִשְׁבַּעְתָּ חַי־יְהוָה בֶּאֱמֶת בְּמִשְׁפָּט וּבִצְדָקָה
וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בוֹ גוֹיִם וּבוֹ יִתְהַלָּלוּ׃

Four issues require discussion in the interpretation of Jeremiah 4:1–2. First, the Hebrew verb rendered "waver" in the ESV is נוד and has as its fundamental meaning "go back and forth, swing to and fro, flutter, oscillate, shake, wave" (e.g., 1 Kings 14:15). Some secondary meanings are "be aimless, wander" (e.g., Gen. 4:12, 14) or "flee" (e.g., Jer. 49:30; 50:3, 8). John Bright renders it "nor stray from my presence," similar to the NIV. Yet the ESV is good here because the meaning is metaphorical of Israel's fickle vacillation between loyalty and disloyalty in the covenant relationship with Yahweh. Israel's covenant disloyalty and fickleness is a major theme in Jeremiah; he speaks frequently of the "stubbornness of their evil hearts" and of their "incurable wound." Indeed, the entire section from 3:1–4:4 is a call to return to devoted, faithful loyalty in covenant love to Yahweh.

Second, once again we have the *hithpael* of the verb *bārak*, and a number of different interpretations are possible. The analysis of Keith Grüneberg is one of the most thorough and deserves to be cited in full:

> The hithpael here is commonly judged a reflexive (NASB, NKJV, JB, RSV), though passive translation is not unknown (e.g., NIV, NRSV, Bright). Yet once again passive force appears unlikely. For התברכו stands parallel to יתהללו, probably used passively in Proverbs 31:30

(above pp 200–201) but elsewhere regularly meaning “glory,” “boast in”: the context makes clear that the subject is doing the praising in e.g., Jer 49:4 (where it is linked to “trusting in her treasures,” הבטחה באצרתיה); Psalm 34:3[2] (where the Psalmist is praising God); Psalm 105:3 (bidding people to give thanks, make known, sing and rejoice); Isa 41:16 (parallel to √ גיל). Elsewhere it is more difficult conclusively to exclude passive sense, but non-passive sense seems more plausible (e.g., Jer 9:22–23; 1 Kings 20:11; Psalm 52:3[1]). Hence it seems overwhelmingly that in Jer 4:2 the meaning of בו יתהללו is “they will boast in him [i.e., by speaking in praise of him],” and hence of התברכו בו that “they will bless by him [i.e., in his name].” For once passive force has been excluded, the analysis will repeat that given to יתברכו in Ps 72:17 (pp 213–14 above, which see for detailed arguments): the primary situation described is probably that of individuals uttering blessings on other individuals, which does not obviously fit either reflexive or reciprocal semantics; however the main point is not precisely who is blessed (or who blesses), but the use of God’s name when blessings are uttered. Thus again we most plausibly have a speech action hithpael.[3]

Note that this analysis matches that of Lee cited earlier in the discussion of the form in Genesis 12:3 and its later reiterations. We concluded that the *niphal* forms are passive (“They shall be blessed”) and the *hithpael* are declarative-estimative reflexive (“They shall declare themselves as blessed”). Nonetheless, as Benjamin Noonan has shown in his discussion of the *hithpael* of *bārak*, the declarative-estimative reflexive is the meaning of the *hithpael*, not a “speech action hithpael”:

If the nations pride themselves in God, placing their trust in him and finding their happiness in him, the parallelism indicates that the nations likewise seek out blessing from him. Once again, the point is not that blessings or statements of praise are being uttered, even though this may occur. Rather, the point is that the nations are placing their trust in God and seeking his blessing. This understanding is coherent within the larger context of this literary unit, in which Jer 3:17 refers to the inclusion of the nations within God’s blessing.

> Jeremiah thus expresses the view Israel will provoke the nations to jealousy (cf. Isa 19:24–25): when Israel repents, the nations will see how Israel benefits from its covenant relationship and seek to enter into that relationship in order to also obtain blessing from God.[4]

Third, in the line "the nations [*gôyîm*] will consider themselves blessed in him," to whom does the third-person pronoun *him* refer? According to the principle of proximity in the context, it must refer to Yahweh.[5] If there is an allusion to the promise in Genesis 12:3 and its reiterations, then this text does present the reader with a variant: rather than being blessed by Abraham or the family of Abraham, the nations declare themselves blessed by Yahweh.[6] They see the blessing through the family of Abraham as ultimately coming from God.

Fourth, Jeremiah 4:1–2 is an extended conditional sentence, and interpreters differ over where the protasis, or "if" clause, ends and the apodosis, or "then" clause, begins. While many English versions render 4:2a as does the above citation from the ESV, John Bright, for instance, sees the "then" clause beginning at 4:2a instead of 4:2b, as follows:

> If you return, O Israel—Yahweh's word—
> To *me* return,
> If you put your vile things aside,
> Nor stray from my presence,
> Then might you swear, "As Yahweh lives,"
> Truthfully, justly, and rightly;
> And the nations by him would bless themselves,
> And in him exult.[7]

Bright's rendering makes better sense of the Hebrew text. Both 4:2a and 4:2b begin with *waw*-consecutive perfect verbs. Moreover, the "if" that is repeated in 4:1b from 4:1a is no longer repeated in 4:2a. This is a clear sign that we are shifting from the protasis to the apodosis, but no clear sign can distinguish 4:2b as the beginning of the apodosis. Bright also makes better sense of the flow of thought. If Israel returns to an unadulterated devotion and loyalty to Yahweh in the covenant relationship, then her use of the name Yahweh will demonstrate faithfulness and justice. This *in turn* would

move the nations to turn to Israel's God—this is the plot structure of the Old Testament from Genesis 12 onward.

Grüneberg doubts that Jeremiah 4:2 entails an allusion to Genesis, mainly because few identical lexemes are used.[8] But allusion is not always a matter of reusing lexemes or phrases from earlier texts. Previously we saw that Genesis 12 is describing God establishing his rule in the hearts and lives of humans through covenant relationship, exactly as described by Genesis 1:26–27. The ideas are precisely the same. The lexemes and language, however, are not remotely similar. Jeremiah 4:2 expresses the idea that when Israel is faithful in her relationship to Yahweh, blessing will flow to the nations, and this idea is based squarely on the Israelite/Mosaic covenant as an outworking of the promises to Abraham.

Jeremiah 12:14–17

The interpretation of Jeremiah 4:1–2 just provided is confirmed and strengthened by the oracle of Jeremiah 12:14–17, which reads as follows:

> This is what the LORD says: "As for all my wicked neighbors who seize the inheritance I gave my people Israel, I will uproot them from their lands and I will uproot the house of Judah from among them. But after I uproot them, I will again have compassion and will bring each of them back to their own inheritance and their own country. And if they learn well the ways of my people and swear by my name, saying, 'As surely as the LORD lives'—even as they once taught my people to swear by Baal—then they will be established among my people. But if any nation does not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it," declares the LORD. (NIV)

Yahweh speaks of "all my wicked neighbors who seize the inheritance I gave my people Israel." Historically speaking, this would refer to the lands and peoples surrounding Israel who have brought harm to its land and people down through the years: the Arameans, the Edomites, the Moabites, the Philistines, and, wider afield, the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Egyptians, just to name a few of them.

Verse 14 speaks of an exile, not just for Judah but also for each of these lands and peoples. The verb "uproot" may have a double meaning:

uprooting a land would mean sending the people into exile; uprooting Judah from among them would mean bringing Judah back from exile. What is astonishing, however, is that according to 12:15, *each land* and *people* will have a return from exile. And when all the exiles are brought home, if the nations learn from Israel to swear by the God of Israel, then they will be "built up" or established in the midst of the restored Israel. If they do not, each will be permanently eradicated as a nation.

What is precisely parallel in this text to Jeremiah 4:1–2 is the idea that through a renewed and restored Israel (which is faithful and loyal to the Lord by faithfulness and social justice), the nations may become worshipers of this same Lord and will be established *in the midst* of the renewed people of God. What is additional and new in this text is that the notion of a return from exile applies to the nations as well as to Judah and Israel. This idea is developed further in our next text, Jeremiah 16:14–18.

Jeremiah 16:14–18

> "However, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when it will no longer be said, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' but it will be said, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' For I will restore them to the land I gave their ancestors.
>
> "But now I will send for many fishermen," declares the LORD, "and they will catch them. After that I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them down on every mountain and hill and from the crevices of the rocks. My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes. I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin, because they have defiled my land with the lifeless forms of their vile images and have filled my inheritance with their detestable idols." (NIV)

As already stated, Jeremiah has a consistent message: "The Babylonians are coming! Judah will be carried away into exile." This, however, is not the whole message. There is also a message of consolation: "God will bring his people back from exile." This message of return from banishment and

exile is expressed first in plain speech in 16:14–15 and is then repeated in figures of speech in 16:16.[9]

In 16:14–15, the return from exile is described as a new exodus. The exodus from Egypt was the big event in the history of Israel. Nonetheless, in terms of magnitude and significance, the exodus will be overshadowed by the future return from exile. In the future, the renewed people of the Lord will be defined and determined not by the exodus from Egypt but rather by a "new exodus" event in which all the exiles are brought home. In the new exodus, the Israelites are brought back from the land of the north, according to 16:15, because the normal routes of travel from Assyria and Babylon enter Israel from the north and not from the east.

Verse 16 employs some unusual figures of speech to depict and portray the effort and length to which the Lord goes to bring back all the exiles. A comparison is drawn between fishing and hunting and bringing back the exiles. Those who fish and hunt require patience, strategy, and time to catch their prey. In a similar way, God will expend considerable patience, strategy, and time to catch his "prey"—the exiles.

It is instructive to pause and follow the interpretation of Jesus and the apostles in the fulfillment of this prophecy. There is a clear and unmistakable allusion to Jeremiah 16:16 in Matthew 4 as Jesus is in the process of choosing twelve men whom he would train as his special agents:

> While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matt. 4:18–19 ESV)

When Jesus says to Peter and Andrew that he will make them "fishers of men," he is referring directly to Jeremiah 16:16, and he is saying that he will use his followers to bring the exiles home. We saw earlier that the return from exile entails two stages: (1) (physical) release from Babylon and (2) (spiritual) release from sin, condemnation, and death. The final stage of return from exile is inaugurated with the coming of Jesus and his ministry. This reading is substantiated from the many passages in the

Gospels indicating that the new exodus has begun in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The work of bringing the exiles home is, in fact, begun at the first coming of the Lord Jesus and concluded with his second coming. This is made plain by Paul's clear allusion to Isaiah 27:12–13 in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18:

> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a command by the voice of an archangel and the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.[10]

The descent of the Lord is heralded by an archangel blowing the trumpet of God. The trumpet of which Paul speaks is not something he was told about by direct revelation, but rather it is something he learned from his own Bible, the Old Testament, in Isaiah 27:

> In that day from the river Euphrates to the Brook of Egypt the LORD will thresh out the grain, and you will be gleaned one by one, O people of Israel. And in that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem. (Isa. 27:12–13 ESV)

Isaiah is referring here to the final gathering of the exiles, which is compared to gathering a grain harvest. A great trumpet is sounded, and the exiles in Assyria and Egypt will be brought home. One common function of blowing a trumpet in the Old Testament is to announce the coming of a king. The great trumpet, then, blown to announce the coming of the Lord

for his own in 1 Thessalonians 4, is the signal for the final phase of bringing the exiles home.[11]

According to Jesus and the apostles, then, the gathering of the exiles is what the first coming of Christ inaugurates and his second coming completes.

Returning to Jeremiah 16, note that verses 17 and 18 conclude the paragraph by reminding readers of the reason for the banishment that requires a new exodus: the idolatry of the Israelites is not hidden from the Lord, and he will repay them for their violation of the covenant in Exodus 19–24, made at Sinai and supplemented by Deuteronomy on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. The rendering of the ESV in Jeremiah 16:18 (as well as that of most versions), “But first I will doubly repay their iniquity and their sin,” does not adequately bring out the meaning of the original text. A literal rendering of the Hebrew would be, “I shall at first repay the double of their iniquity and sin.” This does not mean that the divine punishment is two times the value of the wrongdoing but rather that the penalty matches precisely the wrongdoing. It is the *lex talionis*, the principle of retribution, that is the foundation of the justice in the covenant: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Ex. 21:24–25). For every crime, the repayment must be precisely as much as, but not more than, the damage or harm caused.[12]

Jeremiah 31:26–40

We come now to Jeremiah 31:29–37—not only the main passage in Jeremiah on the new covenant but the only place in the Old Testament where the term “new covenant” is actually employed. The passage on the new covenant appears in a well-defined section commonly called the “Book of Consolation” that follows the bulk of the messages given by Jeremiah and his controversy with false prophets and that precedes his description of the last days of Jerusalem and the oracles concerning foreign nations. Fortunately, Jeremiah’s message is not all bad news: in the midst of prophesying destruction and judgment comes a marvelous message of

future restoration for the people of God. It is important to consider the context before examining Jeremiah 31:29–37 in some detail.

Overview of Jeremiah 30–31: The Book of Consolation

Outline of Jeremiah 30–31

1. Introduction: Promise of restoration and return of God's people 30:1–3
2. A coming time of distress, yet Jacob will be rescued 30:4–7
3. Discipline and rescue for Israel; destruction for the nations 30:8–11
4. The incurable wound: The discipline of Israel 30:12–17
5. The restoration of Israel 30:18–24
6. The Lord (Yahweh) will be God of one united people 31:1
7. Because of his love, the Lord will rebuild Israel 31:2–6
8. Regathering the north: Images of restoration 31:7–22
9. Restoring the south: Judah regathered 31:23–26
10. Once again God's people will be fruitful 31:27–30
11. The new covenant 31:31–34
12. The permanence of the new covenant: As permanent as creation 31:35–37
13. The new Jerusalem 31:38–40

The outline helps to situate our text in its immediate context and to see the flow of thought in the larger context. Jeremiah 30:1–3 forms a kind of general introduction and headline for the section as a whole, and 30:4–11 summarizes the thought of the whole: destruction for the nations but restoration for Israel. Then the restoration is described in detail, beginning with the northern kingdom of Israel and concluding with the southern kingdom of Judah. As the flow of thought arrives at the place where we have a regathered and restored people, we are presented with an announcement of a new covenant. This is followed by comments on the permanence of the new covenant and a brief glimpse of the new Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 31:26–40

The full text of Jeremiah 31:26–40 is cited here without apology; the author of Hebrews does the same thing and hence is responsible for the longest citation of the Old Testament in the New. Once again, this reveals the importance of this text.

At this I awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me.

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the LORD. In those days they shall no longer say:

"'The fathers have eaten sour grapes,
and the children's teeth are set on edge.'

But everyone shall die for his own iniquity. Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.

[The New Covenant]

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Thus says the LORD,
who gives the sun for light by day
and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night,
who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—

the LORD of hosts is his name:
"If this fixed order departs
from before me, declares the LORD,
then shall the offspring of Israel cease
from being a nation before me forever."

Thus says the LORD:
"If the heavens above can be measured,
and the foundations of the earth below can be explored,
then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel
for all that they have done,
declares the LORD."

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. And the measuring line shall go out farther, straight to the hill Gareb, and shall then turn to Goah. The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be sacred to the LORD. It shall not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever." (ESV)

Many discussions of this passage delimit the text as 31:31–34. Note the editorial heading "The New Covenant" in the ESV that sets off 31:31–40. Certainly the phrase "Behold, the days are coming" probably marks the beginning of an oracle or unit; 31:27 and 31:38 begin with the same phrase. Note, however, that 31:26 says that Jeremiah awoke and his sleep was pleasant to him. This indicates that the normal means of communicating to the prophet was in dreams and visions (see Num. 12:6) and that as the content of the Book of Consolation represented good news rather than the usual bad news, Jeremiah found his sleep sweet to him this time. At the same time, the statement that Jeremiah awoke is a clear indication of the end of the divine communication at 31:25, so that what we have attached at the end of the Book of Consolation are several prophetic oracles in definite sections appended to it. As we will see, 31:27–30 is integral to 31:31–34 and important for the interpretation of the new covenant. It is for this reason that I have delimited the unit as 31:27–40, subdivided by the recurring

introductory phrase into three sections. The messenger formula at the onset of 31:35 (“Thus says the LORD”) also marks a new paragraph. In all, then, the section contains four paragraphs. Discussions of the new covenant do not, in general, consider the flow of thought integral to these four paragraphs, but instead, they unnecessarily isolate 31:31–34 and focus attention on that one paragraph.

Explanation of this text will be focused on four questions: (1) When did Jeremiah predict the new covenant would be initiated? (2) With whom would God make this covenant? One of the parties is obviously God, but how should we define and delimit the other (human) party? (3) How is this covenant like the old (Israelite) covenant, and how is it unlike it? In other words, precisely what is *new* about the new covenant? And (4) what is the power or promise of the new covenant? That is, is this renewed covenant any better than the former one made at Sinai and supplemented by Deuteronomy on the plains of Moab?

Time

Jeremiah 31:27, 31, and 38 all begin with the phrase “Behold, days are coming.” This phrase also occurs at 30:3, the general introduction to the Book of Consolation:

> The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. For behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the LORD, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it.” (Jer. 30:2–3 ESV)

The general introduction to the Book of Consolation announces, “Behold, days are coming” (הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים). The next occurrences of this phrase are the three instances in 31:27–40 (in 31:38, בָּאִים is supplied as a Qere reading in the Masoretic Text). Indeed, this is a familiar phrase in Jeremiah (occurring some fourteen or fifteen times),[13] but it is found only rarely elsewhere in the Old Testament (six occurrences).[14] Note carefully that the word “days” is unarticulated or anarthrous. The translation “*the* days are coming” is not accurate. The text simply says, “days are coming.” The days

are indefinite. We must not take this as a technical term in the eschatology of the Old Testament or in the writings of the prophets.[15] It simply refers to an *indefinite* future. Whether this indefinite time in the future is near or remote is left entirely unspecified in the prophecy.

Parties

According to the text, Yahweh makes the new covenant "with the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31). The human partner is specified in this way because, in Jeremiah, this is the party that has broken the covenant made at Sinai:

> For the *house of Israel* and the *house of Judah*
> have been utterly treacherous to me, declares the LORD. (Jer. 5:11 ESV)

> The *house of Israel* and the *house of Judah* have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers. (Jer. 11:10 ESV)

The new covenant will bring the return from exile and reunification of a divided kingdom promised earlier:

> In those days the *house of Judah* shall join the *house of Israel*, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers for a heritage. (Jer. 3:18 ESV)

So "the house of Israel and the house of Judah" are expressly mentioned in 31:31 to show that the previously divided kingdom(s) according to the cotext of chapters 30–31 will be united. The regathered and restored North and the regathered and restored South of 30:1–31:26 will be reunited as *one*. Jeremiah 31:1 emphasizes, as do a number of passages, that there will be one united people of God.

We have already seen, however, from earlier passages in Jeremiah that the Gentiles or non-Jewish nations will be established in the midst of Israel in this restored people of God. They too are the exiles who will be brought home by the fishers of men. Let us now follow this through and see how it is interpreted in the New Testament by Jesus and the apostles.

First, note the clear reference to Jeremiah's new covenant by Jesus during his last Passover meal—which was at the same time his institution of the Lord's Supper. The text of Matthew 26:26–29 reads as follows:

> Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for *this is my blood of the covenant*, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (ESV)

Jesus redefines the Jewish Passover meal as a drama portraying his atoning death on the cross. This drama then interprets his crucifixion in precisely those terms: a new exodus that brings about forgiveness and reconciliation on the basis of the sacrifice of himself as a "Passover lamb." In this drama, the cup represents "my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Although the exact phrase "new covenant" is not recorded in Matthew's account, it is in the account given in Luke 22:14–23:

> And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is *the new covenant* in my blood. But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this. (ESV)

The reference in Matthew to blood "poured out for many" seems to be a clear allusion to Isaiah 53:10–12, where the servant of the Lord is a "Passover lamb" whose atoning death brings about forgiveness for "the many."[16] The reference to Jeremiah's new covenant is explicit, at least in Luke, and the allusion is also clear in Matthew. Jesus's last Passover meal, then, is converted into a new ceremonial tradition in which the cup represents his life (as the Passover Lamb) sacrificed to bring about the forgiveness of sins in the new exodus defined by Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Once the connection between the institution of the Lord's Supper in the Gospels and Isaiah 53 and Jeremiah 31 is established, it is interesting to note that Jesus gives this meal to *his disciples*. That is to say, the new covenant is not made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah interpreted as all Judaism indiscriminately in the first century, but rather it is interpreted specifically as those *who are followers of Jesus*, regardless of ethnicity, Jew first and later on also non-Jew.

Another key passage that addresses the question of how to define the human party in the new covenant is Romans 11:13–24:

> Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.
>
> But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be

> cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree. (ESV)

Paul is explaining in this passage the benefits of the new covenant and, in particular, how they relate to those who are genetically Israelites, since for the most part during Paul's ministry they rejected both Jesus as Messiah and his death as the basis for the final stage of the return from exile. Paul's main mission has been to take the good news to the Gentiles, and this has met with great success. What are we to make of the fact that, during and since Paul's ministry, few Jews but many Gentiles are believing in Jesus and being added to the church? This is the painful problem addressed in Romans 9–11. Paul explains that the acceptance of the person and work of Jesus by the Gentiles, the nations, will arouse jealousy among those of the historical race of Israel and will motivate them to come to faith in Jesus Christ.

As is well known, Paul employs the metaphor of an olive tree to represent Israel. Natural branches have been removed, and nonnative branches have been grafted into the one tree. It is common in the Old Testament to represent kings and kingdoms by stately tall trees and fruitful plants. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 is an obvious example. Ezekiel 17 pictures the king of Israel this way, as does Ezekiel 31 picture the kings of Assyria and Egypt. The most common type of "tree" used to represent Israel is the vine (Deut. 32:32; Ps. 80:8–19; Isa. 3:14; 5:1–7; 27:1–6; Jer. 2:21; 5:10; 12:10–13; Ezek. 15; 17; 19:10–14; Hos. 10:1–2). Psalm 80 is particularly eloquent, for it develops the theme of the extension of the kingdom of God by describing how the vine (i.e., Israel) grew and spread, and it also speaks of Israel's Adamic sonship (80:15). Only rarely is Israel represented by an olive tree (Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:6). Jeremiah is the one who speaks of burning the *olive tree* and breaking its branches (see also the vine described in this way in Jer. 5:10). So the olive tree for Paul represents Israel, and the Jeremiah passage is fundamental for his comments in Romans 11. Unbelieving and rebellious Israelites have been removed,

and individuals from other nations have been joined to this one people of God, the new and transformed Zion. As we saw earlier, this theme was already adumbrated in Jeremiah, though it was not stated there as clearly as in the New Testament.

The passages in Ephesians 2 and 3 are among the clearest in the New Testament:

> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.
>
> For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and

partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (Eph. 2:11–3:6 ESV)

When Paul speaks in Ephesians 2:15 of "one new *man*," he is obviously thinking of a new *Adam* and is saying that the *church*—by virtue of the new creation resulting from the resurrection of Jesus Christ and by virtue of the union of head (Christ) and body (church)—constitutes this new Adam. It is a renewal of the Adamic role initiated with Abraham and his family.

The Gentiles—members of nations and peoples in the earth apart from or outside the nation of Israel, who were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel—have been forged together with believers from Israel into *one new humanity*. Ephesians 2:14 says that "he made both groups / the two groups one." And again, 2:15 says that "he created in him the two (groups) into one new man/humanity." There is no future for either Israelite or non-Israelite apart from the church, and there is no separate future for either Israelite or non-Israelite—both will be part of the church. This is the body of humans who will survive the destruction of this creation and will be placed within the creation of a new heavens and new earth. Thus ethnic Israelites and ethnic non-Israelites will enjoy the new creation if and only if they have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and become part of the church. This is an inclusion for Gentiles and, as Romans 11 says, also an inclusion for ethnic Israelites, since they can be *grafted back into* their own olive tree, the one people of God in Scripture.

Ephesians 3:5 says that this truth was not made known earlier; instead, *it has now been revealed* to the apostles and prophets of the church of Jesus Christ by the Spirit. Paul then clarifies that this truth is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Earlier, I argued that the word "as" indicated *chronology* and *degree* rather than *kind*. G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd have now demonstrated a more convincing interpretation.[17] Certainly, Paul is not saying that this truth was not revealed *at all* before this time. This truth was certainly made known by the prophets of the Old Testament, as we have attempted to show. But what was not revealed is that the inclusion of the Gentiles would come *in* Christ Jesus. The prophets did predict that a coming king would restore the broken

covenant relationship between God and Israel. They also predicted that the blessings would come to the nations through Israel. What was not revealed is that both would happen through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the true Israel: the death of Jesus is the basis of a new covenant and also of the blessings flowing to the Gentiles *at the same time*.

Luke's arrangement in the book of Acts supports Paul's teaching. Note Acts 3:22–23:

> Moses said, "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people." (ESV)

Here Peter cites Deuteronomy 18:15, 18–19 to show that Israelites who do not accept Jesus as the coming prophet will be cut off from the people. Luke then shows the foreigner (Samaria) and the eunuch (Ethiopia) added to the one people of God, as Isaiah 56 predicted.

Returning to Romans 11, we find Paul giving the following teaching:

> I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written:
>
> "The deliverer will come from Zion;
> he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.
> And this is my covenant with them
> when I take away their sins." (Rom. 11:25–27 NIV)

Romans 11:25–27 is a debated passage among Christians, especially in classic covenant theology versus dispensationalism. Some have taught that the "full number of the Gentiles" refers to the so-called "church age" and that when it is over, the geopolitical kingdom will be restored to Israel and physical Israel will be saved. They may also appeal to the book of Daniel, which describes four Gentile kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God. Unfortunately, everyone may be blinded by the assumptions they have and

the way they put the metanarrative of Scripture together. We all bring such background to the reading of any particular text.

What does Paul mean in Romans 11:26 by the statement "all Israel will be saved"? In his commentary on Romans, Colin Kruse describes six different interpretations of this text.[18] Here are two of the most plausible: (1) by "all Israel" Paul is indicating all ethnic Israelites who believe in Jesus Christ between his first and second coming, when the exiles are being called home; and (2) Paul is indicating a large ingathering of believers in Jesus Christ from ethnic Israel toward the end. Both possibilities have been argued well in recent scholarship.[19]

In Romans 11, Paul has just portrayed Israel in terms of an olive tree, some of whose natural branches have been removed and some of whose branches are now non-Jewish branches grafted into the one root and tree. What this means is that the new humanity and restored Israel is based on faith and covenant relationship to the Lord rather than on ethnicity. During the period in which the exiles are brought home, a large number of "Gentile exiles" (to use Jeremiah's own imagery) will be brought home first, and this will motivate a large number of Jewish exiles to be brought home toward the end. But the Jewish exiles will be *brought back* to the one olive tree. We must interpret "all Israel" within the context of Paul's teaching in Romans 11. There is no separate future for physical Israel outside the church—the only humanity to inhabit the new creation. And this is not so-called replacement theology. It is what the prophets teach about the renovated and restored Zion. This is further made clear by Revelation 21:1–4:

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "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." (ESV)

The community of the new exodus, the new Zion, is defined in Hebrews 12:18–24. This community is now being gathered before the throne of God in heaven. When the new creation is ready—that is, the place where they will live—this community comes down out of heaven to the new earth. In Revelation 21:2, it is called "the holy city," "the new Jerusalem," and "a bride." In the New Testament the bride is a metaphor for the church, and here it is identified as the new Jerusalem. Later on, in 21:10–16, the same community, identified by the same names (i.e., the holy city, the new Jerusalem), is described as a cube, because it corresponds to the Most Holy Place in the Old Testament. The new creation community is the temple of God. There are twelve gates, and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are on the gates. In addition, there are twelve foundations, and the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are on them.

Normally, foundations are underneath. How may we imagine twelve foundations under a cube? Probably one foundation under each corner and two in between each corner. This is fitting, since twelve gates divided by four sides would give three gates per side, or one gate between each foundation.[20] Thus the Israel of the Old Testament and the apostolic community of the New Testament are completely and fully integrated in the new Jerusalem. This is the same as Paul's picture in Ephesians of Jew and non-Jew, forged into one united new humanity and covenant community—note the Covenant Formula in Revelation 21:3.

The New Covenant and the Old: Continuity and Discontinuity

How is this covenant like the old (Israelite) covenant, and how is it unlike it? In other words, precisely what is *new* about the new covenant? Jeremiah 31:31–34 describes the new covenant. Scholars have debated extensively the meaning of the word "new" (חָדָשׁ / *ḥādāš*) in Hebrew. Does it mean a renewed covenant or a covenant that did not exist previously? Is it a new development, or is it a bringing out of something yet again, such as a new day? As Dumbrell notes, Hebrew *ḥādāš* can mean "renewed" (Lam. 3:22–23) or "new" (Ex. 1:8; Deut. 32:17).[21] Joshua Moon rightly argues that we

should let the statements in Jeremiah 31:31–34 define what is meant by a new covenant.[22]

It is important to pay attention to the grammatical and literary structures in the text. Scott J. Hafemann has helpfully diagrammed the text to aid in clarifying the flow of thought. The argument of Jeremiah 31:31–34, according to its constituent propositions, is seen in table 13.1:

Table 13.1 Argument of Jeremiah 31:31–34[23]

31:31	"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.
31:32a	*Specifically* (negatively): "I will not make it like the covenant that I made with their fathers . . .
31:32b	"because they broke my covenant [at Sinai]
31:32c	"although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.
31:33a	*Specifically* (positively): "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD. "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their heart.
31:33b	*Immediate result*: "I will be their God and they will be my people.
31:34a	*Ultimate result*: "They will no longer teach each other saying, 'Know the LORD,'
31:34b	"because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD.
31:34c	*Basis for this result*: "I shall forgive their iniquity, and I shall remember their sin no more."

Several points in Jeremiah's announcement of the new covenant must be noted.

GOD'S RESOLUTION TO ISRAEL'S REBELLION. First, the new covenant is the divinely promised answer to the perennial problem of Israel's hard-hearted rebellion against the Lord. The Hebrew expression "the stubbornness of his (or their) heart(s)" occurs ten times in the Old Testament (Deut. 29:18; Ps. 81:12; Jer. 3:17; 7:24; 9:13; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17): the one instance in Deuteronomy is picked up by Jeremiah, who uses the phrase a total of eight times. Thus nearly all the occurrences are in Jeremiah. This phrase, along with other phrases used by Jeremiah, such as "the incurable wound" in chapter 30, demonstrates his emphasis on the fact that Israel's

rebellion is intractable: she cannot avert the coming anger and wrath of God. Judgment is absolutely certain. The new covenant looks beyond judgment to a future in which God will provide a solution to the stubbornness of his partner in the old covenant. The direction and instruction of God for righteous relationships will be internalized and written on the heart (see Isa. 51:7). Since the heart of the people will be transformed, they will be a faithful covenant partner. The new covenant will not be like the Mosaic/Israelite covenant, because the people broke that covenant. Now the people of the Lord will be completely faithful and loyal; they will be covenant keepers. Thus the new covenant in Jeremiah must be interpreted against the background of the faithless and stubborn heart of Israel in the old covenant. That the human partner in the new covenant will be faithful is nicely stated by Walther Eichrodt:

> The purport of Jer. 31.31ff., even though it does not speak of the spirit, is in effect no different from that of Is. 32.15ff.; 11.9 or Ezek. 36.26ff., namely a new possibility, created by God himself, of realizing the will of God in human life.[24]

Joshua Moon draws attention to the fact that the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31 is contrasted not with a “first” or “old” covenant but with the *broken* covenant:

> Our first firm point for reading 31:31–34 can now be established: the reference to “the day when I brought them up out of Egypt” (whether at 31:32 or 11:4 and 7) is not used to identify which covenant is made the point of contrast (e.g., Mosaic or Josianic). Nor does the phrase give justification for our leaping out of Jeremiah into a state of affairs described in the book of Exodus or Deuteronomy. Rather the phrase points us to the start of the relationship between Yhwh and his people, the great act by which Yhwh claimed them as his own. In other words, from ch. 11 we learn that the infidelity of the people to Yhwh—the broken covenant—has been broken from the very start, from the time in which Yhwh acted to call and bring them to himself.[25]

Moon is correct to emphasize that what is contrasted with the new covenant is the infidelity of the people. This clearly defines the new covenant as one

in which all covenant members are faithful, that is, believers. Nonetheless, just because scholars debate whether the broken covenant is Josianic or Mosaic does not mean we need to be agnostic on this issue. As we have demonstrated earlier, the Josianic covenant, according to 2 Kings 23:3–5, was a covenant initiated to establish or keep the Israelite covenant made at Sinai and renewed in Deuteronomy. The phrase "the day when I brought them up out of Egypt" most certainly refers to the events of Sinai and not to those of Josiah's time.

Jeremiah employs a wide variety of expressions to refer to the infidelity of Israel as a covenant partner. Three passages in particular ought to be mentioned:

> Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,
> look and take note!
> Search her squares to see
> if you can find a man,
> one who does justice
> and seeks truth,
> that I may pardon her.
> Though they say, "As the LORD lives,"
> yet they swear falsely.
> O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth?
> You have struck them down,
> but they felt no anguish;
> you have consumed them,
> but they refused to take correction.
> They have made their faces harder than rock;
> they have refused to repent.
>
> Then I said, "These are only the poor;
> they have no sense;
> for they do not know the way of the LORD,
> the justice of their God.
> I will go to the great
> and will speak to them,
> for they know the way of the LORD,

the justice of their God.”
But they all alike had broken the yoke;
they had burst the bonds. (Jer. 5:1–5 ESV)

For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them: “Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.” But they did not obey or incline their ear. (Jer. 7:22–24 ESV)

For long ago I broke your yoke
and burst your bonds;
but you said, “I will not serve.” (Jer. 2:20 ESV)

Jeremiah 5:1–5 describes a search for one person who is righteous so that the city may be saved, which recalls Abraham pleading for Sodom and Gomorrah. The phrase “the way of the LORD” refers directly to Genesis 18:19, where Abram is to direct his family to keep the way of the Lord by practicing social justice. For Jeremiah to assert that the people do not know the way of the Lord is an accusation of *covenant* infidelity. In Jeremiah 7:23, the command “Obey my voice” is a direct reference to Exodus 15:26 and 19:5, and therefore the refusal to hear or obey is Jeremiah’s accusation of *covenant* infidelity. In Jeremiah 2:20, the prophet describes the exodus as breaking the yoke (of serving Pharaoh) so that Israel could give the service of a devoted and obedient son to Yahweh, but Israel would not serve. This is yet another way of referring to Exodus 19:5–6 and describing *covenant* infidelity. Moon is right in stressing that the new covenant reverses this infidelity. Nonetheless, when he contrasts the exegesis of Jerome (the new covenant is a new era) and the exegesis of Augustine (the new covenant is what is characteristic of the faithful believer in any era), he oversimplifies. The new covenant entails a new era in which all covenant members are faithful.

GOD’S TORAH WRITTEN ON THE HEART. Second, in the new covenant, the תּוֹרָה (“instruction”) of God will be internalized and written on the heart, the center of one’s life—that is, the inner person where one reasons, feels, and

makes decisions and plans.[26] The term תּוֹרָה (inappropriately translated "law") shows that God's direction and instruction for appropriate relationships (divine-human, human-human, human-creation) will not change. The new covenant does not mean a change in God's standards of righteousness, of right and wrong, of what is appropriate in a covenant relationship. No, what is new about the new covenant is the ability of both partners to keep the covenant.

The writing of the divine instruction on the heart corresponds to the promise made earlier in Jeremiah that the ark of the covenant would become obsolete:

> And when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land, in those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, "The ark of the covenant of the LORD." It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again. At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart. In those days the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers for a heritage. (Jer. 3:16–18 ESV)

As Kevin J. Youngblood has noted, hints of a new covenant begin as early as Jeremiah 3:11–22, where Yahweh offers forgiveness to the northern kingdom of Israel if they would only acknowledge their guilt. In this context, Yahweh states that the ark of the covenant will no longer be necessary. Youngblood aptly comments,

> Since this was the box that housed the copy of the covenant document, the implications of its loss should be catastrophic as it was in DtH (1 Sam 4–6). Instead, YHWH says, no ark will be necessary in the future. Why not? Because Jer 31:31ff indicates that the new covenant document will be stored, not in a piece of cultic furniture but in the very hearts of YHWH's people.[27]

Thus, the people of God will faithfully keep the new covenant. God's instruction will be internalized; it will be ingrained in their thinking,

feeling, and planning. Paul picks this up in 2 Corinthians 3:3 when he speaks of the evidence for the new covenant in the Corinthian Christians: "You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (NIV).

THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. Third, the covenant relationship with God is the immediate result of God "writing" the divine direction for living and the instruction of the new covenant on the hearts of believers. This is clear from the Covenant Formula, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Notice, again, how Paul applies the Covenant Formula to the Corinthian Christians in 2 Corinthians 6:14–18:

> Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said:
>
> "I will live with them
> and walk among them,
> *and I will be their God,*
> *and they will be my people*."
>
> Therefore,
>
> "Come out from them
> and be separate,
> says the Lord.
> Touch no unclean thing,
> and I will receive you."
>
> And,
>
> "I will be a Father to you,
> and you will be my sons and daughters,
> says the Lord Almighty." (NIV)

Paul backs up his command not to be "yoked together with unbelievers" by a pastiche of citations from the Old Testament. First, from Leviticus 26:11–12 comes the Covenant Formula.[28] Then, from Isaiah 52:11 is a call to the exiles to leave Babylon and join the community of the new exodus, with the promise "I will receive you" added from Ezekiel 20:41, where another paragraph on the same topic can be found. Finally, 2 Corinthians 6:18 seems to apply the father-son relationship of the covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7:14 to all the members of the new covenant community.

THE MEMBERS OF THE NEW COVENANT COMMUNITY. Fourth, the result of inaugurating the new covenant will be that a community will be created in which "they will no longer teach each other, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, declares the LORD" (Jer. 31:34). This is a most significant statement, whose import has not been well understood. To begin to grasp the meaning, it must be understood that this verse is a statement that stands in contrast to 31:29–30 and answers the problem posed by these words:

> In those days people will no longer say,
>
> "The fathers have eaten sour grapes,
> and the children's teeth are set on edge."
>
> Instead, everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes —their own teeth will be set on edge. (NIV)

Verse 29 recites a proverb going around among the exiles in Babylon. Normally when a person eats sour grapes, his or her own lips pucker up. To claim that the parents ate sour grapes and the lips of the children puckered up is a way of saying that the children have been judged (i.e., exiled) for their parents' sins. One of the most illuminating comments on this text is that of D. A. Carson, which we must cite in this context:

> In the sixth century B.C. the prophet Jeremiah, speaking for the LORD, foresees a time when people will no longer repeat the proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Jer. 31:30). The history of Israel under the Mosaic covenant has been characterized by the outworking of this proverb. The covenant

> structure was profoundly racial and tribal. Designated leaders—prophets, priests, king, and occasionally other leaders such as the seventy elders or Bezaleel—were endued with the Spirit, and spoke for God to the people and for the people of God (cf. Exod. 20:19). Thus when the leaders sinned, the entire nation was contaminated, and ultimately faced divine wrath. But the time is coming, Jeremiah says, when this proverb will be abandoned. "Instead," God promises, "everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—his own teeth will be set on edge" (Jer. 31:30). This could be true only if the entire covenantal structure associated with Moses' name is replaced by another. That is precisely what the LORD promises: he will make "a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" that "will not be like the covenant" he made with their forefathers at the time of the Exodus. The nature of the promised new covenant is carefully recorded: God will put his law in the hearts and on the minds of his people. Instead of having a mediated knowledge of God, "they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," and therefore "no longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD'" (31:31ff.). This does not foresee a time of no teachers; in the context it foresees a time of no mediator, because the entire covenant community under this new covenant will have a personal knowledge of God, a knowledge characterized by the forgiveness of sin (31:34) and by the law of God written on the heart (31:33). "I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me" (Jer. 32:39–40).[29]

We would agree with Carson's analysis, although the fundamental point might be stated more clearly. He claims that the difference between the old covenant community and the new covenant community is that the latter will have no mediator. This is not quite true. It will indeed have a (human) covenant mediator, namely, Jesus Christ, who is prophet, priest, and king in one person. In the old covenant community, these covenant mediators sinned, and the community suffered because of *faulty mediators*. In the new

covenant, however, our covenant mediator is without sin, and as a result, the community will never suffer because of a faulty mediator.

What Jeremiah 31:34 is saying, however, in contrast to 31:29–30, is that in the old covenant, people became members of the covenant community simply by being born into that community. As they grew up, some became believers in Yahweh, and others did not. This pattern resulted in a situation within the covenant community where some *members* could urge other *members* to know the Lord. In the new covenant community, however, one becomes a member not by physical birth but rather by the new birth, which requires faith on the part of every person. Thus only believers are members of the new community: all *members* are *believers*, and *only* believers are members. Therefore in the new covenant community there will no longer be a situation where some members urge other members to know the Lord. There will be no such thing as an unregenerate member of the new covenant community. All are believers, all know the Lord, because all have experienced the forgiveness of sins.

What Jeremiah is teaching in 31:33–34 is identical to what Isaiah is teaching in Isaiah 54:13: "All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children" (ESV). Everyone in the covenant community will experience reconciliation (peace) with God, and so everyone will have a living relationship with the Lord, and so the divine instruction for living will be written on the heart. As the last part of 31:34 indicates, the basis for these characteristics of the new covenant community is the divine forgiveness of sins brought about by the establishment of the new covenant.

Jeremiah 31:34 creates difficulties for the Presbyterian understanding of the new covenant community. The prophets of the Old Testament and apostles of the New Testament clearly teach that there are no covenant members who are not believers. This challenge must be given in humility since, by and large, Presbyterians have had a much better grasp of the meaning and role of the covenants than Baptists.

How do Presbyterians interpret Jeremiah 31:34? As far as we know, their analysis of this text rests on three points.[30]

The first argument, as G. K. Beale puts it, is that Leviticus 26:9–13 is a passage in the Old Testament that uniquely shares three parallels with Jeremiah 31:31–33. We cite the text from Leviticus and list the three parallels:

> I will turn to you and make you fruitful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you. You shall eat old store long kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new. I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect. (ESV)

The three things this text uniquely has in common with Jeremiah 31:31–33, according to Beale, are as follows:

1. The placement of a "covenant into Israel"
2. A contrast of "old" and "new" inextricably linked to the renewal of a covenant and the new end-time conditions accompanying such a covenant
3. The concluding formula "I will be your/their God, and you/they will be my people"

Beale thinks that Jeremiah 31 is echoing the Leviticus 26 passage and that the text in Leviticus shows "that the primary expression of the new-covenant blessing in Lev. 26 is that God will establish his tabernacle (i.e., temple) with Israel (v. 11) in order to be present among them (v. 12)."[31]

Let us examine his points one by one. The phrase "I . . . will confirm my covenant with you" in Leviticus 26:9 is *hēqîm bĕrît*. This does not mean "the placement of a covenant into Israel," as Beale claims. What is being stated in Leviticus 26:1–13 is that if the Israelites obey the Mosaic covenant, Yahweh will affirm or uphold his side of the Mosaic covenant.

Second, when Yahweh upholds his side of the Mosaic covenant, the harvests will be so plentiful that the grain from last year, the "old," will no longer be used when the new harvest comes in. Therefore, "old" and "new"

refer directly to harvests as blessings promised in the Mosaic covenant in Deuteronomy 28 and are not speaking of an old or new covenant.

Third, a brief glance at Elmer Martens's book *God's Design* or the discussions given here of the Covenant Formula ("I will be your God, and you will be my people") shows that this statement is all over the Old Testament and not uniquely common to Leviticus 26 and Jeremiah 31. Definitely, Leviticus 26:9–13 does not shed light on Jeremiah 31.

A second argument brought forward by Beale and other Presbyterians is that the statement in Jeremiah 31:34 "they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them" always in the Old Testament means all without distinction rather than all without exception.

Presbyterians' third argument is to apply an "already–not yet" to the prophecy of Jeremiah 31 so that these blessings, such as the forgiveness of sins, are initiated by the first coming of Christ but not consummated until the second coming. Thus, the second and third arguments allow them to affirm that the church is a mixed community of believers and unbelievers. This preserves their claims concerning infant baptism.

Note, for example, Dumbrell, who argues that "injunctions to seek forgiveness of sins committed within the new relationship established through the death of Christ abound in the New Testament," so that "in Jeremiah, we are looking beyond the New Testament age to the community of the end-time, to a situation when the kingdom of God has finally come and God is all in all."[32]

Unfortunately, these arguments fail for a couple of reasons. (1) How do we hear what the prophets are heralding concerning the new covenant, and (2) how are these prophecies interpreted by the apostles of the New Testament?

First, to hear accurately and correctly the prophetic teaching on the new covenant, we must consider the prophetic teaching not only according to the plot structure of each prophetic book as attempted in this work but also according to the chronological progress of revelation. This was already realized more than thirty-five years ago by T. J. Deidun. When Jeremiah says that the new covenant consists in God himself giving his instruction(s) (*tôrâ*) within (*bĕqirbām*) the Israelites and writing (it/them) on their hearts

(i.e., minds) with the result that all will know Yahweh, we must recognize that he is developing further Isaiah's teaching given earlier "that all your children will be taught by Yahweh" (Isa. 30:20–21; 54:13). In the new Zion, God's people will have a Teacher and will "hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it.'"[33] Then we must interpret Jeremiah's teaching in the light of what Ezekiel says about thirty years later, since it is substantially the same thing. Ezekiel shows that the "interiorized" instruction/law of the new covenant is to be the Spirit of Yahweh given in the hearts of the people, effecting their inner transformation and impelling them to free obedience (Ezek. 36:27; 37:24).[34]

Certainly the expression "from the least of them to the greatest of them" emphasizes all without distinction, because in the Old Testament, only covenant mediators (kings, priests, prophets) were anointed by the Spirit. This anointing will apply to all without distinction in the new covenant. This does not mean that the new covenant community is mixed. It is parallel to other passages emphasizing that all will be given the Spirit. In Acts, the sine qua non, the mark of whether one is a Christian or not, is whether one possesses the Spirit.[35] First John 2:20 says, "But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge." In the new covenant, then, all without distinction have equal access to the knowledge of the Lord. So when Jeremiah talks about the instruction of Yahweh "written on the heart," he is speaking of the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer and the way the Spirit teaches us what path to follow. This is how we are taught of God. And this applies to each and every member of the new covenant community.

As we will see soon (below), Jeremiah 32:36–41 is parallel to Jeremiah 31:31–34. The normal pattern in Hebrew literature is to repeat, to go around the topic twice. And the parallel to Jeremiah 31:34 is Jeremiah 32:39, "I will give them singleness of heart and action." We explore the meaning of this phrase throughout the New Testament below in our discussion of Ezekiel 36:26. This parallel phrase prevents understanding the new covenant community as a mixed community. How can a mixed community have "one heart and one way"?

Further, if new covenant members have forgiveness of sins, in what way can the community be mixed and have believers and unbelievers in it? In what way can the forgiveness of sins be already and not yet? The final judgment will only confirm what believers possess now!

Second, the attempt to apply the "already–not yet" distinction to this text is not warranted by Jesus and the apostles. We must remember that the prophets of the Old Testament could not distinguish the already from the not yet (1 Pet. 1:10–12). It is Jesus and the apostles who explain and teach us that some of the prophets' statements are already, while others, in the same verse, are not yet (e.g., Isa. 61:2 in Luke 4:21–26). The Presbyterians seem to be confusing the kingdom of God and the new covenant. There is an already but not yet to the kingdom of God, but when the apostles speak of the new covenant, it is always already and in no part not yet. Hebrews 8 cites all of Jeremiah 31 and affirms that it is here in its fullness, now!

Consider the teaching of the apostle John on the forgiveness of sins. The interpretation of Dumbrell appears clearly contradicted by the teaching of 1 John 1:5–2:2. The argument of John in this text is outlined in table 13.2, followed by a brief comment.

First John 1:5–2:2 consists of paragraphs arranged according to an identical pattern. First, the apostle John reports a claim made by false teachers; second, he categorically rejects this teaching; third, he provides a remedy or solution to the problem posed by the false teachers.

Each of the paragraphs in this series deals with different aspects of sin in one's worldview. The entire series is prefaced by a central principle in Christian teaching that describes God as pure "light." Stated negatively, "there is no darkness in him at all." In his being and in his relationships, there is no evil.

Table 13.2 Covenant Violation and False Teaching in 1 John 1:5–2:2

Introduction 1:5
1. Behavior and covenant relationship to God
a. Report of false teaching 1:6a
b. Rejection of false teaching 1:6b
c. Remedy/response to false teaching 1:7

2. Dealing with sin (general)
   a. Report of false teaching 1:8a
   b. Rejection of false teaching 1:8b
   c. Remedy/response to false teaching 1:9
3. Dealing with personal sins
   a. Report of false teaching 1:10a
   b. Rejection of false teaching 1:10b
   c. Remedy/response to false teaching 2:1–2

First, this affects those who claim to be in covenant relationship with God and at the same time evince behavior that is clearly evil. This claim is rejected. Then John states that those who are in covenant relationship must demonstrate a lifestyle that corresponds to the being and character of God. At this point, such behavior is not completely sinless, but nonetheless, the atoning work of Jesus *constantly cleanses from all sin*. So even though there is an already–not yet to the kingdom, believers in Jesus Christ *currently experience full forgiveness of sins*.

Second, there are those who deny any participation in sin (in general). The only remedy for them is to confess their sins and put their trust in Christ. Elsewhere in the writings of John, the forgiveness of sins refers to deliverance from the penalty of sin, and therefore he is describing here "becoming a Christian" or "becoming a member of the new covenant community." This paragraph deals with justification in the language of Paul.

Third, there are those who deny as believers that they have committed acts of sin. This appears to be the force of the perfect in Greek. These folks are claiming that since becoming believers they have achieved a condition in which they no longer commit sins. Now, says John, there is no need to go out and sin to prove that the false teachers are wrong. But moment by moment, as and if the believer sins, he or she *automatically has Jesus Christ as High Priest presenting the merits of his finished work on his or her behalf*. God does not wait for us to confess our sins, although this is an important act on the part of a believer. *Jesus Christ, our High Priest, immediately applies his atoning work on our behalf. So we now have the*

full forgiveness of sins. Moreover, in Romans 5:11, Paul indicates that "*we have now received reconciliation*." It is not something in process, in spite of our failures as a Christian.

In *An Old Testament Theology*, Bruce K. Waltke claims, based on Jesus's parables in Matthew 13, that the new covenant administration includes both regenerate and unregenerate members:

> The first parable, the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1–23), reveals that only a fraction of those who outwardly accept Jesus Christ as Messiah persevere and bear good fruit (i.e., love of God and of others). The second parable, the parable of the weeds (vv. 24–30), reveals that at present good seed (the people of God's kingdom) and weeds (the people of Satan's kingdom) co-exist in the world, growing together until the final judgment at the end of the age, when the weeds will be burned and the wheat will be saved. The Lord's final parable, the parable of the net (vv. 47–50), climactically clarifies that the visible kingdom of God consists of good and bad fish that are caught in the same net and not separated from one another until the end of the age.
>
> Consequently, the new covenant administration includes both true (regenerate) and nominal (unregenerate) followers of Jesus Christ. The latter fall away because they lack the root of regeneration and the eternal life that perseveres and prevails over temptation. The apostles confront this reality in their letters to the churches (cf. 1 Cor. 15:2; Gal. 1:6–9; Heb. 6:4–6; 10:26–39; 1 John 2:3–6, 19; Rev. 2:14, 20–23; 3:1–5, 16). In other words, true believers and nominal believers can be found in both the old and new covenant administrations. The former receive covenant blessing; the latter covenant curses.[36]

Unfortunately, what is claimed in the second paragraph does not follow from the exegesis in the first; that is, the problem is with the word "consequently." This is due to a larger problem in classic covenant theology: the metanarrative of this system is not true to the Bible because it does not pay adequate attention to what the biblical texts say in defining the relationship(s) of one covenant to another. First, we cannot speak of "the covenant" in the way the theologians of classic covenant theology do because this language is never found in the Bible. Instead, we can speak

only of the covenants (plural)—that is, the covenant with creation, the covenant with Abraham, the Israelite covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the new covenant. Furthermore, we must let the biblical texts define the relationships between them.

In the Abrahamic covenant, God promises blessing for Israel and for the nations through Israel. The Israelite covenant is inaugurated to implement the promises to Abraham. The Davidic covenant reveals that the blessing will come through the king of Israel (rather than through the nation as a whole) as he administers justice to Israel and to the nations. Israel's idolatry and sin violate the covenant, and thus the plan of salvation for the world appears doomed. The new covenant restores the broken relationship between God and Israel by bringing about the forgiveness of sins. Redemption is the achievement and victory of a Davidic king who then administers righteousness to a restored Israel, in which Jew and Gentile are created to be the new humanity. The community of the new covenant is the only humanity to inherit a new creation—a new heavens and new earth.

In the present time, when the old creation overlaps with the new, God rescues believers in Jesus Christ from "the authority of darkness" and "transfers them to the kingdom of his beloved Son," according to Colossians 1:13. In the church, believers experience the blessings of the new covenant. In what way, however, does the new covenant "apply to" the unregenerate? The only blessings the unregenerate receive are the blessings given in the covenant with creation to all humans alike.

In the parable of the sower, the field is the world, where the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the Evil One are not clearly separated. Nonetheless, the church and the world are not the same thing. This is why, in church discipline, putting people out of the church is to hand them over to Satan, that is, remove them from the protection administered by the new covenant and expose them to the dangers of Satan's kingdom (1 Tim. 1:20). This is the opposite of the transferal in Colossians 1:13.

INAUGURATING A NEW COVENANT. Fifth, the expression "I will cut a new covenant" (*kārat bĕrît*) shows that God is not simply confirming or reestablishing or upholding the Sinai covenant in a covenant renewal; he is initiating or inaugurating a new covenant. Therefore the new covenant is

not the old covenant. It is a *new* covenant. This automatically renders the Israelite covenant obsolete as a code or formalized agreement. Recall that the Israelite covenant is both a law treatise and a covenant or vassal treaty. A new arrangement or code will be put into place between God and his people, but the instruction in that code will be the same. As a result, when we compare and contrast the old and new covenant, we can say that we are not bound to the old covenant as a code but that the righteousness of God demonstrated in the old covenant has been enshrined and incorporated into the new.

This is something that in general is poorly grasped in many discussions of the Christian life. As a Christian, I am not bound by the Ten Commandments because they are part of an agreement between God and Israel that does not apply to me. My relationship to God is based on and defined by the new covenant. Nonetheless, within the new covenant the divine instruction calls me to love my neighbor so that adultery, murder, stealing, and so forth are still covenant violations. The righteousness of God has not changed. Thus, those like the theonomists who want to put the Christian under the old covenant are false teachers.

Some of the similarities and differences between the old and new covenants can be diagrammed simply:

Similarity of the New Covenant to the Old Covenant

1. Basis is the same (the grace of God)
2. Purpose is the same (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9–10)
3. Initiated by blood (Heb. 9:6–10:18)
4. Character of divine instruction is the same (Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:14)

Dissimilarity of the New Covenant to the Old Covenant

1. Better mediator (without sin)
2. Better sacrifice (Isa. 42:6; 52:13–53:12; Heb. 9:6–10:18)
3. Better provision (the Spirit of God, Ezek. 36:24–28)
4. Better promise (impartation of a new heart, Ezek. 36:24–28)

The Power of the New Covenant: Daring to Draw Near

Hidden and tucked away in the Book of Consolation, separate from the paragraphs on the new covenant, are some amazing statements concerning the power and promise of the coming new situation. Let us consider the amazing prediction of Jeremiah 30:21–22:

> Their prince shall be one of their own,
> their ruler shall come from their midst;
> I will bring him near, and he shall approach me,
> for who would otherwise dare to approach me?
> says the LORD.
> And you shall be my people,
> and I will be your God. (NRSV)

The import of these words for the new covenant can be developed under three headings.

NO ONE CAN APPROACH GOD ON HIS OR HER OWN INITIATIVE. Jeremiah employs a bold figure of speech in this text. This figure of speech is usually not translated in most English versions. Verse 21c might be rendered, "For who would mortgage his heart to draw near to me." This is a metaphor in which a comparison is drawn between a person using property as collateral for a loan and a person giving away his life for something. Just as mortgaging a house or property for money due to one's desperate financial straits is an extreme and radical step, even more so is it an act of desperation to give away one's heart, that is, one's life. The inner person is one's most precious possession. Here Jeremiah portrays a man selling his soul, as it were, to have an audience with God. Could one's most valuable possession be used as collateral to gain an audience with God? Absolutely *not*! The metaphor expresses the fact that there is no initiative on the part of a human that can bring him close to God; the initiative must come from God and God alone.

GOD HAS BROUGHT THE KING-PRIEST OF HIS PEOPLE NEAR. Although no human initiative can bring a person into the awesome presence of the divine King of kings and Lord of lords, God has brought the king of his people

near. This is of greater moment than that of Esther coming before the great king of the Persian Empire. J. A. Thompson comments,

> To enter the divine presence unbidden was to risk death. The ruler thus appears to be undertaking a sacral or priestly function rather than one that is specifically political. The picture is of a ruler-priest performing both political and priestly duties. Such a concept was well known in the Middle East.[37]

We should carefully note the language used in Jeremiah 30:21. The text speaks of a prince (אַדִּיר) or ruler (מֹשֵׁל). The first word is literally a "mighty one," and the second is a participle from a generic verb "to rule." Bright is right to note that the normal term for "king" (מֶלֶךְ) is avoided for the same reasons that the author of Samuel prefers נָגִיד. Furthermore, the verb "to draw near" (נגשׁ) and the verb "to bring near" (קרב) belong primarily to the description of priestly service and work.[38] The language of this text, then, portrays a coming figure who is both priest and king. The combination of priest and king is extremely rare in the messianic texts of the Old Testament (cf. Psalm 110), but it indicates that the coming figure fulfills an Adamic role planned by God from the beginning for a man over his creation. The text also speaks of the future ruler coming from the midst of Israel. This is exactly the language used in Deuteronomy 18:15 for God raising up a prophet and perhaps also in Deuteronomy 17:15 for God choosing a king for Israel.

We Can Draw Near through Him. The implication is that those who are joined to this ruler, his people, can draw near to God through him. And this is made explicit in Hebrews 10:19–22:

> Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (NIV)

Jeremiah 31:35–36 speaks of the new covenant as enduring, as lasting, as permanent by affirming that it is as enduring as the divine arrangement that gave the sun to light up the day and the moon and stars to light up the night. Williamson argues that this is a reference to the covenant with Noah rather than to the covenant with creation:

> While some scholars have pointed to Jeremiah 33:20–26 for further support [that Jer. 31:35–36 refers to Genesis 1–2], the references here to a covenant with inanimate created things seem to allude more to dimensions of the Noahic covenant reflected in Genesis 8:22–9:13 (esp. Gen. 8:22) than to an implicit "covenant with creation" in Genesis 1–3. Admittedly, the somewhat similar analogy drawn in Jeremiah 31:35–37 may indeed allude to the fixed order established at creation, although this appears to build an argument from silence.[39]

The text of Jeremiah 31:35–36 mentions specifically the sun as a light for the day and the stars as a light for the night. This refers more obviously to Genesis 1:14–16 than to Genesis 8:22. If one allows for a covenant with creation that is reaffirmed and upheld in Genesis 6–9, then one can have it both ways. Nonetheless, Williamson's argument appears to be special pleading, especially when he feels the force of the connection between Jeremiah 31:35–37 and the fixed order of creation. How is this an argument from silence when Genesis 1:14–16 speaks of this fixed order?

Finally, Jeremiah 31:38–40 describes the dimensions of the renovated and restored Jerusalem and claims that even the areas formerly used for refuse will be devoted to the Lord. Not all the locations mentioned in the text are known, but Jeremiah appears to move from northeast to northwest, then to southwest and around to southeast. It seems that the geography of the new Jerusalem will be different and that the Valley of Hinnom defiled by corpses and garbage will become holy to the Lord. The new Jerusalem will be both different from and expanded beyond the old.

Excursus

The book of Jeremiah is notorious for problems in the history of the transmission of the text. Many differences exist between the Hebrew Masoretic Text and the Greek Septuagint. Scholars attribute some of the differences to copyists' errors, some to the process of translation, and some to a different parent text. Frequently the argument is made that the parent text behind the Greek translation is older than and superior to what we have in the Masoretic Text.

One important treatment on Jeremiah 31 in the Hebrew and Greek Bible is by Adrian Schenker.[1] Schenker argues that the differences in the Greek translation, particularly those in 31:32, are due largely to a different parent text, which represents a different understanding. The parent text behind the Greek translation may even be older and superior.

Here we may briefly provide an English translation of the Greek (Septuagint) version of Jeremiah 31 and consider claims made by Schenker relevant to the discussion of the new covenant. First, a rendering of 31:27–34 of the Greek version is useful:

> "Behold, days are coming," says the Lord, "and I will sow Israel and Judah with human seed and animal seed. And it will be, just as I was watching over them to tear down and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and plant," says the Lord. "In those days, they will no longer say, 'The fathers ate unripe grapes, and the teeth of the children are set on edge,' but each will die for his own sin, and the one eating unripe grapes, his teeth will be set on edge.
>
> "Behold days are coming," says the Lord, "and I will make with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah a new covenant, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers when I took them by their hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, because they did not remain in my covenant and I was not concerned about them," says the Lord. "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the Lord. "Giving, I will give my laws in their mind, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will become a god to them, and they will become a people to me. And they will never again teach each his fellow citizen and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord.' For they will all know me, from their small even to their great,

because I will be propitious regarding their wrongdoings, and their sins I will never again remember.”

A brief comparison of the Greek and Hebrew texts yields the following differences. In 31:27, διὰ τοῦτο is a plus in the Septuagint in relation to the Masoretic Text. Yet in 31:31a, where the wording in the Masoretic Text is identical to 31:27a in the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint corresponds quantitatively to the Masoretic Text. The Greek translator does not render בַּיִת in אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בֵּית יְהוּדָה by οἶκος as he does for the identical phrase in the Masoretic Text in 31:31. Hence, διὰ τοῦτο is a minus in the Septuagint in relation to the Masoretic Text. If the putative parent text of the Septuagint is identical to the Masoretic Text, then this represents an attempt to provide stylistic variation. In 31:28, the Masoretic Text has five bound infinitives describing a negative “watching over” God’s people in the past and two bound infinitives describing a positive “watching over” God’s people in the future. The Septuagint has two infinitives in both cases. It is possible that the parent text of the Septuagint differs from the Masoretic Text, but it looks more like the Greek translator made the negative and positive dependent clauses match in length. In 31:29a, 34a, and 34b, the Masoretic Text employs a negative + imperfect + עוד. This construction is rendered by οὐ μή + aorist subject (i.e., emphatic future denial) in 31:29a and 34a, but more quantitatively by οὐ μή + aorist subject + ἔτι in 31:34b. Again, apparently the Greek translator exercised freedom in his task. In 31:30b, the Masoretic Text employs a cleft sentence while the Septuagint omits כל־האדם and has the participle directly dependent on the subject rather than employing extraposition. The possessive pronoun αὐτοῦ at the end, although corresponding quantitatively to the Masoretic Text, is redundant in Greek. For 31:32, בְּיוֹם הֶחֱזִיקִי בְיָדָם is rendered by ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπιλαβομένου μου τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῶν. Thus the Greek translator employs a genitive absolute and demonstrates concern for the demands of the target language. As a result, a *beth* preposition in the Masoretic Text has no formal equivalent in the Septuagint. Moreover, the dependent clause ὅτι αὐτοὶ οὐκ ἐνέμειναν ἐν τῇ διαθήκῃ μου does not correspond formally to the relative clause אֲשֶׁר־הֵמָּה הֵפֵרוּ אֶת־בְּרִיתִי in the Masoretic Text, nor does καὶ ἐγὼ ἠμέλησα αὐτῶν correspond to וְאָנֹכִי בָּעַלְתִּי בָם in the Masoretic Text, although the καὶ ἐγώ for וְאָנֹכִי is a wooden rendering and may suggest a

parent text not greatly different. In 31:33, διδοὺς δώσω does not match נָתַתִּי in the Masoretic Text but suggests a parent text like נתון אתן. (Note that the citation in Hebrews 8 lacks δώσω). The phrase εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν for בְּקִרְבָּם shows concern for the demands of the culture of the target language, while καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίας αὐτῶν for וְעַל־לִבָּם does not, except that the "hearts" are pluralized according to the demands of Greek. Nonetheless, לֵב is frequently literally translated in the Septuagint. The direct object אֶת־תּוֹרָתִי in the Masoretic Text, although singular, is rendered in Greek by the plural νόμους, and the third feminine singular suffix on אֶכְתְּבֶנָּה is rendered by αὐτούς to match in number. For Jeremiah 31:34, the direct objects with the third masculine plural pronominal suffixes are translated as plurals in Greek: ταῖς ἀδικίαις αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν.

When one considers the character of the translation *as a whole*—data that Schenker in general does not consider—we get a more holistic perspective of the work of the translator and see that the Greek translator varies considerably from formal correspondence to functional correspondence in relation to his parent text. Moreover, the biographical notes in the book of Jeremiah clearly indicate that the work was rewritten several times. The book was sent to the exiles in Babylon, but Jeremiah himself migrated to Egypt. This history in itself suggests that perhaps the version in Egypt is not the canonical version in the library authorized by Ezra and Nehemiah.[2] It could also be that the parent text behind the Septuagint was updated from archaic Hebrew to the demands of contemporary forms of the language at the time of translation. All these factors make it difficult to be certain about the claim that we should consider the text of the Greek translation superior at any point, especially when, as Schenker admits, the precise wording of the parent text is impossible to reconstruct.[3] Even if the long citation in Hebrews 8:7–13 generally follows the Septuagint, this does not mean that the different wording in Jeremiah 31:32 is somehow a better text, when the author of Hebrews draws no specific argument based on it.

Perhaps what Schenker has not considered sufficiently is the possibility that the Greek translation actually represents an interpretation of a Hebrew parent text identical to that transmitted in the Masoretic Text. The clause ὅτι αὐτοὶ οὐκ ἐνέμειναν ἐν τῇ διαθήκῃ μου could be construed as a dynamic rendering of אֲשֶׁר־הֵמָּה הֵפֵרוּ אֶת־בְּרִיתִי in the Masoretic Text. How ἠμέλησα in the clause following might be a dynamic rendering of בָּעַלְתִּי has yet to be

adequately explored. Could the translator have thought that the people did not remain in the covenant and that God said, “Never mind! [I have another plan]”? The apparatus of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* at least considers the possibility that the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text are identical here.

Jeremiah 32:36–41

It is normal and standard in Hebrew literature for a speaker to go around the topic at least twice. The second time, the speaker will usually approach the topic from a different perspective. When the two conversations are heard at the same time, a holographic idea can be mentally viewed. In Jeremiah 32:36–41, Jeremiah goes around the topic of the new covenant a second time:

> You are saying about this city, “By the sword, famine and plague it will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon”; but this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me and that all will then go well for them and their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul. (NIV)

Here the oracle of the prophet describes gathering the people from exile and bringing them back to the land of Israel. Note the Covenant Formula in 32:38: “They will be my people, and I will be their God.” Verse 40 builds on this formula by announcing “an everlasting covenant.” The people will have “one heart” (32:39) and will be inspired to fear the Lord (32:40).

When Yahweh says he will act so that “all will then go well for them and their children after them,” this has been misinterpreted by covenant theologians to say that children of those who belong to the new covenant community are included (see Acts 2:39) and that therefore infants should be baptized. There is a constant concern in Jeremiah 31 and 32 for the

descendants of Jeremiah's hearers (31:17, 29; 32:18, 39, 42). The return that brings the exiles home is the period between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ. Thus the promise of the new covenant was given by Jesus to his hearers, and they could pass on this good news to their children and so on down through the generations. But it is not a statement that guarantees that the children of believers will automatically become believers.

Williamson compares and contrasts Jeremiah 31:31–34 and 32:37–41 by means of a table (table 13.3):

Table 13.3 Comparing and Contrasting Jeremiah 31:31–34 and 32:37–41[40]

Jeremiah 31:31–34 (NIV)	**Jeremiah 32:37–41 (NIV)**
31:31 I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah	32:40a I will make an everlasting covenant with them [i.e., the people of Israel and Judah; cf. 32:30]
31:32 It will not be like the covenant . . . they broke	32:40c They will never turn away from me
31:33a I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts	32:39a I will give them singleness of heart and action
	32:40c I will inspire them to fear me
31:33b I will be their God, and they will be my people	32:38 They will be my people, and I will be their God
31:34a They will all know me	32:39b They will always fear me
31:34b I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more	32:40b, 41 I will never stop doing good to them . . . and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul

Again, these are like the left and right speakers of a stereo system. Note how the titles "new covenant" and "everlasting covenant" are interchangeable. The fact that the Israelite covenant was broken is contrasted with the faithfulness of the human partner in the new covenant. Verse 39 in the Hebrew text literally reads, "And I will give to them one[41] heart and one way to fear me all the days for good to them and for their sons after them." As Georg Fischer helpfully points out, this verse is based on Deuteronomy 5:29 and is closely connected to Ezekiel 11:19.[42] Having

the divine instruction in the heart will give the people undivided emotions, mind, and will focused on the Lord and his *way*. Again, knowing God and fearing the Lord are also looking at the same thing from different perspectives. Finally, the positive side of forgiveness is equivalent to "the good things" God has planned and will do for his people.

Jeremiah 33:12–26

Jeremiah 33:12–26 is basically Jeremiah's final discourse on the new covenant (apart from a brief mention in 50:4–5). And just as Ezekiel draws together several different strands in his last conversation on the new covenant, Jeremiah does the same thing. Return from exile and the new covenant is connected to the covenant with David, the covenant with Levi, and the covenant with creation:

> "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In this place, desolate and without men or animals—in all its towns there will again be pastures for shepherds to rest their flocks. In the towns of the hill country, of the western foothills and of the Negev, in the territory of Benjamin, in the villages around Jerusalem and in the towns of Judah, flocks will again pass under the hand of the one who counts them,' says the LORD.
>
> "'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.
>
> "'In those days and at that time
> I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line;
> he will do what is just and right in the land.
> In those days Judah will be saved
> and Jerusalem will live in safety.
> This is the name by which it will be called:
> The LORD Our Righteous Savior.'
>
> For this is what the LORD says: 'David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of Israel, nor will the Levitical priests ever fail to have a man to stand before me continually to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to present sacrifices.'"

> The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: “This is what the LORD says: ‘If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time, then my covenant with David my servant—and my covenant with the Levites who are priests ministering before me—can be broken and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne. I will make the descendants of David my servant and the Levites who minister before me as countless as the stars of the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore.’”
>
> The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: “Have you not noticed that these people are saying, ‘The LORD has rejected the two kingdoms he chose’? So they despise my people and no longer regard them as a nation. This is what the LORD says: ‘If I have not made my covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and have compassion on them.’” (NIV)

The New Covenant and the Covenant with David

Jeremiah continues the announcement of restoration for Israel that flows from the return from exile. As part of this rebuilding, renewal, and restoration, he will uphold his good word concerning a Davidic king. The NIV renders Jeremiah 33:14, “I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.” In the Hebrew text the verb that is used is *hēqîm*. Similar to the expression *hēqîm bĕrît*, we have the expression *hēqîm haddabar haṭṭôb*, which means, “He will cause to stand”—that is, confirm, establish, uphold—“the good word that he gave” to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. The good word or gracious promise to which Jeremiah refers is a prophetic word given by earlier prophets (e.g., Isaiah 11) that ultimately goes all the way back to Nathan in 2 Samuel 7. It is the promise of someone from the lineage of David as king and ruler over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as Jeremiah 33:26 puts it. Isaiah had used the term “branch” for this, as had Jeremiah earlier:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—
and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. (Isa. 11:1–3 NIV)

"The days are coming," declares the LORD,
"when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch,
a King who will reign wisely
and do what is just and right in the land.
In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel will live in safety.
This is the name by which he will be called:
The LORD Our Righteous Savior." (Jer. 23:5–6 NIV)

In order to adequately grasp the meaning of these texts in Isaiah and Jeremiah and to see the relationship between them, we have to discuss the meaning of the word commonly rendered "branch" in the English versions. We have discussed earlier that plants or stately tall trees are used as a common metaphor for kings and kingdoms in the Old Testament. Wolter Rose's study of "branch" is superior and is the basis for the comments here.[43] For the Hebrew word צֶמַח, there are two options: either (1) it refers to a part of a plant/tree and means "branch" or "sprout," or (2) it is used for the plant or plants as a whole and means "vegetation." Rose gives a table showing all the terms in Hebrew for parts of plants and plants in general (table 13.4). What is interesting in the analysis of these terms is that those in the last column can be used in the expression "the [plants] of the field," whereas those in the first two columns cannot. Therefore, צֶמַח is not a plant part but rather a generic term for vegetation meaning something like "growth" and should be assigned to column three in the table.

With the correct meaning of צֶמַח in mind, let us note that Isaiah uses the terms חֹטֶר and נֵצֶר in 11:1, whereas Jeremiah employs צֶמַח in 23:5 and 33:5.[44] The emphasis in each prophet is different, just as the words are different. In Isaiah, the divine judgment means that the tree representing the

Davidic king and kingdom is cut down. Nonetheless, in the gracious restoration brought by God the remaining stump will bring forth a shoot and grow again.

Table 13.4 Possible Meanings of צֶמַח[45]

Branch	Shoot/Sprout	Plant(s)/Vegetation
בַּד	יוֹנָקֶת	דֶּשֶׁא
דָּלִית	נֵצֶר	חָצִיר
חֹטֶר	[פֶּרַח]	עֵץ
עָנָף		עֵשֶׂב
פֹּארָה		שִׂיחַ
שָׂרִיג		

Jeremiah 23 comes in the context of a curse brought on Coniah, so that this particular Davidic king will have no one from his line as future king in Israel. Ultimately, this means that the king will have to come from another part of the lineage of David. Note what Jeremiah says in 23:5, “I will raise up for David righteous growth.” We should pay attention to the little preposition “to” or “for” in this text. Things will be so far gone in destruction that *God* will have to bring about restoration for the line of David; it will not be able to send out a shoot on its own. Rose summarizes well the difference between Isaiah’s and Jeremiah’s prophecies:

> The difference in terminology between Isa. 11.1 and the צמח oracles (those in Jeremiah and in Zechariah) implies that the overall thrust of these passages is substantially different. The imagery in Isa. 11.1 of a “shoot from the stump of Jesse” and a “branch . . . out of his roots” leaves room for the Davidic dynasty to make a contribution to its own future. The צמח imagery in Jer 23.5 suggests that only a divine intervention can safeguard the future of the Davidic dynasty.[46]

In other words, we have to get to the place as in Abraham’s experience where only the divine gift of life from dead bodies will bring about fulfillment of the promises.

In the text, the growth is given the adjective “righteous,” because, as the next clause clearly states, “he will do what is just and right in the land.” “Just” and “right” constitute a word pair communicating not only the notion of social justice but specifically the social justice of the Israelite covenant. Thus it is a way of summarizing the entire Torah. The king is the administrator of the Israelite covenant. Never again will the family of David fail to have a man on the throne, and a hint of the coming king is found in the name of this growth raised up by God: “The LORD Our Righteousness.”

The New Covenant and the Covenant with Levi

The future restoration will see no further failure in the continued rule of a Davidic king administering the divine righteousness, “nor will the priests, who are Levites, ever fail to have a man to stand before me continually to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to present sacrifices” (Jer. 33:18). So the new covenant will involve not only the king but also the priests.

A covenant that we have not discussed to this point is one made by God with the Levites. All the (few) relevant texts in the Old Testament are cited here:

> Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings the Israelites present to the LORD I give to you and your sons and daughters as your regular share. It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the LORD for both you and your offspring. (Num. 18:19 NIV)

> Then an Israelite man brought into the camp a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting. When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear into both of them, right through the Israelite man and into the woman’s stomach. Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped; but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000.
>
> The LORD said to Moses, “Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites. Since

he was as zealous for my honor among them as I am, I did not put an end to them in my zeal. Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites." (Num. 25:6–13 NIV)

"And now, you priests, this warning is for you. If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honor my name," says the LORD Almighty, "I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not resolved to honor me.

"Because of you I will rebuke your descendants; I will smear on your faces the dung from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it. And you will know that I have sent you this warning so that my covenant with Levi may continue," says the LORD Almighty. "My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin.

"For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth. But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi," says the LORD Almighty. "So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law." (Mal. 2:1–9 NIV)

Remember them, O my God, because they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites. (Neh. 13:29 NIV)

We can quickly summarize the import of these texts. As early as Numbers 18, the Israelite offerings are given to the Levites for their sustenance as a "covenant of salt" (cf. 2 Chron. 13:5). Since salt was used in the ancient world to preserve things, a covenant of salt means one that is enduring and lasting, a permanent agreement.

Then in Numbers 25, Phinehas showed great zeal for the honor of Yahweh, and his actions atoned for the sin of the people, so God rewarded his actions by giving a covenant of peace to him and his tribe. Malachi excoriated the priests in his time for failing to live up to this covenant. The text in Malachi gives us a fuller appreciation for the covenantal role to be played by the Levites—how they were to bring peace. It also demonstrates that the physical return from exile did not bring about a restoration of the priesthood.

John Davies notes how Moses's final blessing in Deuteronomy 33:8–13

> also presents Levi's position as priest in relation to a "covenant" (v. 9). While other Pentateuchal references to Levi emphasize his zeal for purity and honor (Gen. 34; Exod. 32.25–29), Deut. 33.8–13 moves from singular to plural forms in a manner designed to identify the patriarch Levi with the tribe to which the priestly office was entrusted, and thus to depict the patriarch himself in priestly terms.[47]

Williamson also comments helpfully on the covenant with Levi:

> In any case, these priestly covenants seem to have served the same general purpose as the Mosaic covenant with which they are so closely related; namely the priests facilitated the maintenance of the divine-human relationship between Yahweh and Abraham's descendants. Significantly, it was when they failed to do their part in this latter respect that they were accused by Malachi of having "corrupted the covenant of Levi" (Mal. 2:8 ESV). Thus the Priestly and Mosaic covenants, while remaining distinct, run in parallel with one another, and are closely related in purpose; namely maintaining the relationship between God and Israel.[48]

Williamson rightly sees the covenant with Levi as a mechanism to administer the Israelite covenant especially before the inauguration of kingship in Israel. Yet in the text under discussion, Jeremiah foresees countless Levites offering sacrifices. He does not describe in detail how this will work out, but Isaiah does. We have already seen how Gentiles, those from the nations, symbolized by eunuchs and foreigners in Isaiah 56, will become priests in the new temple. The New Testament speaks of their

sacrifices as prayers and songs of worship in the gatherings of the church (Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15–16; 1 Pet. 2:5).

There is an emphasis in Jeremiah 33:12–26 on the notion of servanthood, indicated by the Hebrew terms עֶבֶד (“servant”) and מְשָׁרֵת (“minister”). David is called the servant of Yahweh in 33:21–22, and the Levites are described by the parallel term, ministers of God. In a way reminiscent of the servant, singular, becoming the servants, plural, in the last part of Isaiah, Jeremiah 33:22 says that the “seed” (i.e., descendants) of David and of the Levites will be countless, and the language used is that of the Abrahamic covenant—the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore. Thus the new covenant brings the promises of these other covenants to fulfillment.

The New Covenant and the Covenant with Creation

The last paragraph of Jeremiah 33, verses 23–26, shows that the people no longer believed that God had chosen them and that as a result they despised the people (*‘am*) of God as a nation (*gôy*)—that is, they no longer recognized the kingdom of God. This goes back to Genesis 12:1–3, where in the Abrahamic covenant God considers the different groups in the world as amorphous kin groups, and only the family of Abraham will be a real and lasting *kingdom*, an entity with political and social structure and governmental headship. In Jeremiah 33:20 and 25, the permanence and lasting quality of the situation brought about by the new covenant is compared to the covenant with day and night, the fixed decrees or statutes of heaven and earth—a clear reference to the covenant with creation (in spite of Williamson’s protest).

Jeremiah 50:4–5

There is a final reference to the new covenant in Jeremiah 50:4–5 in the context of an oracle against Babylon. In the end, Babylon, a nation used as an instrument to discipline the Lord’s people, will be judged in turn:

> “Announce and proclaim among the nations,
> lift up a banner and proclaim it;
> keep nothing back, but say,
> ‘Babylon will be captured;

Bel will be put to shame,
Marduk filled with terror.
Her images will be put to shame
and her idols filled with terror.'
A nation from the north will attack her
and lay waste her land.
No one will live in it;
both people and animals will flee away.

"In those days, at that time,"
declares the LORD,
"the people of Israel and the people of Judah together
will go in tears to seek the LORD their God.
They will ask the way to Zion
and turn their faces toward it.
They will come and bind themselves to the LORD
in an everlasting covenant
that will not be forgotten." (NIV)

When Babylon is judged, a process of return from exile will begin for the people of Israel and Judah. The process of a physical return and a spiritual return is not spelled out here in terms of separate stages, but the picture presented by Jeremiah is that the people will turn toward Zion and bind themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant. This is a brief summary statement, looking back to the earlier and fuller expositions in the book of Jeremiah.

Twelve Prophets

Explicit references to the new covenant are rare in the Twelve (Minor) Prophets. Chapter 15 is devoted to the book of Daniel. Here we may briefly consider a passage in Hosea:

"When that day comes," says the LORD,
"you will call me 'my husband'
instead of 'my master.'"
O Israel, I will wipe the many names of Baal from your lips,
and you will never mention them again.

On that day I will make a covenant
with all the wild animals and the birds of the sky
and the animals that scurry along the ground so they will not harm you.
I will remove all weapons of war from the land,
all swords and bows,
so you can live unafraid
in peace and safety.
I will make you my wife forever,
showing you righteousness and justice,
unfailing love and compassion.
I will be faithful to you and make you mine,
and you will finally know me as the LORD. (Hos. 2:18–22 [2:16–20 EV] NLT)

Hosea's language is somewhat different from the others. Nonetheless, the day when God removes the many names of Baal from the lips of his people and makes Israel his wife forever is the time of the new covenant. The removal of the names of Baal is the end of idolatry and sin, all of which is accomplished between the first and second coming of the Messiah, ending in the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The covenant with animals and birds, that they no longer bring harm, shows the reversal of the curse, something that is eventually brought about by the new covenant. Therefore, this prophecy must speak of the new covenant.[49]

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1. Parts of chap. 13 are adapted from Peter J. Gentry, "The Text of the Old Testament," *JETS* 52, no. 1 (2009): 19–45. Used by permission of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*.

2. William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21–22 and the Old Testament* (Homebush West, NSW, Australia: Lancer Books, 1985), 83.

3. Keith N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in Its Narrative Context*, BZAW 332 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 217. Bright actually renders the *hithpael* by a reflexive, not a passive. John Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed., AB 21 (New York: Doubleday, 1965, 1984), 21.

4. Benjamin J. Noonan, "Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Reexamination of the Niphal and Hitpael of ברך in the Patriarchal Narratives," *HS* 51 (2010): 83.

5. For a lengthier treatment of the pronominal referent, see Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations*, 217–18.

6. For affirmation that the text in Jer. 4:2 entails a variant of Gen. 12:3, see J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 213.

7. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 21.

8. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations*, 218–19.

9. Cf. Jer. 23:8 and 31:8 for a repetition of these thoughts and words.

10. ESV modified according to author's own translation.

11. On 1 Cor. 15:51–52 and 1 Thess. 4:16–17 as an allusion to Isa. 27:13, see J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 58.

12. I came to this interpretation on my own but later found it substantiated in Meredith G. Kline, "Double Trouble," *JETS* 32, no. 2 (1989): 171–79.

13. Jer. 7:32; 9:25; 16:14; 19:6; 23:5, 7; 30:3; 31:27, 31; 33:14; 48:12; 49:2; 51:47, 52. Also Jer. 31:38Q.

14. 1 Sam. 2:31; 2 Kings 20:17; Isa. 39:6; Amos 4:2; 8:11; 9:13.

15. Cf. Peter Andreas Munch, *The Expression Bajjôm Hāhū: Is It an Eschatological Terminus Technicus?* (Oslo: I Kommisjon hos Jacob Dybwad, 1936).

16. The expression "the many" or "the numerous" occurs four times in Isa. 53:11–12. See Peter J. Gentry, "The Atonement in Isaiah's Fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13–53:12)," *SBJT* 11, no. 2 (2007): 20–47.

17. G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 159–73.

18. Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 441–51.

19. See Alan S. Bandy and Benjamin L. Merkle, *Understanding Prophecy: A Biblical-Theological Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2015), 249–64. Another excellent discussion is Luke Harding, "The Deliverer Will Come from Zion and the Salvation of All Israel: The Function of Paul's Quotation in Romans 11:25–32" (unpublished paper presented at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, May 6, 2014).

20. See Michael Wilcock, *I Saw Heaven Opened: The Message of Revelation*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 208.

21. William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology*, rev. ed. (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2013), 256.

22. Joshua N. Moon, *Jeremiah's New Covenant: An Augustinian Reading*, JTISup 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 168–72.

23. Adapted from Scott J. Hafemann, "The Covenant Relationship," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 49.

24. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 2:58n5.

25. Moon, *Jeremiah's New Covenant*, 194.

26. Normally, the first statement in Jer. 31:33 is rendered as a future tense: "I will place my law in their inward parts." Adrian Schenker argues that because the form in the Hebrew text is a perfect, it ought to be rendered as a past. The word "midst" (קֶרֶב) is construed as "among them." Adrian Schenker, *Das Neue am neuen Bund und das Alte am alten: Jer 31 in der hebräischen und griechischen Bibel*, FRLANT 212 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 30n29. I note that a prophetic perfect followed by a *waw*-consecutive perfect or imperfect (if non-clause initial) is the normal pattern for beginning a prophecy in the future tense (e.g., Num. 24:17) and that when "midst" (קֶרֶב) is paired with "heart" (לֵב), the meaning must be inward parts of a person. So also Moon, *Jeremiah's New Covenant*, 234–38.

27. Kevin J. Youngblood, "Beyond Deuteronomism: Jeremiah's Unique Theological Contribution" (unpublished paper presented at Lipscomb University, 2009).

28. In a work on this topic, Stanley E. Porter does not mention 2 Cor. 6:16–18, although he extends his study beyond the term "covenant" to covenant language. The concept of covenant is far more prevalent than many New Testament scholars are aware. Stanley E. Porter, "The Concept of Covenant in Paul," in *The Concept of the Covenant in the Second Temple Period*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Jacqueline C. R. de Roo, JSJSup 71 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 269–85.

29. D. A. Carson, "Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church," in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 359–60.

30. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 731–40; Christian Locatell, "Jeremiah 31:34, New Covenant Membership, and Baptism," *Scriptura* 114, no. 1 (2015): 1–14.

31. Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 736.

32. William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 182–83; Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, rev. ed., 266–67.

33. In the Hebrew Text, the word for "Teacher" is marked by an honorific plural, normally used for deity.

34. T. J. Deidun, *New Covenant Morality in Paul*, AnBib 89 (Rome: Pontifical Institute Press, 1981, 2006), 37.

35. See Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*, NSBT 27 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 125–44.

36. Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 442.

37. See Thompson, *Book of Jeremiah*, 562. Bright notes that "the ruler here (the word 'king' is avoided) discharges a sacral or priestly function, rather than one that is specifically political." Bright, *Jeremiah*, 280. Also, cf. *HALOT*, s.v. נגשׁ.

38. See, e.g., Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, ed. Walter Baumgartner, Johann Jakob Stamm, and Benedikt Hartmann, 3rd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1967–1995), s.v. נגׁש and קרב.

39. Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 74.

1. Adrian Schenker, *Das Neue am neuen Bund und das Alte am alten: Jer 31 in der hebräischen und griechischen Bibel*, FRANT 212 (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2006).

2. Some more recent essays by Emanuel Tov only attempt to provide a brief overview and summary: Emanuel Tov, "The Nature of the Large-Scale Differences between the LXX and MT S T V, Compared with Similar Evidence in Other Sources," in *The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible: The Relationship between the Masoretic Text and the Hebrew Base of the Septuagint Reconsidered*, ed. Adrian Schenker, SCS 52 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2003), 121–44; Tov, "The Septuagint as a Source for the Literary Analysis of Hebrew Scripture," in *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 31–56. Nonetheless, Tov presents as established fact the view that the shorter Septuagint Jeremiah is an earlier edition, while that of the Masoretic Text is a later edition that "added various new ideas" (126). Tov discussed this problem in detail in his doctoral dissertation; see Tov, *The Septuagint Translation of Jeremiah and Baruch: A Discussion of an Early Revision of the LXX of Jeremiah 29–52 and Baruch 1:1–3:8*, HSM 8 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976); Tov, "The Characterization of the Additional Layer of the Masoretic Text of Jeremiah," *ErIsr* 26 (1999): 55–63; Tov, "Exegetical Notes on the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Septuagint of Jeremiah 27 (34)," in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint*, ed. Emmanuel Tov, VTSup 72 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 315–32; Tov, "The Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah in Light of Its Textual History," in Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible*, 363–84. See also Young-Jin Min, "The Minuses and Pluses of the LXX Translation of Jeremiah as Compared with the Masoretic Text: Their Classification and Possible Origins" (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977). Support for Tov's view is found, for example, in studies by P.-M. Bogaert, "La *vetus latina* de Jérémie: texte très court, témoin de la plus ancienne Septante et d'une forme plus ancienne de l'hébreu (Jer 39 et 52)," in Schenker, *Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible*, 51–82; Adrian Schenker, "Est-ce que le livre de Jérémie fut publié dans une édition refondue au 2e siècle? La multiplicité textuelle peut-elle coexister avec l'édition unique d'un livre biblique?," in *Un Carrefour dans l'histoire de la Bible: Du texte à la théologie au IIe siècle avant J.-C.*, ed. Innocent Himbaza and Adrian Schenker, OBO 233 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Academic Press, 2008), 58–74. Schenker argues that the Teacher of Righteousness could authorize a revision of Jeremiah (= the Masoretic Text) while the previous version (= Septuagint) still circulated. Yet other studies on the Septuagint Jeremiah reveal the complexity of the textual transmission of Jeremiah and show that this knotty problem is far from solved: Sven Soderlund, *The Greek Text of Jeremiah. A Revised Hypothesis*, JSOTSup 47 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1985); Louis Stulman, *The Other Text of Jeremiah: A Reconstruction of the Hebrew Text Underlying the Greek Version of the Prose Sections of Jeremiah with English Translation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985); H.-J. Stipp, *Das masoretische und alexandrinische Sondergut des Jeremiabuches: Textgeschichtlicher Rang, Eigenarten, Triebkräfte*, OBO 136 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Éditions Universitaires; Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994). Jack Lundbom has also done extensive research and claims that 1,700 of the 2,700 words by which the Septuagint Jeremiah is shorter than the Masoretic Text could be explained by haplography—a problem to be expected in the transmission of a text whose chief literary feature is repetition. Jack R. Lundbom, "Haplography in the Hebrew *Vorlage* of Septuagint Jeremiah" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Antonio, November 22, 2004); David Noel Freedman and Jack R. Lundbom, "Haplography in Jeremiah 1–20," *ErIsr* 26 (1999): 28*–38*. Two doctoral students working under Albert Pietersma at the University of Toronto did further research: Marc Saunders and Tony S. L. Michael. Michael suggested from his studies that the Septuagint Jeremiah belongs more to the classification of a resignified text (private communication). Albert Pietersma offers good evidence that the differences between the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text may be translational rather than textual in "Greek Jeremiah and the Land of Azazel," in *Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the Septuagint, Presented to Eugene Ulrich*, ed. Peter W. Flint, Emanuel Tov, and James C. VanderKam, VTSup 101 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 403–13. See also Albert Pietersma, "Of Translation and Revision: From Greek Isaiah to Greek Jeremiah," in *Isaiah in Context: Studies in Honour of Arie van der Kooij on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Michaël N. van der Meer, Percy van Keulen, Wido van Peursen, Bas ter Haar Romeny, VTSup 138 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 359–87, where Tov's hypothesis of revision in Greek Jeremiah 29–52 has been falsified and which, in fact, may point to a new hypothesis of contextual accommodation and exegesis.

3. Schenker, *Das Neue am neuen Bund und das Alte am alten*, 23.

40. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 165. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press (Downers Grove, IL, 2007) and Inter-Varsity Press UK (London, 2007).

41. The Septuagint has "another way and another heart" (ὁδὸν ἑτέραν καὶ καρδίαν ἑτέραν). This is based on confusing *daleth* as *resh* (reading אחד as אחר) and is an inferior and secondary textual tradition for this word. Note that the Septuagint also transposes the noun phrases in relation to the Masoretic Text and that the Septuagint of Ezek. 11:19 also reads "another heart" instead of the Masoretic Text's "one heart." The confusion of *daleth* and *resh* is common.

42. Georg Fischer, *Jeremia 26–52*, HThKAT (Freiburg, Germany: Herder, 2005), 212.

43. Wolter H. Rose, *Zemah and Zerubbabel: Messianic Expectations in the Early Postexilic Period*, JSOTSup 304 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

44. The only other occurrences in the Old Testament where צֶמַח is employed metaphorically are Zech 3:8 and 6:12.

45. Rose, *Zemah and Zerubbabel*, 120. Used by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

46. Ibid., 94.

47. John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, JSOTSup 395 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 186.

48. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 105–6.

49. For evidence on the inclusion of non-Jewish nations in the future Israel, see Daniel C. Timmer, *The Non-Israelite Nations in the Book of the Twelve: Thematic Coherence and the Diachronic-Synchronic Relationship in the Minor Prophets*, BibInt 135 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

14

The New Covenant

Ezekiel

At the heart of establishing God's kingship in the world is worship. We saw this theme indicated by Genesis 2, which depicts Adam and Eve placed in a garden sanctuary. Only as they spent time in the presence of God would they be equipped to implement his rule in the world in the way in which God himself would relate to his creation. Israel inherited the Adamic role of son of God at the exodus (Ex. 4:22), and the priority of worship became evident right away with the instructions to build the tabernacle. When the construction of this portable tent for worship was complete, a bright cloud symbolic of the divine presence settled on the tent to show that the creator God was dwelling in the midst of his people as king (Ex. 25:8; 40:34).

This is where prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel fit into the story. The people of God had repeatedly violated the terms of the Israelite covenant. Love of God and love of one's neighbor had been replaced by idolatry and the corruption of social justice in every way. As a result, Israel's worship had become hollow and hypocritical. In the Hebrew canon Jeremiah is the first of the Latter Prophets, and in Jeremiah 7–10, we have his famous "Temple Sermon": "Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!'" (Jer. 7:4 NIV). The threefold repetition is the strongest form of emphasis possible. Jeremiah is saying, "You can't live as you please and then treat the temple like a good luck charm or rabbit's foot." The people thought they would always be protected as long as God was dwelling

among them. Jeremiah's message was that covenant violation meant that God would be true to his threats and bring upon his people the curse of exile (Deuteronomy 28). Most importantly, he could no longer live among them, since their behavior and lifestyle contradicted his own character as expressed in the Torah.

Ezekiel carries the "Temple Sermon" of Jeremiah one step further. The opening vision shows the bright cloud, the glory of the Lord, in motion, and the divine throne has wheels. *Why*? Because God is getting ready to move out! God is surrounded by social injustice and idolatry, and the temple has lost its five-star hotel status—he can no longer live there. This message must have come as an awful shock to the people of Judah. In Ezekiel 8–11, the opening vision is developed further, and the bright cloud—the glory of the Lord—actually begins to move from the temple to the eastern gate. Finally, the glory of the Lord departs from the city of God. I express it in these terms to show that the city of God can no longer be the city of God when God is no longer there.[1] A brief consideration of the structure and shape of Ezekiel's book shows the development and resolution of this problem.

The Structure and Shape of Ezekiel

Outline of Ezekiel's Book

1. Opening vision and call of Ezekiel 1:1–3:15
2. Ezekiel's role and message 3:16–7:27
3. The departure of the glory of the Lord from the temple 8–11
4. The exile symbolized 12–24
5. Oracles against the foreign nations 25–32
6. Divine leadership and restoration 33–36
7. The valley of dry bones 37–39
8. The new temple 40–48

As already noted, the "opening vision" portrays the glory of the Lord in motion because God is getting ready to move out. The second section (3:16–7:27) presents Ezekiel's message and role. Like all the prophets, he employs every means and method of communication to get through to the people: because of idolatry in relation to God and social injustice in relation

to others, they have broken the covenant, and the curse of exile is upon them. This message is communicated through preaching but also through symbolic dramas. In 4:1–3, Ezekiel is commanded to draw a diagram of the coming siege of Jerusalem on a brick and to act out the attack of the Babylonians. He holds an iron pan between himself and the city to show that the prayers of the people will not get through to God. Again, in 4:4–8, he is commanded to lie on one side for 390 days for the sin of Israel and on the other side for 40 days for the sin of Judah. The sum is 430 days, which represents the period of bondage in Egypt. Just as prophets like Isaiah had foretold a future salvation, describing it as a new exodus, so Ezekiel indicates another "Egyptian bondage" *before* the new exodus occurs. This is similar to Daniel's vision of seventy weeks (Dan. 9:24). The exile may be over in seventy years according to the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer. 25:1–11), but it will take a lot longer to deal effectively with sin and to restore the broken covenant relationship with God. Unfortunately, the people did not heed Ezekiel's message. According to Ezekiel 33:32, the prophet was viewed only as an entertainer singing songs with a beautiful voice.

Chapters 8–11 constitute a second vision, in which the glory of the Lord departs from the temple. This is followed by further messages to Judah in chapters 12–24, largely through symbolic dramas, to communicate the coming judgment and exile.

Chapters 25–32 constitute oracles against foreign nations. Such oracles are included in all the Major Prophets because of the program laid out in Deuteronomy 32. The covenant violation of Israel will bring the curse of exile. At first God plans to completely erase his people (32:26), but he fears the taunt of the foreign nations (32:27). The foreign nations will conclude that they have defeated Israel by their own gods and prowess instead of realizing that God allowed them to conquer Israel only because of her sins. So the nations must be punished for their arrogance and idolatrous worldview and for their harsh treatment of the people of God.

Then in Ezekiel 33–36, Israel will be given new leadership in the form of a new David—the Messiah. The messianic theme is summarized well by Stephen Dempster:

> Even the divided kingdom of exiles is reunited under a new leader, who is said to be "my servant David" (Ezek. 37:24–25; cf. 34:23–24). But he is also described as one who will come to power through relative obscurity. In a remarkable allegorical passage, a Davidic descendant is compared to a tender shoot (*yoneqet*) plucked from a tall tree, taken to Mount Zion and planted there to grow into a huge tree, bearing fruit and providing shade for all the birds of the forest (17:22–24). Thus all the trees of the forest (peoples of the world) will know that "I the LORD lower the tall tree and raise the low tree. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish" (17:24). Later, this "David" who will come to power is remembered for his humble origins as a shepherd (34:23); he will provide true leadership, as opposed to past leaders, who are symbolized as corrupt and destructive shepherds. Both these motifs of Davidic rule (a tender shoot and a shepherd) echo Jeremiah's prediction of a "plant growth" from the line of David, which will bring good shepherds—justice for the nation (Jer. 23:1–8).[2]

Then there will be a new covenant to renew the relationship with God and his people, a covenant that will deal effectively with hearts stubbornly bent on sin (Ezek. 36:24–32). This is followed by an announcement of return from exile described in terms of resurrection from the dead. The vision of the valley of dry bones shows the people of God miraculously restored to life and given victory over enemies.

The book of Ezekiel concludes in chapters 40–48 with a vision of a renewed temple and of God dwelling in the midst of his people once more in a healed land. The conclusion of the book is extremely powerful: "The LORD Is There" (48:35). The glory of the Lord has returned to the temple. God is once more dwelling in the midst of his people as King. Thus restoration involves the rebuilding of the Davidic house in both of its meanings in 2 Samuel 7—the dynasty of David and the temple.

Ezekiel 11:16–21

The first important text is Ezekiel 11:16–21:

> Therefore say: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the

> countries, yet for a little while I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone."
>
> Therefore say: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again."
>
> They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose hearts are devoted to their vile images and detestable idols, I will bring down on their own heads what they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD. (NIV)

This prophetic text is direct and straightforward. Israel has been scattered among the nations. God will gather his people from the nations and give them the land once more. The exiles who return will be given by God "one heart and a new spirit"—according to a literal translation of the Hebrew. Yet those who are devoted to idolatry will be judged—so not all exiles are restored. We can see in Ezekiel, just as we saw in Isaiah, that the return from exile is both physical and spiritual. Verse 20 contains the Covenant Formula, so although the word "covenant" is not in this passage, the text is speaking clearly about a new covenant.

The statement "I will give them one heart and put a new spirit in them" is similar to the "new heart and new spirit" in Ezekiel 36:26 and to the "one heart and one way" mentioned in Jeremiah 32:39. Paul's admonitions to the new covenant community in the New Testament to "mind the one/same thing" (normally rendered "be in harmony") may well be based on passages such as these:

Acts 4:32 καρδία καὶ ψυχὴ μία
Romans 12:16 φρονεῖν τὸ αὐτό
Romans 15:5 φρονεῖν τὸ αὐτό
2 Corinthians 13:11 φρονεῖν τὸ αὐτό
Philippians 2:2 φρονεῖν τὸ αὐτό
φρονεῖν τὸ ἕν

Philippians 4:2 φρονεῖν τὸ αὐτό

Indeed, perhaps when Paul speaks of one spirit in Ephesians 4:4, he is thinking of the one heart and new spirit in Ezekiel, and perhaps his one baptism refers to the instruction (i.e., Torah—the entire complex of repentance, faith, and conversion) of the new covenant written on the heart.

Ezekiel 16:59–63

> This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "I will deal with you as you deserve, because you have despised my oath by breaking the covenant. Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, both those who are older than you and those who are younger. I will give them to you as daughters, but not on the basis of my covenant with you. So I will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the LORD. Then, when I make atonement for you for all you have done, you will remember and be ashamed and never again open your mouth because of your humiliation," declares the Sovereign LORD. (NIV)

This passage concludes an extremely long parable (63 verses) in which Jerusalem is depicted as a bride cheating on her husband on many occasions with a long litany of lovers. Her feckless loyalty and constant and incorrigible covenant violation are compared to the sins of Samaria to the north and of Sodom to the south. This comparison turns out to be rather unfavorable for Jerusalem.

The plot of the parable can be briefly summarized. Jerusalem is depicted as a child born to Canaanite ancestors who is cast away by her parents—the ancient Near Eastern equivalent of abortion/infanticide. Yahweh sees this baby abandoned in the field to die "kicking about in its blood" and commands it to live. Much later, after the child reaches puberty, Yahweh passes by a second time and sees a young woman ready for adornment and marriage, and he marries her. His gifts to his bride of costly garments and expensive jewelry bring her far-flung fame for her beauty and even royalty. Although historical points of reference cannot always be pinpointed in the

parable, the baby appears to correspond to the Abrahamic covenant, while the mature young woman getting married would correspond to the Mosaic covenant, with royalty perhaps keeping the Davidic covenant in view.

Next, the parable details the downward spiral of the bride into adultery and harlotry. In the ancient Near East, harlots were frequently married women, so this is why the repeated term "fornication" is associated with adultery in this parable. Her sexual unfaithfulness corresponds to various forms of idolatry and alliances with foreign nations in pursuit of military support. The downward spiral reaches its nadir in child sacrifice and the fact that this harlot has to pay her lovers to have sex with her instead of them paying her for sex.

Jerusalem's sins are so terrible in this R-rated depiction of her crimes that she completely *embarrasses* her pagan neighbors, designated as Samaria and Sodom and portrayed as her "sisters." Since Ezekiel is writing after 722 BC—when the northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria and the people of Israel were deported and foreign peoples were imported to live there—the northern neighbors of Jerusalem constitute the mixed race of Samaritans that resulted from these events. Second Kings 17:24–41 describes and deplores the Samaritans' behavior, lifestyle, and rejection of Yahweh's Torah. The people of Sodom are likewise condemned because an abundance of life's necessities resulted in arrogant independence from God and led to many social injustices. Nonetheless, Jerusalem's acts of covenant violation were so bad by comparison that her sins actually *justified* the conduct of her "sisters," Sodom and Samaria!

As a result, Yahweh promised to gather Jerusalem's neighbors to attack and destroy her. Finally, God would restore the fortunes of all three: Samaria, Sodom, and Jerusalem (this is the order in the text). At the end of Ezekiel 16, the verses we have quoted explain the basis for this restoration.

According to 16:59, Jerusalem will experience the curses of the covenant because of her many acts of unfaithfulness. Verse 60 speaks of Israel breaking the covenant, and then it speaks of God upholding (*hēqîm bĕrît*) an everlasting covenant with them. The first part is clear: breaking the covenant means that Israel violated the covenant made at Sinai and reaffirmed in Deuteronomy. But what does the text mean by confirming or

upholding an everlasting covenant? Two problems are entailed in this question: (1) Does the expression *hēqîm bĕrît* follow the normal meaning here as elsewhere, and (2) what is the everlasting covenant of which Ezekiel speaks?

Everywhere else the expression *kārat bĕrît* ("to cut a covenant") is used to describe covenant making. The expression *kārat bĕrît* indicates a covenant that did not exist previously and is now being initiated between partners for the first time. Excellent examples are Isaiah 55:3; Jeremiah 31:31; and Ezekiel 17:13; 34:25; and 37:26. Conversely, *heqîm bĕrît* usually indicates upholding a commitment or promise already in place. Yet Ezekiel 16:60 and 62 employ *heqîm bĕrît* for an everlasting covenant. How are we to interpret and understand the language of Ezekiel at this point? Is there a development in the language so that "cut a covenant" and "confirm a covenant" are now synonyms? A change for these expressions is unlikely since Ezekiel uses both *kārat bĕrît* (3x) and *heqîm bĕrît* (2x) and since a clear distinction between *kārat bĕrît* and *heqîm bĕrît* can be seen in Jeremiah 34, a writing close in time to that of Ezekiel, as well as in the much later Qumran Scrolls (e.g., CD 15.8, 4Q381 69.1.8; CD 3.13, 1QS 5.21–22, 8.10). We should assume, then, that the distinction established between the two expressions also works in Ezekiel. God is saying he will uphold a covenant that is already initiated. The problem is in understanding "eternal covenant" in Ezekiel 16:60.

The parable storyline suggests that the everlasting covenant is the Abrahamic covenant. God will give Samaria and Sodom to Jerusalem not on the basis of the covenant with Israel at Sinai (i.e., his marriage to the young woman) but rather on the basis of the covenant with Abraham (the aborted baby rescued). A connection between Ezekiel 16 and Leviticus 26:40–42 supports interpreting the everlasting covenant as the Abrahamic covenant. True, Ezekiel is describing here what will happen when God makes a new covenant with Israel. But in the text itself, he is saying that the future restoration for Israel and the gift of other peoples to Jerusalem will come about not on the basis of the Israelite covenant at Sinai but instead on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant. The Israelite covenant was broken, but the Abrahamic covenant still stands. Ezekiel may be describing what

will happen in the new covenant, but the term “covenant” in this text refers to the Israelite and Abrahamic covenants, respectively. This interpretation better explains Ezekiel 16:60–62 since it is the nations (Samaria and Sodom) that receive blessing with Israel in this text and since it is the Abrahamic covenant that specifies salvation for the nations through Israel.

It is interesting that the term “everlasting covenant” occurs sixteen times in the Old Testament: two times of the covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:16; Isa. 24:5), five times of the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:7, 19; 1 Chron. 16:17; Ps. 105:10; Ezek. 16:60), once of the covenant with David (2 Sam. 23:5; cf. 2 Chron. 13:5), five times of the new covenant (Isa. 55:3; 61:8; Jer. 32:40; 50:5; Ezek. 37:26), and three times of covenant signs (Gen. 17:13; Ex. 31:16; Lev. 24:8). Nowhere in the Old Testament is the Israelite/Mosaic covenant at Sinai called an everlasting or permanent covenant.

Thus, the following interpretation of Ezekiel 16 is proposed: *bĕrît* in 16:59 is the Mosaic covenant. In 16:60, the first use of *bĕrît* is the Mosaic covenant, and the second use of *bĕrît* is the Abrahamic covenant. Likewise in 16:61, *bĕrît* is the Mosaic covenant, while in 16:62 *bĕrît* is the Abrahamic covenant. Yahweh is saying to Israel that both Samaria and Sodom will be given to Jerusalem as daughters not on the basis of the Mosaic covenant but rather on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant. “Being given as daughters” means that the neighboring nations (Samaritans and Sodomites) are now *family*. God will uphold his promises to Abraham that through him the nations will be blessed even though the nations were not blessed through the Mosaic covenant, since Israel as a nation failed as a light to the nations.

Thus Jerusalem will be given both Samaria and Sodom but not on the basis of the Israelite covenant. This statement shows that in the new covenant, the old divisions in Israel are healed, and the Gentiles are included.

Ezekiel 18:1–4, 30–32

> The word of the LORD came to me: “What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As I live, declares the

> Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die. . . .
>
> "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live." (ESV)

Ezekiel 18:1–4 sets forth the thesis of a message sent through the prophet, while 18:30–32 provides the conclusion. This important text deals with how the relationship between God and his people is structured under the old covenant and the difference promised in the new covenant. Jeremiah sets his passage on the new covenant (Jer. 31:30–34) in the context of the same proverb and problem (Jer. 31:29–30). As we saw earlier,[3] the mention of "a new heart and a new spirit" in Ezekiel 18:31 clearly demonstrates that the prophet is describing changes brought about by new covenant realities. Under the old covenant, the corporate solidarity between the people and their fallible human leaders meant that they could suffer for the sins of another, but this will not be true under the new covenant.

Ezekiel 34:17–24

> As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet?
>
> Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, I will save my flock, and

they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken. (NIV)

Since this passage is in the section of Ezekiel dealing with leaders in Israel who have aggrandized themselves and have served neither the people nor the interests of the divine King over them, it is natural for Ezekiel to speak of the divine restoration of all things in terms of a coming king who will be a good shepherd of the sheep, caring for the interests of the people and serving at the same time the interests of the divine overlord. The coming king is referred to as "my servant David," similar to the manner in which the coming king is referred to in Isaiah 55:3 and in the writings of Isaiah's contemporary Hosea (Hos. 3:5).

Ezekiel 36:22–36

Therefore say to the Israelites, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.

"For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that

> you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, people of Israel!" (NIV)

This famous passage on the new covenant in Ezekiel, a text to which Jesus alludes directly in John 3, speaks of God restoring his people to covenant relationship by dealing with their sin—their impurities and idols. The Lord will change the intractable stubbornness and unfaithfulness of the human partners by giving them a new heart and a new spirit, as in Ezekiel 11 and 18. The divine Spirit will enable and motivate the human partners to follow the divine instructions. Fertility and fruitfulness in the land will result. God will do this not for the sake of his people but for his own sake—to demonstrate that he is holy, that is, completely committed and devoted to his character, plans, and purposes—as laid out in the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32.

Ezekiel 37:15–28

The sixth section of the book, on divine leadership and restoration, moves naturally into the seventh section, containing the vision of the valley of dry bones, which foresees Israel's restoration as a resurrection from the dead. As part of this vision, Ezekiel communicates divine revelation by means of a minidrama or one-act play:

> The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, 'Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.' Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, 'Belonging to Joseph (that is, to Ephraim) and all the Israelites associated with him.' Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand.
>
> "When your people ask you, 'Won't you tell us what you mean by this?' say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph—which is in Ephraim's hand—and of the Israelite tribes associated with him, and join it to Judah's stick. I will

> make them into a single stick of wood, and they will become one in my hand.’ Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on and say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God.
>
> “‘My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.’” (Ezek. 37:15–28 NIV)

Ezekiel’s dramatic action of joining two sticks of wood represents God gathering the divided kingdoms of Judah and Israel from exile and joining them together as one nation.

God will deal with their sin and their sinfulness. Note the Covenant Formula occurring twice: “They will be my people, and I will be their God” (37:23); and again, “I will be their God, and they will be my people” (37:27). The double formula is used in both orders.

The covenant relationship will be restored once they are cleansed from sin. Ezekiel uses both the term “covenant of peace” and the term “everlasting covenant,” showing that these are two ways of referring to the same covenant. The former term is employed especially in contexts emphasizing reconciliation between Yahweh and his people, made

necessary because of their disloyalty through idolatry and violation of his covenant instructions. The latter term is employed to stress that the problem in the Israelite covenant (and indeed, in earlier covenants) of the faithless human partner will be permanently addressed: Israel will be truly holy—committed, devoted, and faithful to the Lord.

A Davidic king will be established as ruler over the renewed Israel, and the people will carefully keep the instructions in the covenant. As a result, the temple will be restored: “My sanctuary is among them forever” (37:28).

Verse 25 is a powerful statement drawing together several significant strands in the Old Testament: “They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever.” Readers who have been carefully following the development and progression of thought in Ezekiel—and indeed, in Isaiah and Jeremiah as well—will realize that the promise concerning the renewed Israel living in the land is fulfilled in that the new Jerusalem and the new creation are coextensive. Indeed, the apostle John in Revelation 21–22 recognizes the new creation in Ezekiel’s description of the new temple in chapters 40–48. Careful readers will also draw the conclusion from what has preceded in Ezekiel 16 that the renewed Israel is no longer based on ethnic parameters but is defined as those who are reconciled to the Lord and believing in him: Jerusalem will be given both Samaria and Sodom but not on the basis of the Israelite covenant (16:61). In the new covenant, the old divisions in Israel are healed, and the Gentiles are included. Only faithful human partners (i.e., believers) constitute the covenant community. And the Davidic Messiah is ruler over all.

This passage, then, draws together all the different strands dealing with the new covenant that are treated in earlier passages in Ezekiel. Preston Sprinkle has demonstrated that Leviticus 18:5 is fundamental to the literary framework of Ezekiel and functions to tie the themes together.[4] The key verse with some of its context reads,

> . . . and do not walk in their [i.e., the Canaanites’] statutes. You are to practice my judgments and keep my statutes by walking in them; I am Yahweh your God. And you shall keep my statutes and my judgments;

> if a person practices them, he will live by them. I am Yahweh. (Lev. 18:3–5)

First, just as other prophets employ the word pair love (*ḥesed*) and faithfulness (*ʾĕmet*) or the word pair justice (*mišpaṭ*) and righteousness (*ṣĕdāqâ*) as *summaries* of the entire Torah, or instruction, in the covenant, so Ezekiel is using "judgments and statutes" from Leviticus 18:5 as a summary for the instruction in the Torah.

Second, Ezekiel indicts Israel in chapters 18; 20; and 33 and shows that they are dying as a result. Ezekiel 18:9, 17, and 19 are clear allusions to Leviticus 18:5. Ezekiel 20, another retelling of the history of Israel, makes clear allusions to Leviticus 18:5 at the giving of the Torah at Sinai (Ezek. 20:11), at the rebellion in the wilderness (20:13), and at the rebellion of the second wilderness generation (20:21). Finally, in Ezekiel 33, the life language (33:10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 19) picks up the life theme of Leviticus 18:5, brought to a climax in Ezekiel 18:31: "Why will you die, O house of Israel?"

Third, all this development via Leviticus 18:5 results in the death and resurrection of Israel pictured in the vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37). In Ezekiel 36:27, God says, "I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them," which resolves the entire issue; in 37:1–14, the Spirit gives life; and in 37:24–28, the Davidic king enables Israel to "walk in my statutes and observe my judgments." Putting the two texts, 36:27 and 37:24, together yields a remarkable result: in 36:27, it is the Spirit who causes the Lord's people to fulfill the instruction (*tôrâ*) in the new covenant (summarized by "statutes and judgments"), but in 37:24, it is the future Davidic Messiah who enables all who are members of the new covenant community to follow the covenant requirements (again, "statutes and judgments"). This is another way in which Ezekiel 37 draws together the different strands and themes developed earlier in the book.

Ezekiel 40–48

How to interpret the final section of Ezekiel has been hotly debated among Christians. Some think that this is a blueprint for a future temple to be built

in the city of Jerusalem. Such an interpretation is not at all likely. Space permits only a couple of key observations.

First, note that this section is described as “visions of God” in Ezekiel 40:2. This heading is used elsewhere *only* of the visions of chapter 1 and chapters 8–11. If we interpret chapter 1 and chapters 8–11 as symbolic visions, we must be consistent and interpret 40–48 the same way. This also fits with the fact that Ezekiel frequently communicates via symbolic dramas, and the description of the restoration of Israel in the vision of the valley of dry bones is also symbolic.

Second, note the use of the terms “length,” “width,” and “height” in the Old Testament. Careful examination of *all instances* show that 80 percent of all references occur in three texts: (1) the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 25–40), (2) the building of the temple (1 Kings 6–7), and (3) the future temple of Ezekiel. Note, however, that the accounts of building the tabernacle and temple contain instances of length, width, and height, whereas the description in Ezekiel contains only length and width, no height. This vision is two-dimensional because unlike the cases of the tabernacle in Exodus and the temple in Kings, Ezekiel’s temple is not a blueprint for a real building. It is a symbolic portrayal of the restoration of God dwelling in the midst of his people as King and of a renewed covenant relationship. This is clearly the interpretation of Jesus, who identified himself as the true temple (John 2:19). Both Paul (1 Cor. 3:16) and Peter (1 Pet. 2:4–5) understand the church, those who are joined to Christ, to constitute the final temple. This is also the picture in Revelation 21. We must follow Jesus and the apostles in their interpretation of the Old Testament.

So the last section of the book depicts the restoration of Israel by means of symbolic vision. Two passages are relevant for the Gentiles, or non-Jewish nations.

Ezekiel 44:6–9

> Then he brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the temple, and I looked, and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple of the LORD. And I fell on my face. And the LORD said to me,

> “Son of man, mark well, see with your eyes, and hear with your ears all that I shall tell you concerning all the statutes of the temple of the LORD and all its laws. And mark well the entrance to the temple and all the exits from the sanctuary. And say to the rebellious house, to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: O house of Israel, enough of all your abominations, in admitting foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and flesh, to be in my sanctuary, profaning my temple, when you offer to me my food, the fat and the blood. You have broken my covenant, in addition to all your abominations. And you have not kept charge of my holy things, but you have set others to keep my charge for you in my sanctuary.
>
> “Thus says the Lord GOD: No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the people of Israel, shall enter my sanctuary. But the Levites who went far from me, going astray from me after their idols when Israel went astray, shall bear their punishment. They shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the temple and ministering in the temple. They shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before the people, to minister to them. Because they ministered to them before their idols and became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel, therefore I have sworn concerning them, declares the Lord GOD, and they shall bear their punishment. They shall not come near to me, to serve me as priest, nor come near any of my holy things and the things that are most holy, but they shall bear their shame and the abominations that they have committed. Yet I will appoint them to keep charge of the temple, to do all its service and all that is to be done in it. (Ezek. 44:4–14 ESV)

In the restored future temple, no foreigners, those uncircumcised in heart and flesh, will enter the sanctuary of the Lord. Apparently, in the past, Levites permitted foreigners who were circumcised in flesh but not in heart to enter the sanctuary. Although the text does not state this, the implication is that foreigners who are circumcised in heart will be permitted in the future temple. That is at least what Isaiah 56 portrays. Here the Levites care for the temple but do not serve as priests. In Isaiah 56, foreigners are offering sacrifices.

Ezekiel 47:21–23

> So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel. You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the sojourners who reside among you and have had children among you. They shall be to you as native-born children of Israel. With you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe the sojourner resides, there you shall assign him his inheritance, declares the Lord GOD. (ESV)

In Ezekiel 47:21–23, clearly foreigners are included in the future Israel and have full citizenship. They have an inheritance among the tribe where they dwell. Thus, even in Ezekiel's vision of the future Israel, folks from the nations are included.

Finally, to conclude our analysis of Isaiah and Ezekiel, note how Paul brings together the teaching of Ezekiel 36:26 and Isaiah 54:13 in 1 Thessalonians 4:7–12:

> For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.
>
> Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one. (ESV)

T. J. Deidun demonstrates decisively that the phrase "God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you" comes directly from Ezekiel 36:26 and that the phrase "You yourselves have been taught by God" is based on Isaiah 54:13. In his analysis of θεοδίδακτοι ("taught of God"), Deidun rightly explains διδάσκειν on the basis of *lāmad* in the Old Testament: "like *lmd* (in *Pi.*) διδάσκειν means to 'form' or 'train' rather than to 'instruct.' What is communicated necessarily issues in *action*, for it is addressed not so much to the intellect as to the will; better still, it is addressed to the *whole* man."[5]

Furthermore, the syntactic structure of Ezekiel 36:27 (i.e., ποιήσω . . . ἵνα ποιήσετε) is reflected by ποιεῖτε in 1 Thessalonians 4:10. The syntax of the Greek in the Septuagint also matches perfectly that in the Hebrew text: "I will act," says God, "that you may act." Thus, to know the Lord, to be taught by him, is to have his Spirit impel the believer to act, and the action specified in 1 Thessalonians 4 is to "love one another."

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1. The departure of God from Jerusalem is not entirely negative; it has a positive side in that God will be a sanctuary for his people in exile (Ezek. 11:16).

2. Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 170–71.

3. See D. A. Carson's important comment on Jer. 31:29–34, which is relevant to the proverb cited by Ezekiel, along with a detailed discussion and evaluation of the proverb, under "The Members of the New Covenant Community" in chap. 13.

4. Preston Sprinkle, "Law and Life: Leviticus 18:5 in the Literary Framework of Ezekiel," *JSOT* 31, no. 3 (2007): 275–93.

5. T. J. Deidun, *New Covenant Morality in Paul*, AnBib 89 (Rome: Pontifical Institute Press, 1981, 2006), 57 (emphasis original).

15

The New Covenant in Daniel's Seventy Weeks

Daniel 9 is famous for the vision of the "seventy weeks."[1] Although the interpretation of the "seventy weeks" is greatly debated, we argue in detailed exegesis that this text directly predicts the coming of the Messiah and his atoning death as the basis of a new covenant for "the many" who are united to him by faith. It also indicates that the Jewish people will reject their Messiah and, as a result, bring about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

Unfortunately, interpretation of this text has been troublesome, not only for average readers but for scholars as well. Many scholars have carefully analyzed the cultural and historical setting and the linguistic and textual data. Yet they have given insufficient attention to the literary macrostructures—namely, the arrangement of the text's smaller sections and the meaning of that arrangement; the apocalyptic genre of the text; the relation of Daniel 9 to other texts in the Old Testament; and the metanarrative, or biblical-theological framework, crucial for making sense of any individual text. Thus, a failure to understand how apocalyptic and prophetic literature communicates has hindered the church, especially in the past century. Furthermore, instead of seeking to discover the larger story that correctly makes sense of the details in this text, a framework or metanarrative foreign to the text has been imposed on it. Finally, since the prophets themselves did not distinguish the "already" from the "not yet" in regard to the first and second comings of the Messiah, we must pay attention to the teaching of Jesus and his apostles in order to correctly

interpret the book of Daniel. We must learn from them what is already fulfilled and what is not yet fulfilled.

In what follows we will focus first on the literary structure of the book of Daniel and how Daniel 9 fits into the literary structure of the book as a whole. Then, after an overview of chapter 9, we shall delve into exegetical issues such as the end of the exile, the literary structure of 9:25–27, and the chronological issues in the fulfillment of the prophecy. The relation of the visions in Daniel 7 and Daniel 9 to the "already" and "not yet," respectively, is important for correct interpretation. Thus, interpretation has to be evaluated in light of the use of Daniel in the book of Revelation.

The Literary Structure of Daniel

No aspect of the study of the text is harder to discern than the literary structure. Here we want to ask the question: In what form is this message given to us? What is the shape of the text? This question is as important as the music composed to accompany the lyrics. Lyrics alone do not convey the entire message; the message is also conveyed significantly by the music that is written for the lyrics. Likewise with Scripture, we are concerned not only with the content or the meaning of individual propositions in the text but with the form as well. We must *explain the form* and show how the literary structure conveys meaning. Nowhere is this more important than in apocalyptic literature (i.e., Daniel, Zechariah, Revelation).[2]

On the basis of content, one can easily divide the book of Daniel into six chapters of narratives and six chapters of visions. Although chapter divisions derive from the medieval period, in the case of the book of Daniel, they correspond for the most part to the grammatical and literary markers in the Hebrew text.[3]

Part 1: Six Stories

1. Daniel and friends in the court of Babylon 1
2. King's dream: The huge statue and a small stone 2
3. Daniel's friends rescued from a furnace (treachery) 3
4. King's dream: A huge tree (humbling) 4
5. Belshazzar and the writing on the wall (humbling) 5
6. Daniel rescued from the lion's den (treachery) 6

Part 2: Four Visions

1. A vision of Daniel: The beasts and the son of man 7
2. A vision of Daniel: The ram and the goat 8
3. A prayer of Daniel and vision of the seventy weeks 9
4. A vision of Daniel: The book of truth (about the future) 10–12

Thus the book of Daniel consists of twelve chapters that divide equally into six narrative (1–6) and six visionary (7–12) chapters. In the Hebrew canon, Daniel follows the poetic section, which ends with Lamentations—a book focused on the theme of exile. The narratives of Daniel 1–6 take up this theme of exile and describe how faith in the God of Israel, the one true and living God, is to be maintained in the face of defilement, idolatry, and prohibitions of prayer backed up by savage beasts, fire, and great persecution. The dreams and visions of chapters 7–12, apocalyptic in nature, give hope to the people of God. They show God in control of history through four periods of domination by foreign nations until a decisive end is made to rebellion and sin. This final blow is followed by a renewal of the broken covenant and the restoration of the Davidic king and temple with the establishment of God's kingdom as eternal and final.

Chronological Links

How has the author arranged his material? An obvious possibility is chronology. The stories and visions, however, are not presented in chronological sequence. The visions of chapters 7 and 8 are given to Daniel before the events of chapters 5 and 6 occur; chronology interconnects and intertwines both parts.

Linguistic Links

Another possibility is division according to language. The book of Daniel is bilingual: part is in Hebrew (1:1–2:4a; 8:1–12:13) and part in Aramaic (2:4b–7:28). This linguistic partition, however, does not match the division of stories and visions but rather ties the two tightly together since the section in Aramaic begins in the middle of the stories and continues partway into the section of visions.

Literary Links

Another possibility is an artistic or literary arrangement. James Hamilton has provided a constructive critique of earlier proposals I made, and based on his own study, he has argued for a chiastic arrangement to the different sections.[4] An improved outline of Daniel is offered below, influenced in part by the analyses of Hamilton and Andrew Steinmann and in part by my own further study:

a Prologue: Exile 1:1–21
  b Four kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God 2:1–49
    c Deliverance of the faithful from the fiery furnace 3:1–30
      d Humbling of proud Nebuchadnezzar 4:1–37
      d' Humbling of proud Belshazzar 5:1–31
    c' Deliverance of the faithful from the lion's den 6:1–28
  b' Four kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God 7:1–28
    c Expansions on kingdoms 2 and 3 8:1–27
      d Vision concerning the end of the exile (kingdoms 4 and 5) 9:1–27
    c' Expansions on kingdoms 3 and 4 10:1–11:45
a' Epilogue: Return from exile 12:1–13

Whether the chiastic arrangement offered by Hamilton or the above outline of the literary structure is criticized by other scholars, no one can deny the connection between chapters 2 and 7. This connection inextricably links the two sections of the stories and the visions.

Thus, although the basic division of the book is six chapters of narratives and six chapters of visions, the visions are inextricably linked to the stories in Daniel 1–6 in three ways: (1) chronologically, (2) linguistically, and (3) structurally. Chapters 2 and 7 are dreams referring to the same thing, and the stories and visions are linked tightly together by sections that are thematically parallel. The book is a unity and comes from one author. What is the significance of this unity? It is just this: the first half of the book establishes and proves that Daniel has a gift of interpreting dreams and visions in events that could be verified independently by his contemporaries; therefore, we ought to believe and trust the predictions in

the visions in the second half of the book, which deal with the distant future and therefore were not open to verification by Daniel's original audience.

In addition, the first six chapters emphasize dominion and authority. First, the stone cut out from the mountain represents a kingdom that will endure forever (Dan. 2:44–45). Second, a Babylonian king was forced to recognize that the Most High God's dominion and kingdom are eternal (4:34), as was his son (chap. 5). And finally, we read about a Persian ruler (6:26) who acknowledges Daniel's God as sovereign. This emphasis on divine sovereignty prepares the reader for the description of God's control of future history through troubled times as portrayed in chapters 7–12.

The Place of Daniel 9 in the Literary Structure of Daniel 7–12

The literary structures are the key to interpretation. We need a clear view of the whole in order to understand the parts and their relationship to each other. First, we must grasp that the dream of chapter 2 and the vision of chapter 7 are at the center of the book and that they communicate the same message in different ways.[5]

Chapter 2 places a gigantic image of a man front and center in the Babylonian king's dream. Its head consists of gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet of iron and clay mixed together. It is struck down by a stone—cut without hands from a mountain—which then grows to fill the entire earth. According to the "explanation section" (2:36–45), this dream predicts four successive human kingdoms succeeded by the kingdom of God, which will endure forever.

Chapter 7 begins the second half of the book, in which the Babylonian king's dream is expanded in a series of visions presented like maps with blow-up inserts. Each successive vision is an enlargement of part of the previous vision, and each provides greater and greater detail of the same scene. Daniel, rather than the king, now dreams and sees four beasts coming out of the chaotic sea. Then, in a picture of the court of heaven, one like a son of man (i.e., a human being)[6] is given the kingdom. This vision again foretells four successive human kingdoms succeeded by the kingdom of God.

The books in the Hebrew canon are arranged with prophets and poets between large narrative sections.[7] The prophets and poets are a commentary on the narrative. Thus the arrangement is narrative—commentary—narrative. Daniel is placed right at the spot where the narrative resumes after the commentary of the prophets and poets. This arrangement invites the reader to compare Daniel with Genesis, since both books begin the narrative sections.

There are echoes and reminders of Genesis 1 in the dream of the king in chapter 2.[8] The dream is really a parody of the divine creation, where God makes humans in the divine image to rule the world. Here in Daniel 2, this gigantic figure is made by human hands to rule the world. Pride, the original sin, is at the heart of the earthly kingdoms. A gigantic image brought down by a stone also recalls to mind another story in Scripture: David's confrontation with Goliath and resultant defeat of the giant with a small stone from the brook. Furthermore, the stone in the vision is cut out of a mountain without hands. In the Old Testament, the only stones "cut without hands" pertain to building the temple.[9] Thus the stone is a symbol of the Davidic house, a play on words because it represents both a descendant of David and the temple. In Daniel 2, then, this stone is a Davidic stone that will grow to be a kingdom/temple without borders.

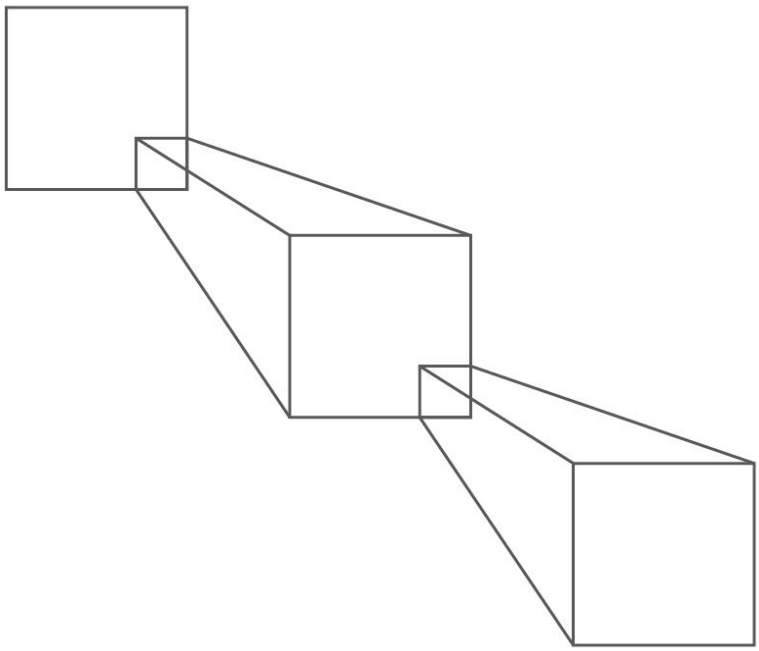
The first vision, in chapter 7, also recalls Genesis 1. Instead of a monstrous human image, a parody of the divine image, there is a parody of creation in Daniel 7, an anticreation, if you will. Like Genesis, at the beginning the Spirit or wind blows over the sea. But instead of the creation of light and land, culminating in the divine image, there emerges from the chaotic sea four beasts in succession, each one more horrifying than the previous, until the last one emerges—a gruesome spectacle, the embodiment of evil. Each of the beasts are given authority to rule (Dan. 7:6, 12). The final, most bizarre and powerful of the creatures distinguishes itself with the faculty of proud speech, bringing to mind the beast that spoke at the beginning (Dan. 7:7–8; cf. Gen. 3:1–5).

Then the scene shifts from earth to heaven, and a court is sitting with a divine Judge on the throne, opening up books and pronouncing a verdict. When the verdict is rendered, the beast on earth is destroyed, and the others

are also stripped of their authority. After this scene, an individual like a son of man (i.e., a human being) approaches the divine court in the clouds of heaven, and all power, rule, and honor is given to him. He rules over all the nations, and his kingdom endures forever. In this vision, the symbols are more complex. The beasts / human figure represent a heavenly ruler, an earthly ruler, and the people ruled in that kingdom all at the same time. The human figure is the house of David—both a heavenly and an earthly ruler in one person. The human figure also represents his people as well as the new temple (based on the wordplay on "house" in 2 Samuel 7).[10]

Above, it was noted that each vision successive to Daniel 7 is an enlargement of part of the central vision in chapters 2 and 7, and each vision provides greater and greater detail of the same scene. The vision of chapter 8 expands on the second and third kingdoms; the vision of chapter 9 expands on the fourth kingdom, followed by the kingdom of God. The vision of chapters 10–12 provides another expansion—in greater and greater detail—of events in the third and fourth kingdoms.[11] The successive visions, then, allow the reader to "zoom in" on the details—as represented in figure 15.1 below.

Figure 15.1 God's Progressive Revelation of Detail



Note how the allocation of space to discussing Persia, Greece, and Rome changes between the second and fourth visions (see table 15.1).

We now have a detailed road map through the maze of powers arrayed against the people of God throughout successive human kingdoms. One of my students created a diagram to show this development (see figure 15.2). Daniel 2 and 7 give us the basic map, whereas chapters 8, 9, and 10–12 are blowups of parts of the big map.

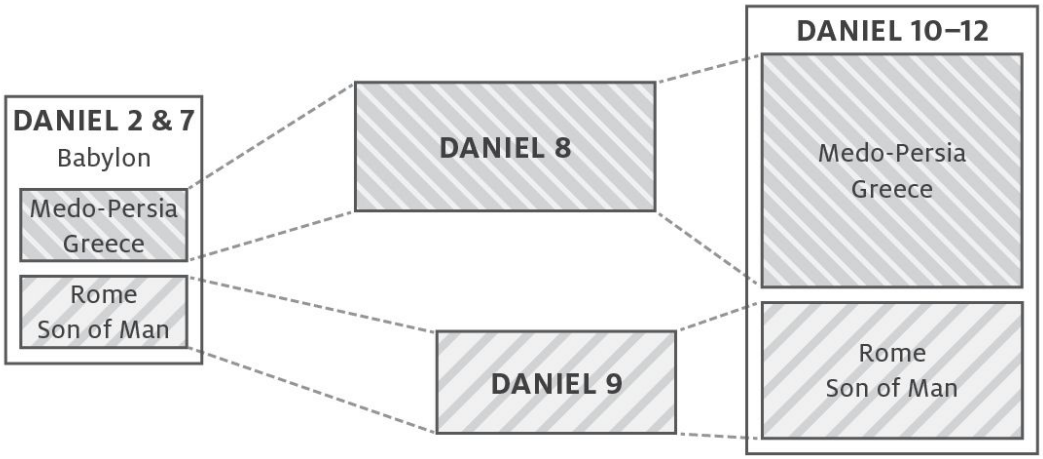
Note that chapters 7 and 8 contain "visions" (i.e., events portrayed symbolically), and each vision is followed by an interpretation section. Chapters 9 and 10–12 are not symbolic visions; rather, they describe future events in plain speech, however abbreviated and cryptic the descriptions may seem. So chapters 9 and 10–12 are not presented as a symbolic vision plus an interpretation section. This diagram may be a bit too tidy to deal fully with the different focus of chapter 9 in relationship to the visions of chapters 7; 8; and 10–12.

Table 15.1 God Reveals in Greater and Greater Detail

Second Vision	**Fourth Vision**
Persia	*Persia*
8:2–4	11:2
8:20	*Greece*
Greece	Alexander
8:5–8	11:3–4
8:21–22	Later kings
(Small horn)	11:5–35
8:9–14	*Rome**
8:23–26	11:36–45

* Several scholars have argued cogently that Dan. 11:36–45 refers to Rome as the fourth kingdom. See Robert J. M. Gurney, "A Note on Daniel 11:40–45," *TSF Bulletin* 47 (1967): 10–12; Murray R. Adamthwaite, "Daniel 11:40–12:4" (unpublished class notes, Melbourne, Australia, 2008); Jason T. Parry, "Desolation of the Temple and Messianic Enthronement in Daniel 11:36–12:3," *JETS* 54, no. 3 (2011): 485–526.

Figure 15.2 God's Progressive Revelation in Daniel[12]



Detailed Overview of Daniel 9

We can now examine chapter 9, beginning by noting its literary structure:

Outline of Daniel 9

A. The Motivation for Prayer 9:1–4a
B. Daniel's Prayer for Favor 9:4b–19
   1. Invocation and confession 9:4b–14
   2. Appeal for favor and mercy 9:15–19
C. Revelation through Divine Messenger 9:20–27
   1. Occasion for angelic message 9:20–23
   2. Vision of the seventy weeks 9:24–27

Setting of the Vision of the Seventy Weeks (Dan. 9:1)

Daniel 9 begins in the usual way by giving a chronological notice. The date is the first year of Darius, "who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom" (9:1). This is significant, for this was the year in which the Persians conquered the Babylonians, whose empire, under Nebuchadnezzar, had defeated and exiled Judah many decades earlier. This was also the first year of Cyrus the Great, who gave the decree that permitted the exiles of Judah to return to their homeland.[13]

Nonetheless, chapter 9 is different in many ways. It begins with an extensive prayer by Daniel—the only major prayer recorded by him in the book (cf. 2:20–23). Although the section includes a "vision" (9:23), the Hebrew word that describes it, *mar'eh*, is different from the one that

describes the earlier visions, *ḥāzôn* (7:1; 8:2, 15; 9:23). There is no symbolic vision followed by an explanation section. There is only description in plain speech as in chapters 10–12. While one can describe chapter 9 as a blowup concerning the fourth kingdom and the kingdom of God, this vision has a different focus from the others, which proclaim a sequence of four human kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God. Instead, it is dealing with the question of the end of the exile. So interpretation of the vision of the seventy weeks must show how this is related to the other visions in Daniel 2; 7; 8; and 10–12.

Prayer Motivated by Scripture (Dan. 9:2–4a)

Daniel's prayer is motivated by Scripture and based on Scripture. In 9:2–3, Daniel indicates that he understands by the word of the Lord given through the prophet Jeremiah that the length of time to complete and end the divine judgment of the exile is seventy years. Although Daniel could not give a particular reference as to the passage(s) he had in mind as we would do today, he is clearly thinking of Jeremiah 25:1–15 and 29:1–23.

His prayer is also based on 1 Kings 8:33–34, 46–51, where Solomon outlines the necessity and possibility of praying toward the temple when the people sin, whereupon God will hear and forgive and bring the people back to the land.

The prayer of Solomon is based in turn on Deuteronomy 30:1–10, where Moses promises a restoration from the covenant curse of exile, a restoration contingent on repentance for sin.

Addressing God (Dan. 9:4b)

Daniel does not begin his prayer by requesting something. He begins by addressing God properly and by acknowledging his character and person. Daniel speaks of God as "the great and awesome God, who keeps the covenant and loyal love [*ḥesed*] for those who obey the requirements and terms of the covenant." The focus here is on God's loyal love within the covenant relationship. He does not quickly punish his people, and he stands ready to bless them when they obey his laws.

Confessing Sin (Dan. 9:5–10)

The next part of the prayer is devoted to confession of sin. Daniel is not concerned to demonstrate his own personal innocence and piety. Instead, he completely and fully identifies with his people and acknowledges their sin. He confesses that God's people have not obeyed his commands but instead have rebelled against him. They have not listened to the warnings of the prophets who were sent to persuade them to change their attitudes and behavior to conform to the directions and instructions for their lifestyle given by God in the covenant. The prophets are like the lawyers of the covenant. When the covenant is broken, they appear in order to accuse the people with the ultimate intention of restoring their love and faithfulness to God. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and many others were used by God to carry the message of warning and repentance, but they went largely unheeded.

The prophets were sent, according to Daniel, to all strata of society—from kings to common people. None of them, however, responded. Rather, they persisted in their foolish and perilous rebellion.

Next, Daniel marks a contrast between the sin of the people and the mercy of God: God is faithful; his people are rebellious. The prophet is brutally honest in acknowledging the responsibility of God's people for their present dire condition. They are in exile because they have rebelled against the covenant that God made with them through Moses.

God's Punishment (Dan. 9:11–14)

Then, in verses 11–14 of his prayer, Daniel draws a direct connection between the sin of the people and their present suffering (cf. Lam. 2:2–5). The present suffering is due to the curses promised to those who violated the covenant (Deut. 28:15–68).

Appealing for Compassion and Mercy (Dan. 9:15–19)

Finally, Daniel calls on God, as the one who delivered his people out of Egypt, to lift the covenantal curse and to restore the city of Jerusalem and its sanctuary. The exodus was a pivotal event in the life of God's people. It defined them as a nation. Through it, God freed them from slavery and brought them into the Promised Land. The prophets before Daniel saw an analogy between the exodus and the future deliverance that would free them

from the shackles of the exile (cf. Isa. 40:3–5; Hos. 2:14–15). In essence, the return from the exile would be a second exodus, a new exodus.

God's Response: The Vision of Seventy Weeks (Dan. 9:20–27)

As Daniel 9:20–23 shows, the brief message supplied by vision in 9:24–27 constitutes a direct divine response by way of an angelic messenger to the appeal and request Daniel made on the basis of Jeremiah's prophecy. What follows is a fairly literal translation of the Hebrew text to show how the numerous problems in the text have been understood. Space does not allow us to treat all the exegetical issues fully.

Literal Translation of Daniel 9:20–27

> And I was still speaking and interceding in prayer and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my plea for favor before the LORD my God to fall on the holy mountain of my God. I was still speaking in the petition, when the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning—while I was made weary by fatigue—was touching me, about the time of the evening offering. And he explained and spoke with me and said, "Daniel, I have now come to give you clear insight. At the beginning of your supplications a word went out, and I came to declare [it], for you are beloved. So pay attention to the word and consider the vision:
>
> "Seventy sevens are determined for your people and your holy city, to end wrongdoing, and to finish with sin, and to atone for guilt/iniquity, and to bring in eternal righteousness, and to seal up prophetic vision, and to anoint a most holy place/person, so you must know and understand, from the issuing of a word to rebuild Jerusalem until an Anointed One, a leader, are seven sevens and sixty-two sevens. It will be rebuilt in square and trench and in distressing times. And after the sixty-two sevens, an Anointed One will be cut off but not for himself, and the people of the coming leader will ruin/spoil the city and the sanctuary, and its end will come with a flood. And until the end war—desolations are what is decided. And he will bring into force a covenant with the many in one [final] seven, and at the half of the seven he will cause sacrifice and offering to cease, and on a wing of

abominations is one bringing desolation and until an end and what is decided gushes out on the one being desolated."

Punctuation in the Hebrew Bible

Among many difficulties encountered in lexical and syntactic issues facing the translator, the most problematic is the clause division in Daniel 9:25. According to the accents in the Masoretic Text, "seven sevens" belongs to the first sentence, while "sixty-two sevens," along with the conjunction preceding this noun phrase (i.e., "*and* sixty-two sevens"), begins a new clause. One could argue that beginning a new sentence with the conjunction and noun phrase before the imperfect verb *tāšûb* (from the hendiadys for "it will be rebuilt") is a natural reading according to the rules of syntax in Hebrew. Moreover, if the author desired to delineate sixty-nine weeks, why not just say so specifically? Why divide the period into seven and sixty-two weeks? On the other hand, according to the rules of macrosyntax, beginning a clause by *tāšûb* without a conjunction (asyndeton) would signal a comment or explanation on the previous sentence rather than supply new information.[14] An explanation for dividing the period into seven and sixty-two can be given (see below), but the problems of interpretation arising from following the accents in the Masoretic Text are insurmountable. Who is to be identified as the Anointed One after seven weeks? Further, the most natural reading is to identify "Anointed One" and "leader" in 9:25 with the same terms in 9:26, but this identification is not possible according to the division in the Masoretic Text. In a detailed historical study, Roger Beckwith has demonstrated that the clause division represented by the Masoretic Text represents a reaction against messianic interpretation of the text, while the clause division accepted in the translation above follows the Septuagint, Theodotion, Symmachus, and the Syriac Peshitta.[15] Thus the clause division adopted here is both strongly and widely supported early in the textual tradition.

Understanding the End of the Exile

In order to grasp properly the request as raised by Daniel and the answer as provided through the vision of the seventy weeks, we need to understand

the prophetic teaching concerning the end of the exile.

According to the context, Daniel is concerned about the end of the exile. God's people had broken the covenant (Exodus 19–24 / Deuteronomy), and as a result, the covenant curses had fallen on them. The final curse or judgment was exile (Deut. 28:63–68). Nonetheless, exile was not the last word; God had a plan *from the start* for his people to return (Deut. 30:1–10). Isaiah indicates that the return from exile entails two separate stages: (1) return from Babylon to the land of Israel, and (2) return from covenant violation to a right relationship to God so that the covenant relationship is renewed and restored (see Isa. 42:14–43:21 and 43:22–44:23, respectively). The first stage is the physical return from exile. But as previously noted, "You can get the people out of Babylon, but how do you get Babylon out of the people?" The physical return from exile gets the people out of Babylon, but the problem of getting Babylon out of the people must be dealt with by a second stage. The second stage is the spiritual return from exile: it deals with the problem of sin and brings about forgiveness and reconciliation in a renewed covenant between Yahweh and his people. According to the structure of Isaiah's message, Cyrus is the agent for the return from Babylon, and the servant of the Lord is the agent for the return from sin. Thus there are two distinct agents, and they correspond to the two distinct parts of the redemption that brings about the end of the exile. This can be clearly seen in the structure of Isaiah 38–55, as outlined previously:[16]

Overview of Isaiah 38–55

a Historical prologue—Hezekiah's fatal choice 38:1–39:8
- **b** Universal consolation 40:1–42:17
  1. The consolation of Israel 40:1–41:20
  2. The consolation of the Gentiles 41:21–42:17
- **c** Promises of redemption 42:18–44:23
  1. Release 42:18–43:21
  2. Forgiveness 43:22–44:23
- **c'** Agents of redemption 44:24–53:12
  1. Cyrus: liberation 44:24–48:22
  2. Servant: atonement 49:1–53:12
- **b'** Universal proclamation 54:1–55:13

1. The call to Zion 54:1–17
2. The call to the world 55:1–13

Daniel's prayer is focused on the physical return from Babylon—the first stage in redemption—but the angelic message and vision of the seventy weeks are focused on the forgiveness of sins and renewal of covenant and righteousness—the second stage in return from exile. Note the six purposes of the message and vision in Daniel 9:24:

Three Negative Purposes

1. To end wrongdoing
2. To do away with sin
3. To atone for guilt/iniquity

Three Positive Purposes

4. To bring in everlasting righteousness
5. To seal up prophetic vision
6. To anoint the most holy place or person

When one considers the plan of redemption as outlined by Isaiah, clearly the angelic message is concerned not with the first stage but with the second stage of return: the forgiveness of sins and restoration of a right relationship to God.

The end of the exile is frequently portrayed in terms of the exodus. Just as God brought his people out of Egypt in that great event known as the exodus, so he will now bring about a new exodus in bringing his people back from exile. In fact, many aspects of the return from exile parallel the original exodus. In Ezekiel 4:4–6, for example, the prophet is instructed to lie on one side for 390 days for the sin of Israel and on the other side for 40 days for the sin of Judah: in each case a day for each year. The sum of 390 and 40 is 430—exactly the length of the period of bondage in Egypt.[17] What is being portrayed by the drama of Ezekiel is that just as the people endured a period of bondage in Egypt before God brought about the exodus, so now will they endure a long period of foreign overlords before he brings about the new exodus. Outside of Daniel 9, this longer period of

subjugation before the new exodus is referred to as the “time of wrath” (Dan. 8:19 NIV).[18]

The vision of Daniel 9 communicates the same truth. From the prophecy of Jeremiah, Daniel expects a literal period of seventy years for the exile to be completed. This seventy-year period apparently begins with the attack of Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC and extends to the edict of Cyrus the Great in 537 BC permitting the Jews to return.[19] When Daniel brings this issue to God in prayer, the answer is that this seventy-year period deals only with the first stage of the return from exile. Before the new exodus, there will be a longer period of exile. Thus the real return from exile—a return including the forgiveness of sins, renewal of the covenant, and consecration of the temple—will take not just seventy years but rather seventy “sevens,” that is, a much longer time. This *fundamental point* of the vision has unfortunately escaped the attention of both dispensational and nondispensational theologians in the last hundred years.

Although the focus of the message is on the city and the people (Jerusalem and Israel), there are broader implications for the nations. This passage must be seen in the light of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. The Abrahamic covenant promised blessings for the nations through the family of Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3). The Mosaic covenant directed and instructed the family of Abraham as to how to live in a right relationship with God, a right relationship with one another in covenant community, and a right relationship to the earth (as stewards of the creation), so that they could be a blessing to the nations (Exodus 19–24). With the Mosaic covenant broken, Israel now needs the forgiveness of sins so that the covenant is renewed and the blessings can flow to the nations. Thus, the final and real return from exile is achieved by dealing effectively with Israel’s rebellion: the first objective in the list of six is to end “the rebellion”—namely, that of Israel. Then the blessing can flow to the nations, and this blessing finds fulfillment in the apostolic preaching of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, when each one turns from their wicked ways (Acts 3:26). In this way, the second stage of return from exile has implications specifically for Israel but also universally, for the nations.

The Literary Structure of Daniel 9:25–27

Daniel 9:25–27 is not to be read in a linear manner according to the logic of prose in the Western world, based on a Greek and Roman heritage. Instead, the approach in ancient Hebrew literature, as we have noted previously, is to take up a topic and develop it from a particular perspective and then to stop and begin anew, taking up the same theme again from another point of view. This approach is *repetitive* but also creates ideas that are full-orbed or like 3-D images. It is like hearing music from stereo speakers sequentially instead of simultaneously. First comes the music of the right speaker; then comes the music of the left speaker. And then the person hearing or reading puts the two together into a three-dimensional whole.

Daniel 9:25 introduces the first period of seven weeks and the uneventful period of sixty-two weeks to the climactic seventieth week. This last week is described twice in 9:26 and 9:27. Verses 26a and 27a describe the work of the Messiah in dying vicariously to bring into force a covenant with "the many" and to deal decisively with sin, thus ending the sacrificial system. Verses 26b and 27b show that, ironically, supreme sacrilege against the temple at this time will result in the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. Thus 9:26–27 has an a-b-a'-b' structure.[20] This fits the normal pattern in Hebrew literature to deal with a topic recursively. The literary structure can be diagrammed as follows:

a The beneficial work of the Messiah 26a
  b The ruination of the city by his people 26b
a' The beneficial work of the Messiah 27a
  b' The destruction of the city by one causing desolation (via abomination) 27b

Observing this literary structure is *crucial* because one can explain difficulties in one section using the parallel section. For example, "the people of the coming leader" in 9:26b bring ruin to the reconstructed Jerusalem. And 9:27b provides further details showing that the "one causing desolation" does so in association with an extreme abomination. Below we will see how this makes perfect sense of the role played by both Jewish and Roman people in the fall of the temple. The literary structure

also clarifies how the terms *māšîaḥ* and *nāgîd* in 9:25 and 9:26 refer to one and the same individual and moreover makes perfect sense of the "bringing into force a covenant" in 9:27a.[21]

The Interpretation of the Seventy "Weeks"

The Hebrew word for "week" in Daniel 9 is *šāvûa*. It may refer to a period of seven days, like the English word *week* (Gen. 29:27, 28 [cf. Judg. 14:12; Tob. 11:19]; Lev. 12:5; Deut. 16:9 [2x]; Jer. 5:24; Ezek. 45:21;[22] Dan. 10:2, 3). Still referring to a period of seven days, it occurs in the phrase "Feast of Weeks" (Ex. 34:22; Deut. 16:10, 16; 2 Chron. 8:13; and without the headword "feast," Num. 28:26). It also occurs in Daniel 9:24, 25 [2x], 26, and 27 [2x], apparently referring to a period of seven but not seven days. This is clear from the occurrences in Daniel 10:2 and 3, where we find the phrase "week of days," because the author wants to return to the literal and normal use of the word "week." Daniel 10:2 and 3 are the only instances of the phrase "week of days" in the Old Testament, a phrase required by the context in proximity to chapter 9, where the word has a different sense.

The number seventy is clearly connected by the context (Dan. 9:2) to Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the end of the exile (Jer. 25:1–15; 29:1–23). Chronicles explains the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years as lasting "until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths" (2 Chron. 36:21 ESV). Chronicles explicitly connects the seventy years of exile to the principle of sabbatical years, although this is not spelled out by Jeremiah. The explanation given in Chronicles is based squarely on Leviticus 26:34–35 (cf. 26:40–45):

> Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its Sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest that it did not have on your Sabbaths when you were dwelling in it. (ESV)

Paul Williamson is therefore right on target when he correlates the "seventy sevens" with sabbatical years and the jubilee:

> The “seventy sevens” chronography is probably best understood against the background of Jewish sabbatical years, and the Jubilee year in particular (cf. Lev. 24:8; 25:1–4; 26:43; cf. 2 Chr. 36:21). Thus understood, the seventy sevens constitutes ten jubilee years, the last (the seventieth seven) signifying the ultimate Jubilee (cf. Isa. 61:2). Given the Jeremianic context that prompted this revelation (Dan. 9:2; cf. Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10), some explicit association between this climactic Jubilee and the anticipated new covenant is not unexpected.[23]

Thus the “sevens” or “weeks” are periods or units of seven years, or sabbaticals. Understood this way, the “seventy sevens” constitute ten jubilees, the last (the seventieth seven) signifying the ultimate jubilee. In Luke 4, when Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah, he sees the ultimate jubilee promised in Isaiah 61:2 as being fulfilled in his own life and ministry.[24]

Retributive justice, the foundation of divine righteousness in the Mosaic covenant, requires a symmetry to the experience and history of the nation of Israel. The period of time from the beginning of the Israelite kingdom to the fall of Jerusalem is essentially seventy sabbaticals. Then come seventy years of exile, a period when the land enjoys its Sabbath rests. This is followed by seventy sabbaticals, before the exile is finally over (see table 15.2).

Table 15.2 A Symmetry of Sabbaths in Israelite History[25]

Seventy sabbaticals	Seventy years of exile	Seventy sabbaticals
= Cause of exile	= Sabbaths for the land	= Solution to exile

Thus the amount of time required to resolve the problem of Israel’s sin is precisely the same amount of time it took to create the problem in the first place.

The Division of the Weeks and the Starting Point

Interpretation requires a chronology of seventy sabbaticals that corresponds appropriately to the divisions of the seventy “weeks” specified in the text

and also allows the details concerning the events and persons predicted for these times to be easily identified. According to Daniel 9:25–27, the period of seventy sabbaticals is divided into three parts: seven sabbaticals in which the city of Jerusalem is rebuilt (9:25), sixty-two sabbaticals in which nothing noteworthy or remarkable happens in relation to the purposes specified in this vision, and the climactic seventieth sabbatical, when a covenant is made and offerings and sacrifices are ended, somehow in connection with extreme sacrilege to the temple and someone who causes desolation (9:27). As Daniel Block similarly notes,

> Despite the textual problems raised by these verses, the focus of attention in this seventieth week of years is on an Anointed One, who is "cut off, but not for himself." Ironically, within the very week that the root problem of Israel's exile (sin) is solved through the death of the Messiah, the city of Jerusalem is destroyed.[26]

In the history of interpretation, four possible dates for the beginning of the period of seventy weeks have been proposed:[27]

1. 586 BC = God's word at the fall of Jerusalem (Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10)
2. 537 BC = Cyrus's word allowing the return from exile (2 Chron. 36:23; Ezra 1:1–4)
3. 457 BC = Artaxerxes's commission to Ezra (Ezra 7:11–26)[28]
4. 444 BC = Artaxerxes's commission to Nehemiah (Neh. 2:1–6)[29]

The first proposal is the least likely. The "word" coming from Jeremiah is actually dated by Jeremiah 25:1 to the fourth year of Jehoiakim, 605 BC, and predicts the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Beginning the seventy sabbaticals at either date does not yield a satisfactory solution for the three periods of time or the events occurring in them and the identity of the Anointed One.

Many scholars opt for the fourth proposal because Artaxerxes's commission to Nehemiah specifically entails building the walls, and this accounts for the word to rebuild Jerusalem. Yet this proposal faces many problems. It requires that the Messiah be cut off *in* the sixty-ninth sabbatical and leaves the seventieth sabbatical in Daniel 9:27 unexplained. This option also simply does not work if we are counting sabbaticals and years in a

literal sense. To make this proposal work, Harold Hoehner, one of its most able proponents, uses so-called "prophetic years" of 360 days but with scant support for such a calendrical definition or evidence that this is typical in prophetic predictions.[30] Scholars who argue that the death of the Messiah occurs in the sixty-ninth sabbatical explain that "*after* sixty-nine weeks" really means "*in* the sixty-ninth week" in ordinary language or reckoning of the time.[31] Such an argument constitutes special pleading.

According to Ezra 1:1–4 and 2 Chronicles 36:23, the "word" of Cyrus in 537 BC is focused on building a house for the Lord at Jerusalem. This word matches perfectly the prophecies of Isaiah 44:28 and 45:13, which predict Cyrus giving leadership to rebuild the city and temple of Jerusalem. Cyrus's divinely appointed purpose (Ezra 1:2) led him to allow the people to return to accomplish this task (1:3). After the altar was rebuilt and foundations were laid for the new temple, opposition brought the work to a halt. A decree of Darius allowed it to be finished (Ezra 6), spurred on by the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah. In Ezra 7, the "word" of Artaxerxes (ca. 457 BC) is focused on support for the new temple. Yet Ezra 6:14 speaks of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes as though they issued a single decree. Darius's decree (Ezra 6) was based on the fact that Cyrus had *already* issued the decree to permit the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem (see 5:17–6:7). Darius's decree was therefore a renewal (6:6–7) and an expansion (6:8–12) of Cyrus's original decree (6:3–5). Ezra 6:14 shows that Artaxerxes's decree to Ezra (in Ezra 7) is also an extension of Cyrus's original decree. So the decree that Cyrus drafted in 537 BC to restore the temple is not completed until 457 BC under Artaxerxes, which is therefore the date of the "word to rebuild Jerusalem," starting with its sanctuary. Artaxerxes's commission to Nehemiah in 444 BC is not connected to Cyrus's decree in Ezra 6:14 because the decree of Ezra 6:14 has to do specifically with rebuilding the temple, not the walls, of Jerusalem. No doubt the rebuilding of the city was incomplete until Nehemiah restored the walls, but rebuilding the city and rebuilding the temple were one and the same thing to the Jewish people (cf. Isa. 44:28).[32]

The year 457 BC, then, is the correct date to begin marking off the seventy sabbaticals because this "word" to rebuild the city is associated

with the return of Ezra and the reestablishing of the judiciary, central to the concept of a city (Ezra 7:25, 26). Ezra is a central figure in the return. (As already noted, the commission of Artaxerxes to Ezra connects with the earlier contributions of Cyrus and Darius.) In addition, the book of Nehemiah (not separate from Ezra in the Hebrew canon) is about rebuilding and restoring the city of God. While Nehemiah 1–6 focuses on restoring the city in physical terms, Nehemiah 7–13 focuses on restoring the city as a group of people devoted to the service and worship of their God. So rebuilding the city for Nehemiah is not merely about bricks and mortar. Daniel had computed the first year of Cyrus (537 BC) as the end of the exile, according to Daniel 9:1–2. Ezra 1:1–4 acknowledges Cyrus as the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy. But it seems that the point of the vision of seventy weeks is to mark a beginning *after* the word of Cyrus in 537 BC. Thus Ezra's return commissioned by Artaxerxes is the next possible point. More importantly, the command in 457 BC is actually at the beginning of a sabbatical cycle.[33] When one begins the computation from this point, the three periods of the seventy weeks and the events and personae associated with them fit both precisely and simply. First, the literary structure of the text must be observed; then the explanation of the chronology and events is straightforward (see table 15.3).

Table 15.3 The Division of the Weeks

Seven weeks	Sixty-two weeks	Final week
Jerusalem rebuilt	Nothing of importance	Arrival of Messiah/leader

The Fulfillment of the Prophecy

Daniel 9:25 speaks of the issuing of a word (or command) to rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah, the leader, comes, as a period consisting of (1) seven and (2) sixty-two sevens. During the seven weeks, the city is rebuilt fully with plaza and town moat. The sentence "It will be rebuilt with plaza and trench and in distressing times" has no sentence connector (asyndeton) and thus, according to discourse grammar, indicates a comment on the previous statement that specifies the time. This clause adds the comment that the city will be fully restored and that the restoration will

occur during distressing times. The seven sabbaticals cover the period roughly 457–407 BC and include the efforts of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. If one uses the command of either Cyrus in 537 BC or Artaxerxes in 444 BC as a beginning point, the period of approximately fifty years does not correspond well to our records of the history of Israel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Then for sixty-two sevens, there is nothing significant to record as far as God's plan is concerned. There is a *good* reason, then, for dividing the sixty-nine weeks into seven and sixty-two weeks: in the sixty-nine weeks to the time of the Messiah, active reconstruction of the city and temple occupies only the first seven weeks.

When the "word to restore Jerusalem" is understood to refer to the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 BC, the passing of sixty-nine sabbaticals, or weeks of years, brings the time to AD 27. The calculation of sabbatical years in Israel for antiquity is based on evidence from Maccabees, Josephus, inscriptions, the Talmud, and Maimonides. The standard treatment derives from Benedict Zuckermann in 1866.[34] More recently, Ben Zion Wacholder has analyzed the data differently and provided a table of sabbatical years from 519 BC to AD 441.[35] Here I follow the standard view of Benedict Zuckermann (based on Bob Pickle's critique of Wacholder), although the difference between the chronologies reconstructed by these two scholars is only one year.[36] Thus, the seventieth sabbatical is from AD 27 to 34 following Zuckermann or from AD 28 to 35 following Wacholder.

Halfway through this time—AD 31—the Messiah is cut off but not for himself. Astonishingly, he dies, but his death is vicarious. The phrase ואין לו, commonly rendered "and he will have nothing" is better translated "but not for himself" (Dan. 9:26). The quasi-verbal אין in Late Biblical Hebrew can function precisely as the Standard Biblical Hebrew negative לא.[37] The point in the vision is that the coming king dies vicariously *for his people*.

Serious students of Scripture have not always agreed on the date of the crucifixion. Robert Newman, John Bloom, and Hugh Gauch have an excellent response for this issue:

> In any case, if the traditional scheme for the location of the sabbatical cycles is followed instead of Wacholder's, the 69th cycle shifts by only

> one year, to AD 27–34, which still fits equally well. Likewise an error by a year or two on either end—for Artaxerxes's 20th year or the date of the crucifixion—would not change the result. The prediction fits Jesus even allowing for the largest possible uncertainties in chronology.[38]

Thus, by employing sabbaticals, the prophecy remains an astounding prediction finding fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth and yet allows for differences as well in calculating the crucifixion. The crucifixion is almost always dated between AD 27 and 34.

If we put Daniel 9:26a and 27a together—as the literary structure based on the pattern of repetition in Hebrew literature demands—the vicarious death of the coming king brings about making a covenant with "the many," almost certainly "the many" referred to in Isaiah 53:10–12.[39] Without a doubt, Isaiah 53, describing a future Davidic king and servant of the Lord, who is also both priest and sacrifice, laying down his life for the many, is the background to the brief comment in Daniel's vision. His death will bring an end to the sacrificial system because it is a final solution to the problem of sin. The expression "he put in force a covenant" occurs only here in the entire Old Testament. Nonetheless, what are we to make of the expression "*higbîr bĕrît*" ("to put in force a covenant") in Daniel 9:27?

One explanation is that the phrase should be translated "he will confirm (make strong) a covenant with the many." If this is Jesus the Messiah, it could refer to the fact that he kept fully the Mosaic covenant.[40]

The best explanation is one proposed by Jason Parry. He notes that the construction *higbîr bĕrît* in Daniel 9:27 is similar to the Aramaic expression *tqp* (*pa"el* = "strengthen") plus *'ĕsār* ("injunction" or "prohibition"), that is, "to put in force an injunction." This Aramaic expression occurs in 6:7 (6:8 MT), where the enemies of Daniel want the king to create a new law that they wish to use to trap Daniel, and is parallel to the expression "enact a statute." Moreover, a cognate adjective of *tqp* in Imperial Aramaic and Nabataean has the meaning "lawful" or "legitimate." Thus, though the basic meaning of *tqp* in the *pa"el* is "strengthen," a meaning like "make lawful" is appropriate, especially when the object is "injunction." The Hebrew expression *higbîr bĕrît* in 9:27 could be viewed, therefore, as a calque of the

Aramaic expression in 6:7 and, as a result, would be equivalent in meaning to *kārat bĕrît*, that is, initiating a covenant rather than upholding an existing commitment or promise. The covenant of 9:27 is the new covenant, which was effected by the sacrificial death of the Messiah in order to restore the broken covenantal relationship between God and his people.

Ironically, at the same time that the Messiah comes and effects a final solution for sin, 9:26b says that the people of the coming ruler will destroy the city and the sanctuary. There is no grammatical issue in identifying object and subject in this sentence. The meaning of the sentence is clear and straightforward. The coming ruler must be the Messiah of 9:25 according to the context and normal rules of literature. Therefore "the people of the coming ruler" are the Jewish people.[41] The statement is telling us that it is the Jewish people who will ruin/spoil the restored city and temple at the arrival of their coming king. Historical records confirm that this is precisely right. We have firsthand accounts of the fall of Jerusalem from the first century in *The Wars of the Jews* by Josephus. Anyone who has read and studied these texts will understand the author's point. Although the Roman army actually put the torch to Jerusalem, the destruction of the city was blamed squarely on the Jewish people themselves.[42] Josephus wrote his work to try to exonerate the *masses* by blaming the *few*, namely, the Zealots. Thus, he wanted people to believe that the fall of Jerusalem was not the fault of the people as a whole but rather was due to a few extreme rebels who brought down the wrath of Rome on them. So Josephus is adequate historical proof that the destruction of Jerusalem was entirely the fault of the Jewish people, just as Daniel 9:26b predicts. Since few interpreters find it possible to accept the straightforward statement of the text, ingenious alternative proposals are multiplied. These cannot be detailed here except to say that many of them assume rather unnaturally that the "ruler" in 9:26 is different from the one in 9:25, when 9:25 clearly connects the "ruler" with the "Anointed One," and no contextual signals exist to suggest that this is a different person.

Moreover, the literary structure of Daniel 9:26–27 helps to explain the cryptic phrase in 9:26b, since 9:27b returns to the topic of the destruction of the restored Jerusalem and elaborates on it, providing further details and

information. Verse 26b states that the "people of the coming ruler" ruin the city and sanctuary. The Jewish people are responsible for destroying city and temple. Verse 27b explains how this works: "On a hem/skirt or extremity of abomination(s) is one causing desolation." The word frequently translated "wing" can also mean "edge, hem, skirt" or "corner, end, edge, extremity."[43] This might refer to the robe of the high priest as a "hem of abomination," or if "extremity" is intended, it might mean on "the basis of extreme abomination(s)."[44] A similar expression, *but not exactly the same*, is used to predict the act of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in Daniel 11:31 and 12:11 in desecrating the temple. Here in 9:27b, however, the agent of abomination is the Jewish people, not a foreign ruler.

In understanding what this act refers to, we need to remember that the Gospels present Jesus as both genuine Messiah and true temple:

> So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:18–22 ESV)

Also recall that the paralytic lowered through the roof by four friends, for example, was not only healed but was also forgiven of his sins.[45] This angered the leaders because Jesus was claiming to do something that could happen only at the temple; thus he was claiming to be the true temple. So when the Jewish people rejected Jesus as the Anointed One / Messiah and the high priest blasphemed Jesus, who was the true temple, the Herodian temple supported by the Jewish people had to fall, and the city had to be destroyed.

The "one causing desolation" (9:27b) is responsible for the "war" in 9:26b since there it is the war that brings about "desolations." Moreover, "desolations" in Daniel's prayer (9:17–18) are the result of a foreign nation that was brought against Israel for breaking the covenant (e.g., Lev. 26:31–

35). The “abomination” refers to the high priest rejecting Jesus, the true temple. It could also refer to the abominations that resulted from the struggle between John, Simon, and Eleazar (“people of the coming ruler”) for control of Jerusalem, and thus the “war” would refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Vespasian/Titus (the “one causing desolation”). The “one causing desolation” (either Titus or, perhaps, the Jewish people, as in Dan. 9:26b) does so “because of extreme abominations” (the high priest / Zealots). At the end of 9:27b, “the one being desolated” is certainly the Jewish people. Jesus’s mention of the “abomination of desolation” in the Olivet Discourse supports this understanding since he is speaking of the abominations of the high priest during his trial (or of John of Gischala during the Jewish war with Rome in AD 66–70), which forewarns of the impending “desolation” of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans.[46]

According to 9:26b, this destruction is something that would happen *after* the sixty-ninth sabbatical. In 9:27b, there is nothing stated that actually requires the desolation of Jerusalem to happen precisely *in* the seventieth week, although this event is associated with the events happening at that time. Thus, the fall of Jerusalem sometime later does fit suitably because it is the final outworking of the Jewish response to Jesus in the seventieth week. When the Jewish people rejected the Messiah and the high priest blasphemed Jesus, the true temple, the Herodian temple *had to fall*, and the city had to be destroyed. The coming destruction, symbolized by the curtain being torn, finally came to pass in AD 70, within the time of the generation that committed this sacrilege.

Nor can the interpretation proposed here be accused of being contrary to texts in the New Testament. What may be at stake is *our interpretation* of New Testament texts with which we want to make our interpretation of Daniel 9 cohere. The approach to Daniel 9 advanced here may fit well with various views of texts such as Matthew 24 and Mark 13 or 2 Thessalonians 2:3–13 and Revelation 13 and 17. We have not appealed to Josephus over against these texts; rather, we have used Josephus as a source of historical information in the same way that we use 1–2 Maccabees to demonstrate that certain predictions in Daniel were fulfilled by Antiochus IV.

By way of summary, the context strongly suggests that *nāgîd* in 9:25 and 9:26 refers to the same individual. Second, the literary structure of the text does not suggest connecting 9:27a to 9:26b. Third, the larger literary structure of Daniel as a whole is against this view. Chapter 7 entails a vision of four successive kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God. In the fourth kingdom there is a ruler who is boastful against God (7:8) and oppresses the saints (7:25). In the "blowup maps" or "zooming in" of chapters 8 and 10–12 that expand on the basic vision of chapter 7, there is a ruler who sets himself against the prince of the host (8:12–14). This ruler is clearly in the Greek kingdom, according to 8:21. The last vision of chapters 10–12 expands further on 8:12–14 and speaks of the abomination causing desolation (11:31; 12:11), ultimately fulfilled in Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a ruler within the Greek kingdom. Since we would identify the fourth kingdom as Roman and the third as Greek, it is problematic to relate 7:8, which belongs to the fourth empire, to 11:31 and 12:11, which belong to the third.[47] That consideration aside, we can see from the literary structure of the book that the vision of the seventy weeks is by virtue of its content not directly related to the three visions portraying the sequence of foreign overlords in chapters 7; 8; and 10–12.[48] The fact, then, that the vision in chapter 9 is not related to the other three visions is a powerful reason against connecting 9:26b and 9:27a with 8:12–14; 11:31; and 12:11. The literary structure of the book prevents the reader from connecting them in spite of some superficial similarities.

The Role of the Davidic King in Ending the Exile

The angelic message specifies sixty-nine sevens, or weeks, from a command to rebuild Jerusalem until the coming of an "anointed one" (*māšîaḥ*), a "leader" or "ruler" (*nāgîd*). Various proposals have been made for the identification of this person in 9:25. Note that these two terms are in apposition, which *requires that both terms refer to one and the same person* and that one noun is a further definition of the other. The same two terms occur again in the next verse, 9:26. Without any grammatical or literary signals to indicate otherwise, the most natural interpretation is that the same

two terms in 9:26 also refer to one and the same person, that is, the same individual referred to in 9:25.

Let us focus, first, on the terms “anointed one” (*māšîaḥ*) and “leader” or “ruler” (*nāgîd*) in 9:25 *before* considering the occurrences in 9:26. As noted, 9:25 presents the two terms together, *māšîaḥ nāgîd*, so that the second term is clearly in apposition to the first and thus both refer to the same individual.

The first term, *māšîaḥ* (“anointed”), is usually used in the Old Testament of the high priest (Lev. 4:3, 5, 16; 6:15) and the king of Israel (1 Sam. 2:10, 35; 12:3, 5; 16:6; 24:6, 10; 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Sam. 1:14, 16; 19:21; 22:51; 23:1; 2 Chron. 6:42; Pss. 2:2; 18:50; 20:6; 28:8; 84:9; 89:38, 51; 132:10, 17; Lam. 4:20; Hab. 3:13). Cyrus the Persian is also called Yahweh’s anointed (Isa. 45:1), as are the patriarchs in one instance (Ps. 105:15 = 1 Chron. 16:22), no doubt because Abraham functioned as a king. When we include Daniel 9:25–26, this accounts for all thirty-eight instances in the Old Testament.

The “anointed one” is further specified as a *nāgîd*, a “leader.” In the case of *nāgîd*, etymology and noun formation are useful. The verbal root has the meaning “be in front” or “be in full sight of everyone.” The noun formation is the same as *māšîaḥ*.[49] Nouns formed in this way have either an active or a passive sense. For *māšîaḥ*, the sense is passive, that is, one anointed. For *nāgîd*, the sense is also passive. Thus, the word means “a person placed out in front,” that is, a leader. The Oxford Lexicon gives “leader” as the first equivalent and afterward also lists “ruler” or “prince,” since most of the “leaders” indicated by *nāgîd* are kings. All kings are leaders, but not all leaders are kings.

Some may question the preference here for rendering *nāgîd* as “leader” in the translation of 9:20–27 and instead favor the rendering “prince” due to its royal connotations in some contexts. Yet since *nāgîd* does not always refer to royal figures, and since the root *ngd* does not have specifically royal connotations, probably *nāgîd* is higher in the hierarchy of semantic domains than “prince,” so that “leader” would be a more accurate rendering than “prince,” although a prince could be one type of *nāgîd*.

Further consideration of the term *nāgîd* is useful. The term is found in forty-three instances in the Hebrew Bible, which can be classified as follows:

1. King of Israel (Saul: 1 Sam. 9:16; 10:1; David: 1 Sam. 13:14; 25:30; 2 Sam. 5:2; 6:21; 7:8 = 1 Chron. 11:2; 1 Chron. 17:7; 28:4; 2 Chron. 6:5; Solomon: 1 Kings 1:35; 1 Chron. 29:22; Abijah: 2 Chron. 11:22; Jeroboam: 1 Kings 14:7; Jehu: 1 Kings 16:2; Hezekiah: 2 Kings 20:5; unnamed awaited future king = "messiah": Isa. 55:4; Dan. 9:25, 26?)
2. Zadokite priest over the house of God (1 Chron. 9:11, 20; 26:24; 28:7; 2 Chron. 31:12, 13; 35:8; Neh. 11:11; Jer. 20:1)
3. Military leaders (1 Chron. 12:28; 13:1; 2 Chron. 11:11; 19:11; 32:21)
4. Tribal leader (1 Chron. 27:4, 16)
5. Generic leader (Job 29:10; 31:37; Ps. 76:13 [76:12 EV]; Prov. 8:6; 28:16)
6. Foreign leader (Ezek. 28:2; Dan. 11:22)

It is clear that the most frequent referent of both *māšîaḥ* and *nāgîd* is a king. Frequently, however, scholars identify the "anointed one" as the high priest Onias III, whose murder in 171 BC is reported in 2 Maccabees 4:33–38. There are four cogent reasons to reject this identification: (1) It depends on dating the composition of the book of Daniel to the second century BC, a position that is untenable, as I have argued, according to the chronological, linguistic, and literary data.[50] (2) The arrival of this person is associated with the rebuilding and restoration of Jerusalem, so that one naturally thinks of a Davidic figure. (3) Although *nāgîd*, "leader, ruler," is used elsewhere of cultic officials, *nāgîd* plus *māšîaḥ* or *māšaḥ* are conjoined elsewhere only with reference to an anointed king (1 Sam. 9:16; 10:1; 2 Sam. 5:2–3; 1 Kings 1:34–35; 1 Chron. 11:2–3; 29:22). (4) While the Old Testament speaks of a coming king who will function as a priest, it never speaks of a coming priest in royal terms.[51] In this way, the Old Testament consistently distinguishes the Aaronic/Zadokite priesthood from Davidic royalty.[52] As John Oswalt notes, the reference in Daniel 9 is the only unambiguous

reference to *māšîaḥ* (“the Messiah”) as the eschatological Anointed One in the entire Old Testament.[53]

There is a good reason why the future king is referred to in Daniel 9:25 and 26 by the term *nāgîd*, “ruler,” rather than by the term *melek*, the standard word in Hebrew for king. This is best explained by Donald F. Murray, who has provided the most recent and thorough treatment of *nāgîd*, particularly in the context of 2 Samuel 5:17–7:29. His conclusion is worth citing:

> In our texts the *melek* is one who sees his power from Yahweh as susceptible to his own arbitrary manipulation, who obtrudes himself inappropriately and disproportionately between Yahweh and Israel, and who treats Israel as little more than the subjects of his monarchic power. The *nāgîd*, on the other hand, is positively portrayed as one who sees his power as a sovereign and inviolable devolvement from Yahweh, who acts strictly under the orders of Yahweh for the benefit of Yahweh’s people, and holds himself as no more than the willing subject of the divine monarch.[54]

In short, *nāgîd* communicates kingship according to God’s plan and standards, whereas *melek* communicates kingship according to the Canaanite model of absolute despotism and self-aggrandizement. That is why the term *nāgîd* dominates in the passage on the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7) and is also the term used here in Daniel.

The Davidic king ruling in Jerusalem was removed from the throne by the exile in 586 BC. Yet according to the eternal and irrevocable promises of Yahweh to David, the prophets spoke of a coming king from David’s line. The message and vision given to Daniel associates the king’s return with the end of the exile and the climactic purposes for Israel and Jerusalem but with great personal tragedy: he will be cut off *but not for himself*. Thus the coming king will give his life to deliver his people.

Although the term *māšîaḥ* can refer to a priest, the majority of uses refer to the person anointed as king of Israel. Moreover, the collocation of *māšîaḥ* with *nāgîd* in 9:25 indicates that *nāgîd* refers to the type of *nāgîd* found in the particular use of the term as defined by Samuel and continued

throughout Kings and parallels in Chronicles. Many instances of *nāgîd* in Samuel are found in connection with the anointing of a king. Thus the collocation of *māšîaḥ* and *nāgîd* most probably connotes a future anointed king over Israel and refers to the same Davidic figure symbolized by the stone in Daniel 2 and by the "son of man" in Daniel 7. The term *melek* is avoided in the vision given to Daniel probably for the same reasons it is avoided in Samuel.

Although most interpreters understand *māšîaḥ* in 9:26a as referring to the same individual mentioned in 9:25, they interpret *nāgîd* in 9:26b as referring to an evil prince,[55] perhaps even the Antichrist, different from the *nāgîd* in 9:25, which refers to the Messiah. This is bolstered by interpreting 9:27a as referring to this evil ruler making a false covenant that disrupts sacrifice in a way similar to the abomination causing desolation in 8:12–14; 11:31; and 12:11. A supporting connection may even be drawn between the fact that several texts in Daniel appear to speak of a three-and-one-half-year period (7:25; 12:7, 11, 12; cf. 8:14, 26).[56] Substantial reasons will be provided to show that this is a faulty interpretation.

First, we can draw several clear conclusions concerning the usage of *nāgîd* from the data. The word *nāgîd* is really a generic term for leader. The leader can be high or low in the hierarchy of society. So he can be a king or priest, a military or tribal leader, or just someone in any kind of leadership position.[57]

Second, in itself, *nāgîd* is a neutral term. A *nāgîd* can be a good or a bad leader. Pashhur in Jeremiah 20:1 is a bad leader. The *nāgîd* of Tyre in Ezekiel 28 is a bad leader as well and receives divine censure. It is interesting to note that the ruler of Tyre is called a *nāgîd* in 28:2 and a *melek* in 28:12, which is the parallel section of this unit of text according to its own literary structure. Since the king of Tyre is presented in Adamic terms in the first section, this explains the use of *nāgîd* according to Murray's analysis. That is, he had a responsibility *under God* to which he was unfaithful. So even when an evil person is called a *nāgîd*, it may be to emphasize a responsibility or stewardship gone awry. In addition, the *nāgîd* of Daniel 11:22 is an evil person.[58]

Furthermore, the observation that Saul is called a *nāgîd* and was a bad leader is irrelevant to the argument that the author of Samuel employs the term *nāgîd* and avoids the term *melek* in order to avoid Canaanite notions of kingship and promote *what is expected* of the person God chose to rule his people under him. The authors of Samuel and Kings use *nāgîd* of both bad and good rulers, all the while emphasizing the kind of king God is seeking. Indeed, throughout the entire history of Israel, each generation is thinking, "Maybe the next king is the promised son of David, but not this one." As an illustration, Isaiah 1–39 shows that the future king who fulfills God's intentions is neither bad King Ahaz nor good King Hezekiah.

Nonetheless, whatever the range of usage, it is *context* that determines the meaning of a specific instance of a word. Moreover, the nearby context is, as a rule, more important than the less proximate context.

First, *nāgîd* in Daniel 9:26b is most proximate to *nāgîd* in 9:25. If *nāgîd* in 9:25 refers to a coming Davidic king, then the author would have to give some clear indication to his readers that a different referent for *nāgîd* is intended in 9:26. Those who hold to the view that this is Antichrist have not articulated satisfactorily how the author has indicated to his reader that both the positive connotation and the messianic referent of *nāgîd* in 9:25 have suddenly changed to a negative connotation and adversarial referent in 9:26. An adversarial connotation of *nāgîd* in 9:26 cannot legitimately be inferred from the actions of the "people of the *nāgîd*" against the city and sanctuary, since the actions of a king's subjects are not necessarily endorsed by the king.

Second, consider the function of the article on the participle *habbā'* ("the coming one"). Verse 26 may be literally rendered, "And after the sixty-two heptads, 'anointed' is cut off but not for himself, and 'people of leader, the coming one' [*habbā'*], will destroy the city and the sanctuary." Both grammatically and rhetorically, the articular participle *habbā'* ("the coming one") is anaphoric. It refers backward in the text to something that is already mentioned. It is clear that the participle *habbā'* is in apposition to the *nomen rectum* ("head noun") of the bound phrase "(the) people of (the) *nagid*," so that the function of *habbā'* is to specify which *nāgîd* is intended, that is, the previously mentioned *nāgîd*, who is to come after sixty-nine

heptads. Perhaps the whole phrase could be more accurately rendered in English “the people of the leader, that is, the one who is coming.” To support the view that this *nāgîd* is Antichrist, the text would have to say, “the people of *another* leader who is to come.” As it is, the proponents of this view have not provided any acceptable grammatical reason to explain the article or why *habbā’* is even in the text. If *habbā’* is announcing that another, adversarial *nāgîd* will come after the text has already stated that the people of that *nāgîd* will ruin the city and sanctuary, the construction would be rather awkward.

This somewhat tedious analysis is necessary to reveal the *assumptions* behind the interpretation of the traditional view. Proponents of that position *assume* what *the text does not explicitly state*, that after the messianic leader is cut off, (*another*) leader (this one evil) comes on the scene. The text does not say this. It says that the people of the leader, the one who is coming (i.e., who was just referred to in 9:25) will destroy the city and temple. The traditional view seems to beg the question. Let us be as clear as possible here: in Daniel 9:26b, the text only says that the people of the leader, the one coming, will destroy the city and sanctuary. So it does not say that another leader comes on the scene. It says that the people of the coming leader will bring destruction. The text also does not say that a *nāgîd* will destroy the city and sanctuary; it says that the *people* of the coming *nāgîd* will do this.

Also noteworthy is the fact that 9:26 is a bit like a couplet in poetry, with the word pair *māšîaḥ nāgîd* from 9:25 now split over parallel lines:

> And after the sixty-two sevens, an *Anointed One* will be cut off but not for himself,
>
> and the people of *the coming leader* will ruin/spoil the city and the sanctuary.

After 9:25 says that *māšîaḥ nāgîd* is coming, 9:26a says that the *māšîaḥ* is cut off and that the people of the coming *nāgîd* destroy the city and sanctuary. The separation of the words in 9:26 may be significant but not in the way normally suggested. The fact that the *māšîaḥ* is cut off does not indicate that another *nāgîd* comes on the scene. According to the text, it is

the people of the *nāgîd* who come on the scene after the *māšîaḥ* is cut off, not the *nāgîd* himself. In general, we should not drive a wedge between the king and his people,[59] but the text does drive a wedge between them in this case when it indicates that the coming king is cut off on the one hand and that his people ruin the city and sanctuary on the other. The two sentences do seem like contrasting statements in an antonymic couplet. And this is exactly what happened: Jesus came and was cut off, and the people of the Messiah, the Jews, ruined the city and sanctuary. It was Caiaphus's blasphemous statement at the trial of Jesus that meant that the temple had to fall. At the crucifixion, the Jewish people called for the death of Jesus, the true Holy One (Most Holy Place, Dan. 9:24) and the true temple (Most Holy Place, Dan. 9:24). This will be demonstrated shortly.

In addition, the next statement, "and its end will be in a flood," does not show that "the coming one" is another leader, and in this instance an evil one, different from the leader in the previous verse. To be sure, the expression does appear to refer to enemy armies, which are sometimes compared to a flood (e.g., Isaiah 8). It could be that the Messiah's people bring down the city and temple, and its end entails foreign armies aiding and abetting this destruction. Once again, we should not *assume* what is not explicit in the text.

It may be natural for one to expect destruction from outsiders, but it is also natural for destruction to come from within. What happened in the exile is both destruction from without and destruction from within. Judah and Jerusalem brought judgment on themselves; armies from other nations aided and abetted this destruction as divine instruments (Assyria = the rod of Yahweh, Isa. 10:5).

One may appeal to the broader context of Daniel to argue for an evil *nāgîd* in 9:26 different from that of 9:25. The theme of persecution from outsiders is in the book of Daniel. However, this theme is not the only theme in the book. There is an additional theme in Daniel: the continued sin of Israel even after their physical return to the land (see 8:12, 23; 11:36, passages indicating that persecution is due to Israel's sin, and note also the consciousness of deserved judgment in 2 Maccabees). Daniel 8:19 also speaks of "the time of wrath" (cf. Zech. 1:12). We can argue that the cutting

off of the Messiah and the ruin of the city and sanctuary by the people of the Messiah are the culmination of this continued transgression of Israel after the physical return, rather than the culmination of the persecution of the outsiders, as some suggest. This interpretation, moreover, better suits the controlling purpose of the paragraph as stated in 9:24. The culmination of the persecution of the outsiders is indeed found in the next part of 9:26: "And its end will come with a flood, and until the end will be war—desolations are determined." This second part refers to the final destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans in AD 70, that is, the culmination of the persecution of outsiders. In sum, the Jews cut off their Messiah and ruined the city as the culmination of their continued transgression, and the Romans destroyed the city "in a flood" as a culmination of the persecution from outsiders, at the end of the "extended exile" that continued after they returned physically to the land.[60] Consequently, 9:26 describes the culmination of two important themes in Daniel: (1) Israel's continued transgression after the physical return from exile and (2) the persecution of outsiders. Thus the broader context coheres with the understanding of the passage proposed here.

The Last Half of the Seventieth Week

An important question raised by many who read Daniel concerns the last half of the seventieth week. At the middle of the seventieth week, we argue that the Messiah is killed and a new covenant is made, based on his atoning death for the many. How should the last half of the seventieth week be explained?

"Seventy Weeks": Literal or Symbolic?

Related to this question is the interpretation of the "seventy weeks" as a whole. We have argued that the "seventy weeks" are to be understood as a literal seventy sabbaticals. Other scholars argue instead that the "seventy weeks" are symbolic. Examples are Sam Storms in his excellent treatment of amillennialism and Zach Maxcey in an equally excellent study of Daniel 9.[61] A common argument is that since the seventy years of exile are imprecise (at best sixty-six to sixty-eight years), and since the arguments for

490 years (instead of seventy sabbaticals) from the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the time of Jesus, the Messiah, are unacceptable, we must rather interpret the seventy weeks as symbolic. Admittedly, they are not "weeks" in the sense of a period of seven days, as the expression "week of days" in Daniel 10:2 and 3 show. This unique expression was necessary in 10:2 because the author was returning from an unusual sense of "week" back to the normal meaning of a period of seven days. Once the argument is made that the "seventy weeks" are symbolic, these same scholars argue that the last week or last half of the last week covers the entire period from the first coming of Christ to his second coming (or something similar).

This logic of a "symbolic view" is difficult to follow. Admittedly, sixty-six or sixty-eight years is not exactly seventy. Moreover, scholars may not be satisfied with our arguments that it is precisely seventy sabbaticals from the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the coming of Jesus. But the exile was roughly seventy years, and the time from the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the coming of Jesus is roughly seventy sabbaticals, however one calculates the time. Does that give us the right to interpret the last half of the seventieth week symbolically as the, at minimum, *two-thousand-year period* between the first and second comings of Christ? Once one accepts the periods of time as symbolic, this still feels like a huge jump, a non sequitur.

At the center of this problem is how the prophecy of Daniel correlates with the first and second comings of Christ. The ultimate jubilee is inaugurated at the first coming of Christ but not consummated until the second coming of Christ. This is clear because we have explained earlier that bringing the exiles home in the new exodus is the period between the first and second comings of Christ.

Many interpreters understand the last half of the seventieth week to refer to a period in the "great tribulation" with the church age as a parenthesis in between. Others understand the three and a half years to be symbolic of the church age as a whole, between the first and second comings of Christ.

A period of roughly three and a half years is referred to in Daniel 7:25; 8:14; 12:7, 11, and 12. In 7:25 and 12:7, this period is designated as "time, times, and half a time." In 8:14, the exact phrase is "2,300 evenings and mornings." In 12:11 and 12, the text speaks of "1,290 days" and "1,335

days," respectively. The phrases in 7:25 and 12:7 are connected directly with the *fourth* kingdom, while the references in 8:14; 12:11; and 12:12 are clearly connected to the *third* kingdom (i.e., Greece).

A period of three and a half years is referred to in Revelation 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; and 13:5 as "forty-two months," "1,260 days," "1,260 days," "a time, times, and half a time," and "forty-two months," respectively. We know that the book of Revelation is influenced by and linked to the book of Daniel in many instances. The instances in Revelation will be discussed shortly.

A simple solution to explain these texts can be suggested. In the book of Daniel, the references in 8:14; 12:11; and 12:12 clearly refer to the third kingdom, and in particular, to a period of suffering during the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. This is a literal, roughly three-and-a-half-year period of suffering caused for the faithful in Israel during the persecution brought by the Greeks (ca. 167–164 BC). The period of suffering under Antiochus IV is, in turn, *typological* of the "time, times, and half a time" period of suffering caused for the holy ones, or saints, during the fourth kingdom. The book of Revelation interprets this suffering to be endured by those who believe in Jesus Christ for being faithful to him in the period between his first and second comings and will be explained below.

Observe, in particular, that in the book of Daniel, this period in the fourth kingdom is indicated by the "time, times, and half a time," whereas the period under Antiochus IV is designated by actual *numbers* of days or months. We suggest that the instances indicated by numbers refer to a literal period of time, while the more vague expression "time, times, and half a time" in 7:25 and 12:7 is to be interpreted symbolically.

Note, furthermore, that Daniel 7 consists of a symbolic vision plus an explanation section, as does Daniel 8. Daniel 9, however, has no symbolic vision but consists solely of detailed description/explanation, and the same is true of Daniel 10–12. (However cryptic some of the statements are to Daniel, they are no longer cryptic to historians of the Maccabean era.) Thus the more vague expression "time, times, and half a time" is found as part of the text of symbolic visions, while the numerical specifications of the abomination caused by Antiochus IV are all in explanation sections. This

means that the numbers specified for the desolation under Antiochus IV are literal, while the time specified for the desolation under "the little horn" in the fourth kingdom is symbolic.

Interpreting the Second Half of the Seventieth Week

We must now show how the last half of the seventieth week in Daniel 9 is to be interpreted *exegetically* from the texts in Daniel and according to the teaching of Jesus and the apostles.

First, as a general rule, when we read prophecies in the Old Testament, the predictions may refer to events at either the first or the second coming of Jesus the Christ/Messiah since the Old Testament prophets were not permitted to understand that there would be two comings of the Messiah. Only the teaching of Jesus and the apostles can clarify for us whether the text in the Old Testament is to be applied to the first or to the second coming. I would suggest that the little horn in Daniel 7 represents Antichrist. I use this word because the little horn is opposed to the "son of man," which represents Jesus Christ *and* his people via the same symbol. I also suggest that the vision in Daniel 7 applies to both the first coming and the second coming. In the first coming, the little horn is the Jewish nation. They are anti-Christ, or opposed to the Messiah in general: he came unto his own, and his own people did not receive him (John 1:11). As Daniel 9:26a says, it is the people of the coming Messiah who are responsible for the destruction of the city and the sanctuary. This fulfillment is then typical of the final Antichrist, who works at the very end times.

Second, in the prophecy in Daniel 9:24–27, the text is connected directly to Jeremiah 25. The seventy years are to be interpreted literally as the time necessary to bring about physical release from exile in Babylon, and the time of the seventy sabbaticals is to be interpreted literally as the longer period of time necessary to bring about release from the spiritual exile of a broken relationship with God. Note carefully that Daniel 9:25–27 says *absolutely nothing* about the last half of the seventieth week. Therefore we should not try to use this text to affirm that the seventy sabbaticals are symbolic just because we know that Revelation interprets the last half of the seventieth week symbolically.

Third, while Daniel 9:25–27 describes nothing for the last half of the seventieth week, Daniel 9:24 may contain a hint of what will happen in this time. The last of the six purposes in 9:24, “to anoint the Most Holy Place,” suggests the notion of someone or something that is both a Davidic king and the true temple at the same time. One of the most extensive and thorough treatments of this phrase is by Steinmann.[62] Part of his lengthy treatment ought to be cited:

> The final infinitive states this purpose: וְלִמְשֹׁחַ קֹדֶשׁ קָדָשִׁים, “to anoint a Most Holy One” (9:24). This phrase has been understood in two ways. Most critical scholars and some evangelicals understand it to be a reference to the rebuilt second temple in Jerusalem. The superlative phrase קֹדֶשׁ קָדָשִׁים, “holy of holies, most holy,” is always used in association with the tabernacle or temple: It describes objects used in the tabernacle or temple, including the altar, utensils, basin, and incense (Ex 29:37; 30:10, 29, 36; 40:10). More often it refers to the sacrifices offered there. Once it describes Aaron (1 Chr 23:13; see NASB), and once it is used for the Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies) in Ezekiel’s temple (Ezek 45:3). The related phrase with the article, קֹדֶשׁ הַקָּדָשִׁים, is used most often to denote the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle or temple; it is used to describe the most holy offerings or things. However, the only other verse besides Dan 9:24 that refers to “anointing” (מָשַׁח) and “most holy” (קֹדֶשׁ קָדָשִׁים) is Ex 40:10.
>
> Many other interpreters have understood the anointing to point to the “Anointed One, Messiah” (מָשִׁיחַ) mentioned in Dan 9:25–26. Since Aaron as high priest and the temple appointments could be called “most holy,” how much more appropriately does it apply to the Messiah, “the Holy One of God” (Mk 1:24; Jn 6:69; see also Acts 2:27; 13:35: Rev 3:7)? A messianic interpretation was adopted by some older Jewish commentators, including Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman or Ramban). The Christian messianic interpretation is the traditional view held by Hippolytus, Tertullian, Theodoret, and Calvin, as well as contemporary evangelical scholars. In the NT, the equivalent Greek verb “anoint” (χρίω, from which Christ is derived) refers to the anointing of Jesus (Lk 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38; Heb 1:9). It is also applied to baptized believers in Christ

(2 Cor 1:21), who "have the anointing from the Holy One" (χρῖσμα ἔχετε ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου, 1 Jn 2:20; cf. 1 Jn 2:27).[63]

As Steinmann goes on to show, we do not have to decide between these two views. The text is ambiguous *on purpose*. The verb "to anoint" is normally used of consecrating *persons* for offices, such as priest (Lev. 4:3), prophet (Ps. 105:15), and most often king (1 Sam. 2:35). It can also be used to refer to the consecration of the Mosaic tabernacle and its holy objects (Ex. 29:36; 30:26; 40:9, 10, 11; Lev. 8:10, 11). Only in Daniel 9:24 do we have the "Most Holy Place" being anointed. Thus the phrase "Most Holy Place" suggests *the temple*, while the verb "anoint" suggests a *person*. As already pointed out, Jesus is both Messiah and true temple. The play on the words "house of David" in 2 Samuel 7, meaning Davidic dynasty and temple, pursued all the way through the Old Testament in places like Amos 9, is also the correct interpretation here. What is "most holy" is both a person, the coming Davidic king, and a place, the true temple.

I would suggest that the phrase "to anoint a most holy place/person" entails more than just the death of the Messiah. It must include his resurrection, his ascension to the right hand of God to begin his rule, and the inauguration of his body as the church in the book of Acts.[64]

Thus, the last phrase of Daniel 9:24 opens up an alternative suggestion for the second half of the seventieth week. According to generally accepted chronologies, approximately three to four years after the death of Christ, an event happened that was the spiritual fulfillment of the destruction of the temple: God announced to his prophet that the time had come for God's presence to be taken to the Gentiles, and Israel no longer had his name exclusively attached to them:

> But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." (Acts 9:13–15 ESV)

Paul also reports this shift in Acts 26:

> But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (Acts 26:16–18 ESV)

The later destruction of the temple was the physical repercussion of this spiritual event: the commissioning of Paul to go to the Gentiles (to build the real temple).

In Acts 1:8, Jesus answers the question "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Luke shows how this begins in Jerusalem and Judea. Then, with Isaiah 56 in mind, Luke shows next the foreigner (Samaritans) and eunuch (from Ethiopia) being included in the new Israel. In Acts 9, the commissioning of Paul begins extending the kingdom of Israel to include Gentiles.

Also, Acts 9 falls at the end of part three of the seven parts of Acts, with a striking closing formula in 9:31. Part four of Acts documents the shift of the center of gravity of the church from Jerusalem to Antioch, from Jew to Gentile.

Fourth, Daniel 7:25 and 12:7 are the basis for interpreting the last half of the seventieth week symbolically *according to the teaching of the New Testament*. This is where the "already" and "not yet" are explained. From one point of view, referring to the first coming and the destruction of Jerusalem, the seventy sabbaticals are to be interpreted literally. What could not be understood until the coming of Jesus and the teaching of the apostles is that the "time, times, and half a time" in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7 are to be understood symbolically as a period of suffering for believers, the saints who inherit the kingdom of the Messiah, and this refers to the period between the Messiah's first and second comings, which ends with the Antichrist of whom Daniel 7:25 speaks. So Daniel 7 applies to both the first and second comings of the Messiah, while Daniel 9 focuses on the first coming and does not address the last half of the seventieth week.

Three and a Half Years in Revelation

We can now explain briefly how all instances of the references to "three and a half years" are used in the book of Revelation. This discussion is based on the literary structure of the book of Revelation provided by Andrew M. Fountain.[65]

The book of Revelation is structured in a way that indicates its close links with Daniel. The "seventy times seven" of Daniel 9 becomes "seven times seven," that is, seven sections of seven paragraphs. In Revelation, however, the chronology is symbolic rather than literal, and the sevens are not periods in chronological sequence; rather, some sections provide blowups or expansions of the ends of others sections.

Each of the two scrolls begins with a sequence of seven visions that spans the whole period between the first and second coming of Christ. These are section two (the seven seals) and section four (the seven visions of warfare).

Three and a Half Years in the First Scroll

What is interesting is that both scrolls divide the whole age into seven years. In Revelation 11:1–2 (the interlude near the end of the first scroll), the holy city is trampled by the Gentiles for forty-two months. Then in 11:3, the two witnesses prophesy for 1,260 days. What period does this cover? The start of the trampling of Jerusalem by the Gentiles is explicitly linked to the destruction of the temple in Luke 21:24. The end of the two witnesses prophesying is linked to the resurrection in Revelation 11:12, after which Christ returns. So the entire period is divided into two three-and-a-half-year parts. Note that since the seven years are symbolic, there is no need to assume that the three-and-a-half-year periods will divide exactly into two. (In fact, there is evidence that the first "half" is much longer than the second.)

Three and a Half Years in the Second Scroll

Once again, in the second scroll we have two periods of three and a half years. In Revelation 12:6, the people of God are protected from the full violence of Satan for 1,260 days. In 13:5–7, the beast from the sea

(Antichrist) is given authority for forty-two months to make war on the saints and conquer them. What period does this cover? The first three and a half years start with the ascension of Christ (12:5) The second three and a half years end with the beast going to destruction (17:8). So once again we have seven years spanning the period between the first and second coming of Christ divided into two.

What Is the Difference between the Two Three-and-a-Half-Year Periods?

Both section two (the seven seals) and section four (seven visions of warfare) have a natural division. For section two the division follows the fourth element, and for section four it follows the third. The second half of both periods is introduced with similar phrases:

> Revelation 11:7: "The beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them."
>
> Revelation 13:7: "[The beast from the sea] was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them."

The second three-and-a-half-year period seems to be associated with a major intensification in spiritual warfare, which ushers in the final conflict of Christ's church with the forces of darkness. This can be identified with elements in the eschatology of both Jesus and Paul: (1) Matthew 24:15–24: great tribulation, triggered by the revelation of an abomination doing "great signs and wonders"; (2) 2 Thessalonians 2:3: revelation of the lawless one with "false signs and wonders." Note that the references in Revelation 11:2–3 are in the period of the sixth trumpet, a period that corresponds to an expansion of the references in 12:6 and 14 and 13:5. Again, the references in 12:6 and 14 and 13:5 belong to a sequence that corresponds to the entire time between the ascension and final return of Jesus Christ.

So these two three-and-a-half-year periods refer to two different periods of time: one is in general the period of the church age when the church is conquering the nations, and one is in a special time of tribulation at the end when the church appears to be destroyed by the nations.

Summary

The Apocalypse reflects the sevenfold imagery of the prophecy of Daniel but in a symbolic manner. The period between the first and second advents is pictured as seven years, divided (not necessarily at the chronological center) by the revelation of the forces of Antichrist. The people of God are thrown into an intensified conflict, culminating in the return of Christ.

Thus, when Sam Storms argues that the seventy sevens must be interpreted "theologically," it seems that an agenda to prove amillennialism overtakes careful attention to the details of the text of Daniel. I repeat: we cannot build a theory of the last half of the seventieth week from Daniel 9, but we can from Daniel 7:25 and 12:7. The cryptic language used in Daniel 7:25 differs from the other references in Daniel to three and a half years, and this allows a symbolic interpretation, while the language in Daniel 9 requires a literal interpretation because the notion of sabbaticals is directly tied to Jeremiah 25 and 2 Chronicles 36.

The Place of Daniel 9 within Daniel 7–12

The question may be raised, quite legitimately, What *is* the relationship of the vision of seventy weeks to the other visions? How does it fit into the larger literary structure of the book as a whole? This question urgently needs to be addressed.

As already noted, the visions in Daniel 7; 8; and 10–12 focus on a series of four Gentile/human kingdoms succeeded finally by the kingdom of God. I attempted to show in an earlier examination of the issue of the "son of man" in Daniel 7 that the "son of man" represents at the same time a divine figure, a human king, and the constituent people of his kingdom: in the end, the saints of the Most High receive the kingdom of God (7:18, 22, 27).[66] These three visions, then, focus on the question, What is happening to God's kingdom now that Israel is in exile, without a king on earth, and subject to foreign powers? Chapter 9, nicely sandwiched between the second and fourth visions, deals with a different but closely related issue: How long will Israel be in exile? How long will the kingdom of God suffer at the hands of the foreign nations? The final, or real, return from exile, equivalent to the forgiveness of sins, is *prerequisite* to the saints receiving a

kingdom, and so the vision of the seventy weeks reveals how and when the ultimate jubilee is ushered in.

Conclusion

The vision of Daniel's seventy weeks, then, can be explained simply. It refers to a period of seventy sabbaticals or periods of seven years required to bring in the ultimate jubilee: release from sin, the establishment of everlasting righteousness, and consecration of the temple. During the first seven sabbaticals, the city of Jerusalem is restored. Then for sixty-two sabbaticals there is nothing to report. In the climactic seventieth week, Israel's king arrives and dies vicariously for his people. Ironically, desecration of the temple similar to that by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the Greek Empire is perpetrated by the Jewish people themselves, resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem. These events are fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He is the coming King. His crucifixion is the sacrifice to end all sacrifices and the basis of the new covenant with the many. His death is "not for himself" but rather vicarious. The rejection of Jesus as Messiah and the desecration of him as the true temple at his trial by the high priest result in judgment on the Herodian temple, carried out eventually in AD 70. The notion of a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week is contrary to a vision of chronological sequence. The prophecy is remarkable both for its precision and its imprecision as it fits the events concerning Jesus of Nazareth. Finally, with the notion of the already and the not yet, the little horn of Daniel 7 may find fulfillment not only in Jesus's first coming in Israel as a nation (the blasphemous high priest) but also at his second coming (the Antichrist).[67]

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1. This chapter is a completely revised version of Peter J. Gentry, "Daniel's Seventy Weeks and the New Exodus," *SBJT* 14, no. 1 (2010): 26–45 (used by permission of the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*), as well as of chap. 14 of the first edition of *Kingdom through Covenant*.

2. See Peter J. Gentry, *How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

3. For a detailed analysis of the features in the text marking the divisions, see James M. Hamilton Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, NSBT 32 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 61–83.

4. Ibid. Hamilton also evaluates the literary structure proposed by Andrew Steinmann.

5. I am indebted here to Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 213–14.

6. In the expression "son of man" in Aramaic, as in Hebrew, the term "son" indicates membership in a class; for example, in Lev. 4:3, "a bull, a son of cattle" is an expression where the "bull" is a member of the class "cattle." Just so, in the expression "son

of man," the "son" is a member of the class "human." Hence, we would say "human being" in the language of today.

7. For a description of the Hebrew canon, see "The Documents of the Old Testament" in chap. 4.

8. Again, I am indebted to Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 215.

9. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 152–53.

10. For further details, see Peter J. Gentry, "The Son of Man in Daniel 7: Individual or Corporate?," in *Acorns to Oaks: The Primacy and Practice of Biblical Theology; A Festschrift for Dr. Geoff Adams*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press, 2003), 59–74.

11. To be more specific, Dan. 11:1–2 provides new details on the second kingdom, and 12:1–3 provides new details on the kingdom of God. Thus the vision of chaps. 10–12 technically spans all the still-future kingdoms. Nonetheless, the focus is largely on the Greek kingdom (11:3–35), with some space devoted to the Roman kingdom (11:36–45).

12. Jason T. Parry, PhD (cand.), the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, personal communication, November 9, 2015. Used by permission of Jason T. Parry.

13. Cyrus may be the same as Darius. See Brian E. Colless, "Cyrus the Persian as Darius the Mede in the Book of Daniel," *JSOT* 17, no. 56 (1992): 113–26; David W. Baker, "Further Examples of the *Waw Explicativum*," *VT* 30, no. 2 (1980): 129–36.

14. Stephen G. Dempster, "Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative: A Discourse Analysis of Narrative from the Classical Period" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1985). As an example, see Gen. 1:27, where the second and third clauses are asyndetic because they are epexegetical to the first.

15. Roger T. Beckwith, "Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah's Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot, and Early Christian Computation," *RevQ* 40 (1981): 521–42.

16. Adapted from J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 289.

17. See James H. Ashby III and Kurt P. Wise, "The Population Growth of the Short Sojourn: A Biblically Based Proposal," *SBJT* (forthcoming). The theory of a short sojourn construes the 430 years to be from Abraham to the exodus and not just the period of bondage in Egypt.

18. Cf. Zech. 1:12, where the seventy years under Babylonian rule are described as a time of wrath.

19. This period measures sixty-eight years and can be rounded up as seventy years.

20. Williamson acknowledges this a-b-a'-b' structure, although he interprets "leader" or "prince" differently; see Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 175.

21. Although the literary structure described here is based on my own analysis, I discovered others who interpret the text the same way: Andrew E. Steinmann, *Daniel*, ConcC (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2008), 443–76; Robert Johns, *The Visions of Daniel the Hebrew Prophet* (Bloomington, IN: Westbow, 2012), 238–51.

22. There is a problem in the text at Ezek. 45:21.

23. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 174–75.

24. The "ultimate jubilee" is nicely described and defended by Zachary Maxcey, "The Messiah and the Seventy Weeks: A Christotelic Interpretation" (MDiv thesis, Providence Theological Seminary, July 2012), 80–83, 104.

25. Adapted from Daniel I. Block, "Preaching Old Testament Apocalyptic to a New Testament Church," *CTJ* 41 (2006): 49. Used by permission of *Calvin Theological Journal*.

26. Ibid.

27. Robert C. Newman, John A. Bloom, and Hugh G. Gauch Jr., "Public Theology and Prophecy Data: Factual Evidence That Counts for the Biblical World View," *JETS* 46, no. 1 (2003): 79–110, esp. 104.

28. Newman, Bloom, and Gauch employ the conventional date of 458 BC. The fall of 457 BC is adopted here based on the chronological work of Bob Pickle, "An Examination of Anderson's Chronological Errors regarding Daniel 9's First 69 Weeks," accessed November 30, 2009, http://www.pickle-publishing.com/papers/sir-robert-anderson.htm. Newman, Bloom, and Gauch also erroneously provide Ezra 4:11–12 and 23 as references to Artaxerxes's commission to Ezra.

29. Newman, Bloom, and Gauch employ the conventional date of 445 BC. Again, the date adopted here is based on the work of Pickle, "An Examination of Anderson's Chronological Errors regarding Daniel 9's First 69 Weeks."

30. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977).

31. Newman, Bloom, and Gauch, "Public Theology and Prophecy Data," 104.

32. I acknowledge help from Jason Parry for the argument at this point.

33. For the calculation of sabbatical years, I follow Benedict Zuckermann, *Über Sabbathjahrcyclus und Jubelperiode* (Breslau, Germany: W. G. Korn, 1866), rather than Ben Zion Wacholder, "The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles during the Second Temple and the Early Rabbinic Period," *HUCA* 44 (1973): 153–96.

34. Zuckermann, *Über Sabbathjahrcyclus und Jubelperiode*.

35. Wacholder, "The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles," 153–96.

36. See Bob Pickle, "Daniel 9's Seventy Weeks and the Sabbatical Cycle: When Were the Sabbatical Years?," accessed November 9, 2008, http://www.pickle-publishing.com/papers/sabbatical-years.htm. Pickle offers a critical evaluation of all the

evidence employed by Wacholder in setting up the table of sabbatical years. Either way, one can find satisfaction in either AD 31 (following Zuckerman's calculation) or AD 33 (following Wacholder's calculation) for a crucifixion date.

37. See Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 218. On the use of *'ên* functioning as a simple negation, see *HALOT*, s.v. אַיִן. If expressed by the normal negative, possible aural confusion could and would have resulted: *lō' lô*.

38. Newman, Bloom, and Gauch, "Public Theology and Prophecy Data," 105.

39. Meredith G. Kline, "The Covenant of the Seventieth Week," in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Oswald T. Allis*, ed. John H. Skilton (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974), 452–69.

40. So Johns, *Visions of Daniel*, 243.

41. In the bound phrase עם נגיד הבא, the attributive relative participle הבא modifies נגיד. Normally, the attributive participle and noun would agree in definiteness, but exceptions are found. See Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 621–22. The participle "who is to come" does not indicate, then, that another person is intended. The phrase means "the people of the ruler who is to come," and the subject of the verb in the sentence in Dan. 9:26b is the leader's own kin; the leader is the Anointed One of 9:26a.

42. Josephus, *J.W.* 4.389–94; 5.562–66a; 6.108–10. See Parry, "Desolation of the Temple," 485–526.

43. See David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. 4:י-ל (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), s.v. כָּנָף.

44. The HCSB (2010) renders this verse "And the abomination of desolation will be on a wing of the temple." In Matthew 4:6 and Luke 4:9, the Devil tests Jesus by taking him to τὸ πτερύγιον τοῦ ἱεροῦ, literally, "the wing of the temple." It seems that the HCSB translators are interpreting the Hebrew word "wing" in this sense, although the word in Hebrew is never used this way in the Old Testament. Similarly, the NIV (2011) translates it "And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation." This rendering is even more interpretive, although following the same view as in the HCSB. The Hebrew of Daniel 9:27a says, "And on a wing of abomination(s) is one causing desolation." The word rendered "abomination" is plural but may be an intensive plural and therefore is best rendered singular in English. The word "wing" is obviously used metaphorically, since it does not refer to a bird's wing. The only other meanings available in Hebrew are "hem" of a robe or "extremity."

45. For more examples, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 432–37.

46. I acknowledge here the helpful analysis of Jason Parry.

47. This does not preclude a typical-antitypical relationship between the two. A typology between Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the oppressive ruler of 7:8 and 7:25, however, does not necessarily imply that the *nāgîd* of 9:26b refers to the same individual as described in 7:8 and 7:25.

48. See Parry, "Desolation of the Temple," 485–526. He argues that there are allusions in 11:36–45 to 9:26–27 showing that 11:36–45 is the fulfillment of 9:26b and 9:27b, and he shows how 11:36–45 can be understood as a reference to the events of AD 67–70. Nonetheless, Daniel 9 does not present a vision showing a sequence of kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God as do the visions in Daniel 7; 8; and 10–12.

49. See Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander, *Historische Grammatik der Hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testaments* (1922; repr., Hildesheim, Germany: Georg Olms, 1991), §470n.

50. See further Gentry, "Son of Man in Daniel 7."

51. This is true even in Zechariah 6. The action concerning Joshua the high priest is symbolic of a king who also functions as priest, as Zech. 6:13 explains.

52. Adapted in part from Block, "Preaching Old Testament Apocalyptic," 17–52.

53. J. Oswalt, "מָשַׁח," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 2:1126.

54. Donald F. Murray, *Divine Prerogative and Royal Pretension: Pragmatics, Poetics, and Polemics in a Narrative Sequence about David (2 Samuel 5.17–7.29)*, JSOTSup 264 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 299.

55. Cf. Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, NAC 18 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 271; Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 175.

56. See Hamilton, *With the Clouds of Heaven*, 121–22.

57. Whether the latter uses are late is a moot point since the generic usage is found in Job, whose date is uncertain.

58. John Collins says that the *nāgîd* in 11:22 was identified by Theodoret as a reference to the murder of the high priest Onias III and that "this is universally accepted by modern scholars, although the reference anticipates a slightly later point in Antiochus's reign." John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 382. This would explain the position represented in the Oxford Lexicon. Andrew Steinmann also understands the *nāgîd* in 11:22 as a reference to "the Jewish high priest," but he acknowledges that "the text leaves ambiguous which high priest is being described." Steinmann, *Daniel*, 526. Stephen Miller interprets the *nāgîd* in 11:22 as a king (of Egypt), namely, Ptolemy VI. Miller, *Daniel*, 299. It is doubtful that the *nāgîd* in 11:22 is relevant for 9:25–26 since 11:22 is dealing with the third kingdom in the sequence and 9:25–26 is dealing with the fourth or fifth kingdom in the sequence.

59. In Dan. 7:27, there is a close connection between king and people. There is, however, a major difference between 9:26 and 7:27. In 7:27, we have several sentences, and what is affirmed for the people is also affirmed for the third masculine singular

referent. In 9:26, there is only one sentence, and the subject is “the people of the leader, that is, the one who is coming.” So the parallel falls apart at that point.

60. The period bringing an end to physical exile is seventy years; the period bringing an end to the broken covenant, or spiritual exile, is seventy sabbaticals. The latter is what I mean by the “extended exile.”

61. Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2013), 85–91; Maxcey, “The Messiah and the Seventy Weeks,” 79–83, 114. My own view of the seventy weeks is almost identical to that of Storms and Maxcey. Storms calls his interpretation of the seventy weeks “theological” as opposed to “literal.” My attempt here is to prove much the same thing from a better exegesis of Daniel.

62. Steinmann, *Daniel*, 466–68.

63. Ibid, 466–67.

64. The inauguration of the church refers to Pentecost and the extension of the church throughout Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria to Antioch.

65. Andrew M. Fountain, “The Structure of Revelation,” *In Christ* (blog), updated June 9, 2016, http://chri.st/structure-revelation. Fountain’s chart and my analysis of his proposed structure are available in the appendix of Gentry, *How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets*.

66. See Gentry, “Son of Man in Daniel 7.”

67. The first edition at this point included a chapter on Ephesians, which was removed to provide space for new and revised material.

Part 3

THEOLOGICAL SUMMARY AND INTEGRATION

16

Kingdom through Covenant

A Theological Summary from Creation to the Promise of the New Covenant

Much territory has been covered in the previous chapters. We turn now in part 3 to the task of reviewing and summarizing what has been discussed, thinking through how Christ Jesus brings to fulfillment all the promises, hopes, and expectations of the Old Testament as disclosed through the progression of the covenants, and then asking the famous question, So what? How does our understanding of the relationships between the covenants help make sense of the Bible's storyline? And what are some of the implications of our proposal for biblical and systematic theology? In this chapter, we will offer a summary of our view from the creation covenant to the promise of the new covenant and highlight some key points of our proposal, especially points that distinguish it from its alternatives. In chapter 17, we will turn to the New Testament and discover how the progression of the covenants is brought to fulfillment in Christ and his new covenant–new creation people, the church. In chapters 18–19, we will discuss some implications of progressive covenantalism for areas of systematic theology, especially on issues related to the differences between dispensational and covenant theology as highlighted in part 1, chapters 2–3.

In part 2, the truth of *kingdom through covenant*—the glue that unites the Bible's entire metanarrative from creation to consummation—emerged from a detailed exposition of the covenants. Let us now unpack this phrase

in two steps. First, we will describe our understanding of the term *kingdom* and how the idea of the *kingdom of God* is developed in the Old Testament, before we see in chapter 17 how it is fulfilled in Christ. Second, we will summarize our understanding of the relationship between kingdom *and* covenant and how it is *through covenantal progression* that God's plan unfolds and anticipates the dawning of God's saving rule in this world centered on our Lord Jesus Christ. This discussion will also set the stage for chapter 17, where we will see how we as the church, constituted as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, are the beneficiaries of Christ's glorious new covenant work and recipients of *all* God's promises in and through Messiah Jesus.

Kingdom through Covenant

The idea of the *kingdom* has already been highlighted and discussed in previous chapters, but now we want to summarize it biblically and theologically. We agree with Thomas Schreiner that the *kingdom* or the *kingdom of God* is "of prime importance in NT theology,"[1] but this assertion is also true for the entire Bible. In this regard, Graeme Goldsworthy correctly asserts that "the idea of the rule of God over creation, over all creatures, over the kingdoms of the world, and in a unique and special way, over his chosen and redeemed people, is the very heart of the message of the Hebrew scriptures."[2] Four points capture what we affirm about the *kingdom* and how we understand the term and idea in the Old Testament.

God as Universal King

Scripture begins by declaring that God, as Creator and triune Lord, is the sovereign ruler and King of the universe. In this important sense, the entire universe is God's kingdom since he is at present Lord and King. From the Bible's opening, God is introduced and identified as the all-powerful Lord who created the universe by his word, while he himself is uncreated, independent, self-existent, self-sufficient, and in need of nothing outside himself (Pss. 50:12–14; 93:2; Acts 17:24–25). He rules with perfect power, knowledge, and righteousness (Pss. 9:8; 33:5; 139:1–4, 16; Isa. 46:9–11).

And in this rule, God loves, hates, commands, comforts, punishes, rewards, and strengthens, all according to the personal covenant relationships that he establishes with his creation. As the Creator and covenant Lord, he is not some abstract concept or impersonal force. He is the triune Lord who is the moral standard of the universe, and as Creator he demands perfect love, devotion, and complete obedience from his image bearers. The triune God of the Bible is the only true God, utterly unique, and unwilling to share his glory with any created thing (Isa. 42:8). For this reason, God alone is to be worshiped, trusted, and obeyed; he is the King, and the entire universe is his kingdom. This truth is nicely captured by Psalm 103:19: "The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all" (NIV; cf. Ps. 47:8; Dan. 4:34–35).

Scripture also presents this one triune Creator–covenant Lord as the Holy One over all his creation (Gen. 2:1–3; Ex. 3:2–5; Lev. 11:44; Isa. 6:1–3; 57:15; cf. Rom. 1:18–23). The common understanding for the meaning of holiness is "set apart," but holiness conveys much more than God's distinctness and transcendence.[3] God's holiness is particularly associated with his aseity, sovereignty, majesty, and devotion to himself.[4] As the one who is Lord over all, he is exalted, self-sufficient, and self-determined both metaphysically and morally, and thus he is *categorically different in nature and existence* from everything he has made. He cannot be compared with the "gods" of the nations or be judged by human standards. God alone is holy in himself; God alone is God. Furthermore, tied to God's holiness in the metaphysical sense is God's personal-moral purity and perfection. He is "too pure to behold evil" and unable to tolerate wrong (Hab. 1:12–13; cf. Isa. 1:4–20; 35:8). God must act with holy justice when his people rebel against him, yet he is the God who loves his people with a holy love (Hos. 11:9), for he is the God of "covenant faithfulness" (*ḥesed*). Often, divine holiness and love are set against each other, but Scripture never presents them as being at odds. Not only do we see this truth taught in the Old Testament, but also the New Testament, while maintaining God's complete holiness (see Rev. 4:8), affirms in 1 John 4:8 that "God is love." But it is important to note that through the progression of the covenants a great *tension* results in how God will simultaneously demonstrate his holy justice

and covenant love, which is truly resolved only in the new covenant mediator and his work. Why? Because it is only in Messiah Jesus as God the Son incarnate that we have a fully devoted and perfectly obedient covenant keeper who can obey for us and act as our propitiatory sacrifice, thus reconciling divine justice and grace in his cross (Rom. 3:21–26).[5]

In addition, God's kingly work in creation is never presented as an end in itself; rather, it is the beginning of God's eternal plan in time (Eph. 1:11; Rev. 4:11), which he now directs and governs toward a specific eschatological end, or telos. Creation begins a drama that drives the course of history to the end designed for it by its Creator–covenant Lord. In this way, creation is *foundational* to the Bible's entire storyline; it leads to providence, and both creation and providence establish the eschatological direction of God's plan, purposely worked out in terms of specific covenantal relationships that God enters into with his creation, which, in the end, all lead to a precise goal centered on Christ (cf. Col. 1:15–20). In light of such teaching, although the specific *wording* "kingdom of God" is not found until much later in Scripture, the *idea* of "*kingdom* through covenant" is taught in the opening pages of the Bible. As Graeme Goldsworthy rightly points out,

> The *kingdom of God* is a name that is not used in the Bible until much later, but the idea of it immediately comes to mind as we think of creation. . . .
>
> How may we describe the kingdom of God as it has been revealed up to this point in Scripture? God's rule involves the relationships that he has set up between himself and everything in creation. In other words, God makes the rules for all existence. Both accounts of creation show mankind as the center of God's attention and the recipient of a unique relationship with him. Thus the focus of the kingdom of God is on the relationship between God and his people. Man is subject to God, while the rest of creation is subject to man and exists for his benefit. The kingdom means God ruling over his people in the material universe.[6]

In short, God made a good creation as the proper habitation in which his kingdom people could live under his covenant rule.[7] God establishes his

rule in the lives of his image-sons not by force but through loyal love (*ḥesed*) and faithfulness (*ʾĕmet*), which are at the heart of God's covenant relationship with us, hence *kingdom through covenant*. And because this state of affairs is central to the desire of the Lord of history, the goodness of creation and the presence of his kingdom are central to the storyline that unfolds his plan. The fact that rebellion within God's kingdom corrupted all creation means that the events of history are moving under the governance of the Creator–covenant Lord in an eschatological direction toward a "new creation" and the consummation of an eternal kingdom (see Isa. 65:17–25; Rom. 8:19–22; Rev. 21:1–4).

This is not to say that the coming creation replaces an original creation that God somehow failed to keep on course. Renewal of both creation and humanity, rather, was part of God's eternal plan (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5–11; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2); the "new creation" represents the original eschatological goal of the old creation. The week of creation itself culminated in the rest of God on the seventh day (Gen. 2:1–3). And this one day of completion and rest became a typological pattern that grounds observance of the Sabbath day under the old covenant (see Ex. 20:8–11) but ultimately points to a final "Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Heb. 3:7–4:13) under the new covenant that will never end (see Rev. 21:22–25), due to Jesus's work that inaugurates the great salvation rest anticipated from the Old Testament.

The Fall and God's Saving Reign

Although the triune God is universal King and Lord, the fall changes everything. Before the fall, God as Creator and King creates a world that is beautifully summarized by the phrase "It was very good" (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Even though the nature of this goodness is disputed, in light of Genesis 3, it must minimally convey moral goodness and purity.[8] Yet now, in light of human rebellion, God's rightful rule over the entire creation is foolishly rejected by his creatures. Sin is essentially rebellion against the claims of the King—moral autonomy—and so, as a result of our sin, we now stand under God's judicial sentence of condemnation, guilt, and death (Gen. 2:16–17; Rom. 3:23; 6:23).

It is in light of the fall that the Old Testament makes an important distinction between the sovereignty and rule of God over the entire creation and the coming of his *saving reign* in the context of a rebellious creation to make all things right. The creation, which was originally created good, has now gone wrong because of sin. If God graciously chooses to make things right, he, as the Lord and King, must act savingly, which sets the stage for the development of the Bible's redemptive storyline, for the coming of a Redeemer to set creation right—to usher in the *saving reign* of God in this world. As D. A. Carson reminds us, "Ultimately that plot-line anticipates the restoration of goodness, even the transformation to a greater glory, of the universe gone wrong (Rom. 8:21), and arrives finally at the dawning of a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21–22; cf. Isa. 65:17), the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:13)."[9] On the one hand, the kingdom of God will exclude all sin and rebellion. On the other hand, it will include all that is redeemed according to God's gracious will and action. Eventually, when all sin and evil is put down, we will see the fullness of God's kingdom in new covenant relationship, which Scripture describes in new creation categories, in contrast to that which was lost in the old creation due to Adam's sin and rebellion, acting as our representative head.

The Coming of God's Redemptive Kingdom

How does God's kingdom come, in this *saving* sense? As the Old Testament unfolds, God's kingdom is revealed and comes *through* the biblical covenants in two ways. First, it comes synchronically—*through* the covenant relationship God establishes with his creatures. Our triune God has graciously chosen to create humans as his image bearers—that is, his priest-kings—to be in covenant relationship with him. Our covenant Lord has given us the supreme privilege of knowing him, and as we give our life to his worship as his servant-kings and are fully devoted and obedient to him in every domain of life, God's rule is extended in his covenant people *and* to the entire creation. Although God is completely self-sufficient and does not need us to achieve his purposes, he has, amazingly, chosen us to realize his sovereign rule in this world in the context of a covenant relationship of loyal love (*ḥesed*) and faithfulness (*'ĕmet*). Thus, it is

through covenant relationships that we fulfill the purpose of our existence in relationship to our Creator–covenant Lord. Yet, sadly, we have failed in our calling, which leads to another use of *through*.

Second, God's kingdom also comes diachronically—*through* the covenants *over time*. In other words, it is *through* the progression of the covenants that God chooses to reverse the disastrous effects of sin and usher in his saving reign in this world. Following the loss of Eden, redemption is linked to the election of a people and by means of a promised human (Gen. 3:15), all of which is given greater definition *through* Noah and his family, Abraham and his seed, the nation of Israel, and uniquely David and his sons/kings. These people, uniquely tied to the nation of Israel, are promised a land to dwell in; they will be the means of blessing to the nations. *Through* covenantal progression, these covenant promises, which ultimately stretch back to God's initial promise in Genesis 3:15, are realized. In the exodus, which becomes a type/pattern of redemption, God reveals his redemptive plan. At Sinai, the people of God are constituted as a theocratic nation—a *kingdom* of priests and a holy nation called to serve the Lord (Ex. 19:6), to reveal God to the nations, and *through* Israel as a nation to usher in God's saving reign to this world (cf. Gen. 12:1–3). Though rebellion leads to delay, the nation is eventually given possession of the land. Here the structures of government develop toward kingship under the dynasty of David in Jerusalem. Solomon builds the temple as the place where reconciliation and fellowship with God are established, a temple that stretches back to the garden-sanctuary of Eden itself. The rule of the Davidic kings is representative of the rule of God over his kingdom. But Israel *and* the kings disobey; the kingdom divides and judgment falls. God's saving reign is not realized through these people and covenant heads; it is only typified, foreshadowed, and anticipated, as God had planned from eternity. Ultimately, it awaits the coming of the great antitype of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Israel, and David and his sons: Jesus Christ our Lord. It is only through this obedient Son—God the Son incarnate—that God's long-awaited kingdom is inaugurated in this world *through* the new covenant. Thus, *through* the covenants, synchronically and diachronically,

God reveals how his image bearers ought to live *and* how *he* will establish his saving reign and restore creation through a promised, obedient Son.

The Promises Proclaimed by the Prophets

In the Old Testament, these promises, hopes, and expectations are announced by the prophets, who all minister and write after the establishment of the epitome of the Old Testament covenants, namely, the Davidic covenant. As the prophets look to the future, God announces, through them, hope for Israel and the Gentile nations. The prophets not only call Israel back to covenant loyalty but also proclaim an overall pattern of renewal by recapitulating the past history of redemption as developed through the typological patterns of the covenants.[10] They anticipate that in the "last days" Yahweh, the Creator–covenant God, will come to save his people through a new exodus, the establishment of a new temple and new Jerusalem, a new Davidic king to rule in a glorious and eternal kingdom—all of which is tied to the dawning of the new covenant age. In this way, the prophets anticipate the coming of Yahweh and his Messiah, specifically associated with the Davidic king, who will usher in God's kingdom, making all things right and reversing the effects of sin and death for this poor, lost world (e.g., Psalms 2; 45; 110; Isa. 7:14; 9:6–7; 11:1–16; 42:1–9; 49:1–7; 52:13–53:12; Ezek. 34:1–26). But what is crucial to note is that this coming of God's *kingdom* will occur only *through* the inauguration of the new covenant by the work of the Messiah, who is closely identified with Yahweh, thus bringing to fulfillment all God's promises as revealed through the covenants.

This synopsis of the kingdom takes us to the end of the Old Testament and the prophetic hope of God's future saving work—truths that the New Testament proclaims have now come in Christ. At this point, it is vital to note that it is *this* Old Testament teaching that serves as the basis for the New Testament's teaching on the kingdom and its inauguration in Jesus, a topic we will return to in chapter 17.

Kingdom *through Covenant*

Scripture organically ties *kingdom* and *covenant* together: it is *through* the progression of the covenants that God's *saving reign* comes to this world, ultimately in the incarnation, life, and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.[11] The relationship between God's kingdom and the covenants is tight. For this reason, thinking through the Bible's covenantal progression is central to understanding how God's kingdom comes in Jesus, how God's redemptive promise is realized, and how the Bible's metanarrative hangs together, since the covenants constitute the framework and backbone for the entire storyline of Scripture.

As noted in parts 1–2, the relationship between the covenants has been and remains today disputed in biblical and systematic theology. However, before we highlight differences, it is important to acknowledge various agreements. Minimally, all Christians have affirmed that God has *one* plan of salvation and that history is the working out of that plan centered on Christ. In addition, most within historic Christianity, especially evangelical theology, agree that the Bible's storyline moves from creation to fall, from Abraham to David, and finally to Christ.

Yet contrary to covenant theology, which has the tendency to speak of God's one plan of salvation in terms of *the* "covenant of grace" and then subsume *all* the biblical *covenants* under this larger category, or dispensational theology, which tends to partition history in terms of dispensations, it is more accurate to think of God's *one* plan revealed through a *plurality* of covenants (e.g., Gal. 4:24; Eph. 2:12; Heb. 8:7–13), which reaches its fulfillment and terminus in Christ and the new covenant. This allows us to speak properly of the *continuity* of God's plan across time, now fulfilled in the new covenant, and it also helps us avoid "flattening" the differences between the covenants and downplaying the significant progression between them. This, in turn, allows us to see specific covenantal *discontinuities* in God's unfolding plan, especially when it comes to the fulfillment of the previous covenants in Christ and the new covenant, which has import for a variety of theological issues.

Crucial Hermeneutical and Methodological Points to Remember

Before we summarize our understanding of the progression of the covenants, let us briefly recap five key hermeneutical-methodological points central to our proposal. These points will not only offer a summary of our view but will also allow us to set our view over against the theological systems of dispensational and covenant theology.

Progressive Revelation

Progressive revelation is highly significant for the unfolding of the biblical covenants. Everyone agrees that Scripture, as God's word-act revelation, comes to us over time. God's self-disclosure, alongside his redemptive work, unfolds progressively by unique twists and turns, epochally demarcated by the covenants. In this way, God's *one* eternal plan—what Paul refers to as the "mystery" of God—unfolds step-by-step, ultimately culminating in Christ. The *progression* of the covenants is the primary means by which God's plan is unveiled, and God's promises *and* intended typological patterns are given, developed, and fulfilled in Christ and his people. Given this fact, it is best to view *all* the covenants as interrelated and mutually dependent.

As God acts to redeem, the covenants disclose God's plan and reveal many truths. For example, they reveal who God is—the triune God of *ḥesed* and *'ĕmet*—his character and way.[12] They also reveal the purpose of our creation, the nature of the covenant relationship, and how we are to live in relationship with God and each other.[13] Most importantly, in light of the tragedy of human sin, the covenants teach us how God graciously chooses to redeem a fallen people for himself and set everything right, while also revealing a growing tension in the covenant relationship between God and his image bearers. We discover how God is always faithful to his promises and obligations while we are not, even though he demands perfect obedience from his responsible creatures. Through covenantal progression, we discover how God's promises to restore his elect to covenant relationship with him from every tribe, nation, people, and tongue are ultimately achieved through the obedient work of God the Son incarnate, which was God's plan from eternity (Eph. 1:4, 9–10).

The Three Horizons of Biblical Interpretation

The three horizons/contexts of biblical interpretation are critical for understanding the Bible's storyline via covenantal progression. Related to a diachronic reading of the Bible's storyline and the covenants are the three horizons of interpretation as discussed in chapter 3. In part 2, each covenant was placed within three expanding contexts. First, the covenant in question was interpreted within its own immediate, redemptive-historical context (i.e., textual horizon). Second, to understand properly how that covenant fits in God's unfolding plan, it was placed in relation to what preceded it (i.e., epochal horizon), and *interbiblical* connections were explored to understand better the interrelations between earlier and later revelation. Third, the covenant was then placed in relation to later covenants and, ultimately, in relation to the coming of Jesus and the inauguration of the new covenant (i.e., canonical horizon).

By tracing out the covenants in this fashion, we are able to see how the entire plan of God is *organically* related and how it reaches its culmination and fulfillment in Christ. Also, it is only when we do this that we rightly see how the *parts* of God's plan fit with the *whole* and see that the theological conclusions we then draw are truly *biblical* and thus warranted.

Typological Patterns and the Progression of the Covenants

The typological patterns of Scripture are developed through the progression of the covenants.[14] In chapter 3, we noted the importance of the *promise-fulfillment* theme and Scripture's typological patterns for understanding Scripture. We also noted how central the progression of the covenants are to both of these areas. By grasping the unfolding nature of the covenants, we better understand how *all* God's promises are yes and amen in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20) and how *all* the typological patterns find their fulfillment first in Christ and then to us, his people. Thus, by starting in creation and tracing the development of God's promises *through* the covenants, we discover the full depth of their meaning and how specific God-intended patterns, centered on specific persons, events, and institutions, reach their telos in Christ and the new covenant age.

For example, Adam, as the covenant head of the old creation, anticipates and looks forward to the coming of the "last Adam," our Lord Jesus, who is

the head of the new covenant. In the meantime, as the biblical covenants are introduced and then progressively develop, “other Adams” show up on the stage of human history who take on the role of the first Adam (e.g., Noah, Abraham, Israel, David). Yet none of these “other Adams” are the ultimate fulfillment, although they point beyond themselves in prophetic expectation of the “last Adam” to come. In this way, through the diachronic and interbiblical/intertextual unfolding of the covenants, these typological patterns take on greater definition and clarity until the antitype arrives. What is true of Adam is also true of other typological patterns, whether they be various persons or groups of people (e.g., Moses, Israel, David, prophets, priests, and kings), events (e.g., the exodus), or institutions (e.g., the sacrificial system, the tabernacle-temple). It is by this means that Scripture moves from lesser to greater and speaks of Christ as greater, along with the better and everlasting new covenant he establishes.[15]

Why is this point important? For the reason that it helps illuminate some of the similarities and differences between our proposal and those of dispensational and covenant theology. For example, in order to discern properly how Old Testament types/patterns are brought to fulfillment in God’s plan, we must first observe not only how those types are *interbiblically* developed *within* the Old Testament but also how they are fulfilled in Christ and the church. Jesus and the new covenant, then, become the hermeneutical lens by which we interpret the fulfillment of the types/patterns of the Old Testament. This may not sound earthshaking, but it is our conviction that it is *not* consistently applied in the biblical-theological systems of dispensational and covenant theology. As discussed in chapter 3, this is how we believe the New Testament has priority over the Old. There we made the point that to be “biblical,” we must first do justice to the Old Testament context, and in the case of typology we must discern whether something is a legitimate type/pattern. Then we must think through that pattern’s interbiblical development across the covenants and finally ask how it is brought to fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant age.

In contrast to dispensational thought, as noted previously and to which we will return in chapters 18–19, we argue that the land promise to national Israel is a promise and a typological pattern. Thus God’s intent in giving the

promise tied to the Abrahamic covenant cannot be understood apart from a backward and forward look: backward to the archetypal reality of Eden and the entire creation, and forward, through the covenants, to its antitypical fulfillment in the new creation that Jesus inaugurates in his person and work. Thus, in Christ, as the first man of the new creation (last Adam) and the true Israel, the new creation is already here in him and his people, and it will reach its fullness in the new creation in the consummation. In the New Testament, then, built on the Old Testament teaching and anticipation, the land promise is not fulfilled simply to national believing Israel in a localized land somewhat "distinct" from believing Gentiles but to the entire church, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, in the glory of a new heavens and new earth. The new creation has "already" arrived in Christ, individual Christians (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:8–10), and the church (Eph. 2:11–21), and at Christ's return, it will be consummated in a land that will be coextensive with the entire new creation (Revelation 21–22). Minimally, two reasons lead us to this conclusion. First, because the story of God's redemptive plan begins with creation, the land of Eden, and Adam's role to expand Eden's borders to the ends of the earth, this sets the context to the later promise given in the Abrahamic covenant. Yet, sadly, Adam disobeyed and was removed from Eden.[16] Second, as God's redemptive promise is given, starting in Genesis 3:15, and is unpacked *through covenantal progression* from Adam to Christ, the old creation leads to the new creation, and the land, which functions as a microcosm of Eden, becomes a typological pattern that through the covenants reaches its inaugurated-consummated fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant age.

In a similar fashion, in contrast to covenant theology, the genealogical principle of the Abrahamic covenant does *not* remain unchanged as the biblical covenants unfold. Rather, as Adam and other covenant heads function as types that reach their antitypical fulfillment in Christ, so the genealogical principle changes in relation to Christ and his people. Under the new covenant, the relationship of Christ to his people is not Christ, then you as a believer, and then your children, but it is Christ as the head of all those he represents, namely, believers born of the Spirit, circumcised of heart, and forgiven of their sin. The natural-biological genealogical link

from the Abrahamic covenant signifies a number of important truths, but it also points to the need for an internal circumcision of the heart, which the prophets say will occur for the *entire* community in the new covenant (e.g., Jer. 31:29–34; Ezek. 36:25–27; Joel 2:28–32). What the Old Testament itself anticipates, then, the New Testament says has occurred in the church, which is constituted as a transformed, regenerate people from every people and nation (Eph. 2:11–21; Rev. 5:9)—the spiritual, believing seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:26–29). This *new* people is new in the redemptive-historical sense: now that Jesus has come and accomplished his work, believing Jews and Gentiles are equally constituted as God's new covenant–new creation people receiving the same inheritance in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. More examples could be given, but the point is that in order to discern properly how Old Testament types are brought to fulfillment in God's plan, Jesus and the new covenant must become the hermeneutical lens by which we interpret the antitypical fulfillment of the Old Testament patterns.

The New Covenant as the Fulfillment of the Covenants

The new covenant is the fulfillment, telos, and terminus of the biblical covenants. Since *all* the biblical covenants are part of the one plan of God and since no covenant is unrelated to what preceded it and since no covenant can be understood apart from its fulfillment in Christ, it is right to say that *all* the biblical covenants reach their telos in Christ and the new covenant. Obviously, we are not minimizing the truth that what Jesus has inaugurated must still be consummated, a topic we will discuss in more detail in chapter 17. Nor are we minimizing that we still live in an overlap of the ages and that not until Christ returns will this "present age" end and thus that the creation order and structures of the Noahic continue until the end, a point we will return to below. Instead, we contend that now that Christ has come, all the previous covenants find their telos, or are "summed up," in him.[17]

For this reason, the new covenant is the *fulfillment* of the previous covenants; it has brought the other covenants to their God-intended end. *Fulfillment* in the New Testament primarily means that what the previous

covenants revealed, anticipated, and predicted through instruction and various patterns is now here, albeit in inaugurated form.[18] That is why our Lord is presented as the new covenant head, who in his person and work is greater than Adam by undoing[19] what Adam did and thus winning for us the new creation; as the true seed and offspring of Abraham, who brings blessings to the nations by his cross work; as the true Israel, fulfilling all that she failed to be; and as David's greater Son, who rules the nations and the entire creation as King of kings and Lord of lords.

However, the fact that Christ has *fulfilled* the previous covenants does not entail that the earlier covenants have no value for us today or that we can jettison the Old Testament from our Bibles. After all, not only did the previous covenants serve their role in redemptive history as part of God's redemptive plan and revelation of himself, which is crucial for us, they are also forever part of Scripture, which Paul reminds us is God-breathed and useful for our instruction, growth, and ministry (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Yet now that Christ has come, Christians are no longer under these previous covenants *as covenants* (other than the Noahic, since it, being tied to the overlap of the ages, is in force until the consummation). Instead, we are under the new covenant and all that it entails.

A crucial implication of this point is that we, as new covenant believers, must view and apply the previous biblical covenants to ourselves in light of Christ, to whom each of the previous covenants pointed and who fulfills every aspect of them—a point that is vital to grasp in a proper application of the Old Testament to believers today and a topic we will return to in chapter 18. This is consistent with the New Testament's presentation of our Lord who, as D. A. Carson rightly notes in his discussion of Matthew 5:17–20, "presents himself as the eschatological goal of the OT, and thereby its sole authoritative interpreter, the one through whom alone the OT finds its valid continuity and significance."[20]

For example, in regard to covenant theology, this very issue is at the center of debates regarding the continuing validity of the genealogical principle in the church and its application to the subjects of baptism and regarding the tripartite division of the law-covenant and how to discern what "moral" law is. To make headway in these debates, we have to decide

what features of the Abrahamic covenant, if any, are to be applied to the church today now that Christ has come. What was the role of the Abrahamic covenant in God's overall plan? How is it brought to fulfillment in the new covenant? And did Christ's coming bring about any changes? Furthermore, we also have to decide whether the tripartite distinction within the law-covenant of moral, civil, and ceremonial is, first, true to the law-covenant and, second, true to how we determine what the moral law is and what "carries over" from the law-covenant to Christians today, who live under the new covenant.

Or, for example, in relation to dispensational theology, how ought we to think of the role of national Israel across the covenants, especially in relation to Christ as the true Israel and the last Adam? Furthermore, what exactly is the meaning of the land promise given in the Abrahamic covenant? Should we understand the promise to mean that God only intends for its fulfillment to national, believing Israel in a specific location, which she will receive in the future in a "distinct" or different way from believing Gentiles in Christ? Or is the intent of the promise, as unpacked from creation and through the covenants, much greater? Is the promise best understood as one part of a larger promise rooted in creation, typologically foreshadowed in Israel's land, but ultimately anticipating its God-intended fulfillment in Christ and the dawning of the new creation, which the entire church, including believing Jews and Gentiles, will receive and enjoy equally?

Other examples could be given, some of which we will highlight in chapters 18–19, but viewing the new covenant in the flow of redemptive history as that which *fulfills* the previous covenants and brings them to their God-intended end does have implications for how we put together the Bible's entire storyline. In contrast to other theological positions, our approach of *kingdom through the progression of the covenants* wants consistently to view and apply the previous covenants through the lens of Christ and his work and the arrival of the new covenant age. It is only when we do so that our theological conclusions will do justice to God's overall plan and intent and let Scripture interpret Scripture at the canonical level.

Conditional and Unconditional Categories

Categorizing the biblical covenants as either unconditional or conditional is inadequate. A common way to distinguish the biblical covenants is to employ the unconditional-unilateral (royal grant) versus conditional-bilateral (suzerain-vassal treaty) distinction.[21] It is on this basis that the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants are often characterized as royal-grant covenants (unconditional), while the covenant of works and the Mosaic/Israel covenant are described as suzerain-vassal covenants (conditional). From here a variety of theological conclusions are drawn, depending on the issue.

For example, on the basis of this distinction, Paul Williamson argues that there are two Abrahamic covenants: an unconditional one made in Genesis 15 and a conditional one made in Genesis 17. Or this distinction is often used as part of the larger law-gospel contrast (which is linked to the larger faith-works contrast) so that the covenant of works and the Mosaic/Israel covenant are viewed as "law," or the latter as a republication of the covenant of works. On the other hand, the Abrahamic, Davidic, and the new covenants are viewed as "gospel," or examples of the covenant of grace. Or from another theological angle, dispensational theology argues that the land promise to Israel, which was given in the Abrahamic covenant, was an unconditional promise since it is part of an unconditional covenant. For this reason, this promise (understood in a very specific way) still requires a future fulfillment to national Israel in the millennium and consummated ages, since not all aspects of it, so dispensationalists claim, have been realized—such as the ruling of the Davidic king in the land of Israel over the nations. On the other hand, covenant theology not only views the "land" more typologically but will also often argue, as Michael Horton does, that the promises made to Israel, especially in relation to the land, were conditional and were in fact forfeited and are now spiritually fulfilled in the church. Or in relation to the genealogical principle, covenant theology argues that this principle is given in the unconditional Abrahamic covenant so that it continues unchanged and unchanging even in the new covenant, since the new covenant is basically a continuation and renewal of

the Abrahamic covenant, with allowances made for obvious differences due to Christ's work.

However, as discussed in the previous chapters, we dissent from this common way of categorizing and distinguishing the biblical covenants. As the exposition has demonstrated, this way of viewing the covenants is problematic and reductionistic. Instead, the covenants consist of unconditional (unilateral) and conditional (bilateral) elements blended together. In fact, it is precisely due to this blend that there is a deliberate *tension* within the covenants—a tension that is heightened as the Bible's storyline unfolds through the progression of the covenants and is only resolved in Christ.

On the one hand, the covenants gloriously reveal our triune Creator–covenant God who makes *and* keeps his promises. As Creator and Lord, he chooses to enter into relationships with his creatures, and in those relationships he always shows himself to be the faithful partner. He always remains true to himself, his character, and his promises, and it is on this basis alone that we can hope and trust in him. The author of Hebrews captures this point well. As he reflects on the certainty of God's covenant promises in Christ, he writes,

> So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. (Heb. 6:17–18 ESV)

The covenants, then, reveal first and foremost our gracious triune God who is the promise maker and keeper and who unilaterally guarantees that his promises will never fail. Whether it is with Adam in Eden or with other covenant heads, God's commitment to his image bearers and creation, tied to his promise in Genesis 3:15, will never fail. That same promise runs across the entire canon, and it is *through* the progression of the biblical covenants that it takes on greater clarity and expansion until it reaches its crescendo in the person and work of Christ. It continues in the Noahic

covenant; it is given more definition and expansion in the Abrahamic; it undergirds the old covenant and the Davidic; and, as noted, it reaches its fulfillment in Christ.

On the other hand, *all* the biblical covenants also demand an obedient, human covenant partner. God as our Creator and Lord demands from his image bearers, who were made to know him, complete devotion and obedience. For this reason, there is a conditional or bilateral aspect to the covenants. This is certainly evident with Adam as he is given commands and responsibilities to fulfill with the expectation that he will do so perfectly, faithfully, and in full devotion. Although we demur to some aspects of covenant theology's "covenant of works," on *this* point they are correct. Furthermore, in the Noahic covenant, obedience is also demanded, which is true as well of Abraham, the nation of Israel, David and his sons, and in the greatest way imaginable *the* Son, who obeys perfectly and completely in his entire life and supremely in his death on a cross (Phil. 2:6–11).

However, as the covenants progress through redemptive history, this *tension* grows, since it becomes evident that it is only the Lord himself who remains the faithful covenant partner. From his initial promise in Genesis 3:15 to reverse the effects of sin and death; from his increasingly greater promises made through the covenants; from the beautiful picture of covenant initiation in Genesis 15, which demonstrates that God takes the covenant obligations solely on himself; from the provision of a sacrificial system to atone for sin (Lev. 17:11); from repeatedly keeping his promises to a rebellious and hard-hearted people, God shows himself time and time again to be the faithful covenant partner. By contrast, all the human covenant partners—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David and his sons—show themselves to be unfaithful, disobedient covenant breakers, some to a greater extent than others. As a result, there is no faithful, obedient, human son who fully obeys the demands of the covenant. Obedience *must* be rendered; it is not an option for us. God is holy and just; he is the moral standard of the universe, but we have sinned against *him*. And in light of Genesis 3:15, God's promises are tied to the provision of an obedient son, who will undo Adam's disastrous choice. But where is such a son who fully

obeys and meets God's moral demands? How can God remain in relationship with us unless our disobedience is removed, our hearts are transformed, and our sin is paid for in full? It is *through* the covenants that this *tension* increases, and it is *through* the covenants that the answer is given: God himself—our covenant maker and keeper—must *unilaterally* act to keep his own promise by the provision of an *obedient* covenant partner that a new and better covenant can be established. It is only in the giving of his Son and through the Son's obedient life and death for us as God the Son *incarnate* that our redemption is secured, our sin is paid for, and the inauguration of an unshakable new covenant is established.

It is only by maintaining the dual emphasis of unilateral and bilateral elements in the covenants, leading us to their fulfillment in the unbreakable new covenant in God's obedient Son, that we appreciate Scripture's glorious Christological focus. The Bible's storyline as told by the covenants leads us to him. Jesus alone, who is God the Son incarnate and our great Prophet, Priest, and King, can secure our salvation. In Christ alone, the covenants are fulfilled and this built-in *tension* is resolved.[22]

With these five hermeneutical-methodological points in mind—points that highlight similarities and differences between other ways of putting together the biblical covenants and ours—let us now sketch out how the covenants unfold in the Old Testament from creation to the promise of the new covenant. Obviously, in what follows only the most salient points of part 2 will be stressed in order to give the big picture of progressive covenantalism.

A Summary of the Covenants from Creation to the Promise of the New Covenant

Adam and the Covenant with Creation

Covenant theology has primarily spoken of the covenant in Genesis 1–2 as the "covenant of works," and dispensational theology rarely speaks of a covenant with creation—at least, such a covenant does not factor much into their theological system.[23] For covenant theology, the covenant of works was made with Adam as the head and representative of the entire human race. To him and his entire posterity, eternal life was promised on the

condition of perfect obedience to God's law. However, due to his disobedience, Adam, along with all humanity, was plunged into a state of sin, death, and condemnation. But God, by his own sovereign grace and initiative, did not leave the human race in this condition but instead gave a saving promise, which is identified with the "covenant of grace"—a covenant made with the elect[24]—wherein God graciously offered to sinners life and salvation through the last Adam, the covenantal head of his people, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even though this formulation is standard for covenant theology, some people have questioned the validity of a covenant of works—or any covenant in creation. We will not rehearse all the arguments for rejecting such a covenant since those arguments were covered in detail in chapter 6. Instead, we will focus on the most central objections. First, exegetically, since the word "covenant" (*bĕrît*) is *not* found in the text and is not used until Genesis 6:18, some have concluded that we should not speak of a covenant prior to Noah.[25] Second, theologically, some have questioned the notion of a covenant *of works*. Is Adam attempting to earn his salvation? Does he not already stand in a right relationship with God? And, though he obviously has everything to lose if he disobeys, should we think of it in a "works" sense?

Why, then, do we argue that there is a "creation covenant" with Adam serving as the covenant head of humanity? Five points summarize our overall argument, and by highlighting these points, we also want to stress the foundational role that Adam plays in the development of the covenants.

A Covenant without the Word "Covenant." The absence of the word "covenant" in Genesis 1–2 does *not* entail that there is no covenant. Exegetically, as argued in chapters 5–6, William Dumbrell is correct to note the crucial distinction between the two words "cut" and "establish" in reference to a covenant. In Genesis 6:17–18 and 9:8–17, the covenant with Noah is "established" and not "cut."[26] Generally, the word "cut" refers to the initiation or origination of a covenant, while the word "established" either assumes that a covenant relationship is already in place or refers to a covenant partner fulfilling an obligation or upholding a promise in a covenant previously initiated—that is, one makes good on his promise (cf.

Gen. 17:7, 18, 21; Ex. 6:4; Lev. 26:9; Deut. 8:18; 2 Kings 23:3; Jer. 34:18). It is legitimate, then, to conclude that the phrase "establish my covenant" in Genesis 6:18 (and in Gen. 9:9, 11, 17) refers to the maintenance of a preexisting *covenant* relationship, which can only be found in Adam and rooted in creation.[27] Later, Scripture confirms this point (e.g., Jer. 33:19–26; Hos. 6:7).[28]

THE COVENANTAL CONTEXT OF GENESIS 2. Contextually, when we turn to Genesis 2, it is *not* improper to see a "covenantal context." Though the word "covenant" is not used, all the elements of a lord-vassal agreement are in the context, including conditions of obedience with sanctions for disobedience.[29] In addition, God identifies himself by his covenant name: Yahweh (Gen. 2:4, 5, 7, 8; Ex. 3:13–15). When the Israelites would have read the Pentateuch, they would have identified God's covenant name from Exodus 3 with Adam in creation. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Moses identifies the covenant God of Israel with Adam and creation. However, instead of viewing it as a "covenant of works," it is probably best to view it as a "covenant with creation," that is, an original and unique situation that involved, especially in light of the rest of Scripture, Adam in a representative role on behalf of the human race (cf. Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:20–21).[30]

This point is further warranted by the truth that Adam and the entire human race are created as God's image bearers and by the link between image and sonship, terms that we have shown in chapter 6 are covenantal terms and assume a covenant relationship with God and creation. Although scholars dispute the exact meaning of the *imago dei*—the terms "image" (*ṣelem*) and "likeness" (*demût*) are rare in the Old Testament as applied to humans,[31] and the terms are not used in a technical sense "with firm semantic borders"[32]—a clear understanding of the concept is possible in view of its ancient Near East background. In the ancient world, the concept of the "image of the god" conveys the idea of a physical representation of the "god," which underscores how Adam and the entire human race are viewed as vice-regents who are to rule and function in the place of God, as God's representatives, as God's servant-priest-kings. However, unlike the ancient Near East, where this concept is applied only to the king, Scripture

teaches that the entire human race, under the headship of Adam, was created to be "king" over all creation, thus emphasizing the dual relationship of Adam and the human race to God and to the created order.[33] This is borne out in Genesis 1:26c, where it is best translated as a purpose clause: "in order that they [human beings] may have dominion"—that is, function in a kingly and royal way. This does not entail that dominion is the definition of the image, as some have sought to argue, but instead, as Graeme Goldsworthy rightly contends, dominion is best viewed as "a consequence of" the image.[34] A crucial text that buttresses this point is Psalm 8, which describes human beings in royal terms. In an important way, this text is developed in Hebrews 2:5–18, where it is applied to Christ, who is not only the true "image of God" as the divine Son (see Col. 1:15; cf. Heb. 1:3) but also the "image of God" as the obedient Son, who takes on himself our humanity, identifies with us, and fulfills the role of Adam by winning for us our salvation.

In all these ways, "image" and "likeness" are terms that signify our uniqueness, our dignity before God, and the representative role we play for the entire creation as God's servant-priest-kings. This entails that God deals with creation on the basis of how he deals with human beings, and all this implies a unique, covenantal relation as mediated through Adam as our representative and covenant head. Goldsworthy confirms this point when he writes,

> Although God commits himself to the whole of his creation for its good order and preservation, humanity is the special focus of this care. Creation is there for our benefit. Humanity is the representative of the whole creation so that God deals with creation on the basis of how he deals with humans. Only man is addressed as one who knows God and who is created to live purposefully for God. When man falls because of sin the creation is made to fall with him. In order to restore the whole creation, God works through his Son who becomes a man to restore man. The whole creation waits eagerly for the redeemed people of God to be finally revealed as God's perfected children, because at that point the creation will be released from its own bondage (Rom 8:19–23). This overview of man as the object of God's covenant love

> and redemption confirms the central significance given to man in Genesis 1–2.[35]

In addition, we must also link the concept of "image"/"likeness" to "sonship" and then "sonship" to the biblical covenants. Just as "image"/"likeness" carries a strong functional and representational meaning, so does "son."[36] As Stephen Dempster points out,

> By juxtaposing the divine creation of Adam in the image of God and the subsequent human creation of Seth in the image of Adam, the transmission of the image of God through this genealogical line is implied, as well as the link between sonship and the image of God. As Seth is a son of Adam, so Adam is a son of God. Language is being stretched here, as a literal son of God is certainly not in view, but nevertheless the writer uses an analogy to make a point.[37]

In fact, the New Testament draws this same connection as Adam is called the "son" of God in Luke 3:38. This is possible to do because "sonship" carries a strong representational-functional meaning. Adam is the "image" and "son" because he is the representative of God, as is the entire human race. He is to act and function in a way similar to God, under his sovereign rule, as a creature of God. Later in the Old Testament covenants, this same notion of "son" is applied to Israel (Ex. 4:22; cf. Hos. 11:1), as well as to the Davidic king(s) tied to the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:14–17; Psalm 2). In every instance Israel as a nation and David and his sons are to stand as representatives of the Lord and to carry out God's rule in this world, as Adam did before them. In light of this, it is very difficult not to think in covenantal terms when we see this emphasis on "image" and "son." Furthermore, this emphasis is also foundational in making sense of New Testament Christology and Christ as the head of the new covenant, since Scripture applies to the eternal Son the expressions "image" and "Son" (though greater) and then describes him as precisely the antitypical fulfillment of Adam, Israel, and David.

Adam in Relation to Christ. Canonically and theologically, the Bible's entire storyline is centered on two foundational, representative individuals: Adam and Christ (Rom. 5:12–21). It seems difficult to think of Christ as the

head of the new covenant without Adam being the head of some kind of covenant in the original situation. What best explains this relationship is a "covenant with creation," where Adam stands in a unique and singular situation as head of the human race. As God's image bearers and children, Adam and Eve are given the mandate to rule over God's creation, to put all things under their feet (cf. Ps. 8:5–8) for God's glory, and to establish the pattern of God's kingdom in this world whereby everything that God has made stands in right relationship to him as God intended.[38] But sadly, Adam did not obey and thus fulfill the purpose of his existence. Rather, he rebelled against God and as the covenant head of the human race plunged us down with him, bringing into God's good world the reality and power of sin and death. In Adam, unless God acts in grace and power, the original creation will stand completely under divine judgment. However, thankfully, God chooses to act on our behalf. He promises that his purposes for creation and the human race will continue through his provision of the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), a Redeemer, which in this context has to be understood as ultimately bringing about the reversal of the disastrous effects of the fall.

Biblically and theologically, we cannot overestimate the importance of the Adam-Christ typological relationship for understanding the storyline of Scripture (see Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:20–23; cf. Heb. 2:5–18). In fact, Scripture teaches that all human beings fall under the representative headship of either Adam or Christ. Adam represents all that is tied to the "old creation" and "this present age," characterized by sin, death, and judgment. Christ represents all that is associated with the "new creation" and the "new covenant," which from the perspective of the Old Testament Prophets are identified with the "age to come," characterized by salvation, life, and restoration of what was lost in the fall.[39] This is why Scripture subsumes Jew and Gentile under Adam, so that anyone who is "in Adam," given Adam's disobedience, now comes into this world dead in his or her sins and under the judicial sentence of God (see Eph. 2:1–3). In this way, Adam's headship has the deeper privilege of more than ordinary fatherhood. It also includes the dignity of defining what it means to be human, for he stands not merely as our physical or seminal head but also as our covenantal

head.[40] Being human, then, is equivalent to bearing Adam's image (1 Cor. 15:49).

Now, in light of the fall, being "in Adam" is equivalent to being part of the old creation and an age associated with sin, death, and judgment, while being "in Christ" is equivalent to being part of the new creation and an age associated with salvation and life. As Douglas Moo says,

> All people, Paul teaches, stand in relationship to one of two men, whose actions determine the eternal destiny of all who belong to them. Either one "belongs to" Adam and is under sentence of death because of his sin, or disobedience, or one belongs to Christ and is assured of eternal life because of his "righteous" act, or obedience. The actions of Adam and Christ then are similar in having "epochal" significance.[41]

This is so even though, as Moo rightly notes, there is discontinuity between these two men in terms of their identity and actions. The two men are not equal in power, since "Christ's act is able completely to overcome the effects of Adam's."[42]

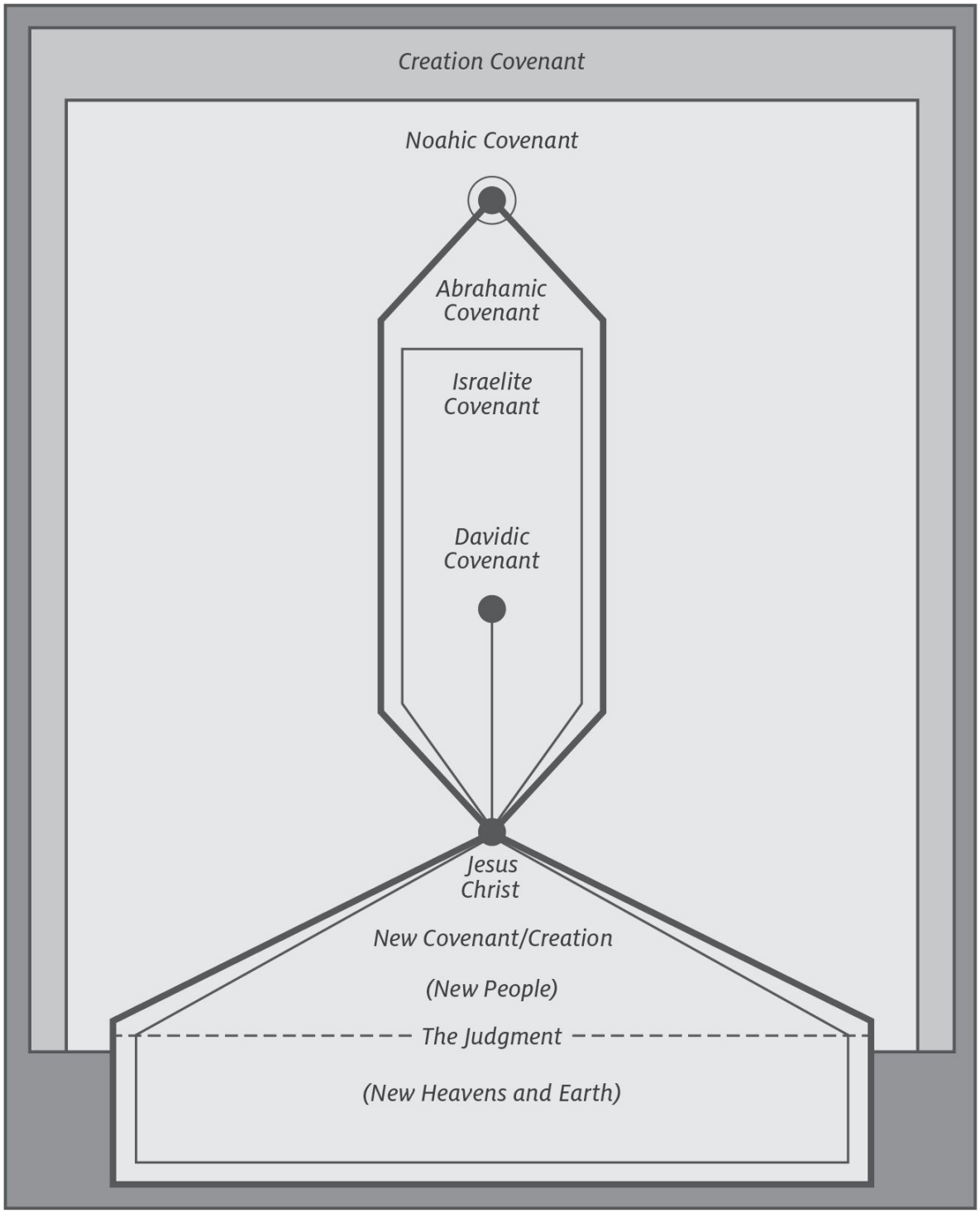
The significance of *starting* with the creation covenant for understanding the Bible's storyline and *how* the covenants relate to each other cannot be overstated. The creation covenant is *foundational* for all future covenants since *all* subsequent covenants unpack Adam's representative role in the world.[43] Adam—indeed, all humanity—is created as God's image-son, a priest-king to rule over creation. Adam is created in relationship with God as he mediates God's rule to the world; he does not need to merit favor before God. Yet God, as holy and just, demands perfect obedience from his covenant partner. *All* subsequent covenant heads function as subsets of Adam, who, in God's plan, points forward to Christ, the last Adam, who by his obedience ushers in a new covenant.

In Christ, the original situation is recovered, though of course in a greater or *a fortiori* manner, thus bringing God's plan to its eschatological goal. In Christ and the new covenant, all the previous covenants find their telos and terminus, which underscores why the new covenant age is greater than what preceded it. Even though the amount of space devoted to Adam is small, his

role as the representative head of creation defines what comes after him, and the entire work of Christ (Heb. 2:5–18).

We have sought to capture this emphasis in figure 16.1, where the first covenant's scope is as universal as creation, even though in subsequent covenants it is narrowed. Yet as the Bible's storyline unfolds through covenantal progression, the narrowing focus of subsequent covenants is restored in Christ, who comes as the new covenant head and who through his obedience brings about the inauguration of a new creation (see figure 16.2).[44]

Figure 16.1 Time versus Scope of Covenant Membership



Notes: The line corresponding to the Abrahamic covenant is bold to show that both the Israelite and new covenants are the means of fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant. The Davidic covenant is a single line because, formally, the Davidic covenant is between God and David. The Abrahamic covenant promises blessing to the nations, the Israelite covenant locates Israel in the land bridge between Mesopotamia and Egypt, and the Davidic covenant is a charter for humanity. So they all have worldwide implications in principle, but the diagram is specifically about the scope of covenant

membership. The new creation eventually replaces the old creation completely. In the Old Testament God first makes the people (Israel) and then the land (Palestine), and in the New Testament God first makes the people (Christians) and then the land (new heavens and earth).

Figure 16.2 Time versus Covenant Partners/Roles

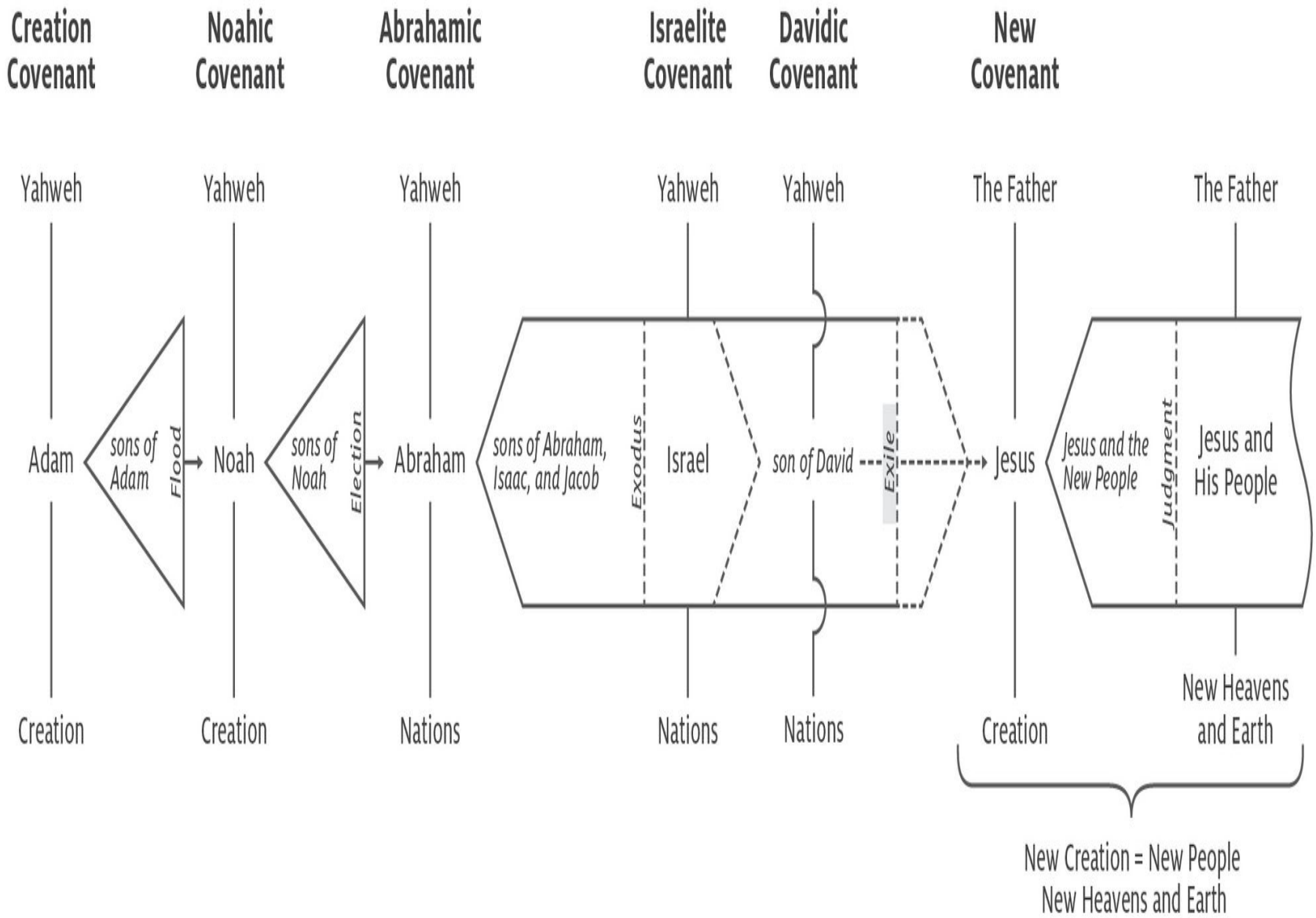

Creation Covenant
Noahic Covenant
Abrahamic Covenant
Israelite Covenant
Davidic Covenant
New Covenant
Yahweh
Yahweh
Yahweh
Yahweh
Yahweh
The Father
The Father
Adam
sons of Adam
Flood
Noah
sons of Noah
Election
Abraham
sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
Exodus
Israel
son of David
Exile
Jesus
Jesus and the New People
Judgment
Jesus and His People
Creation
Creation
Nations
Nations
Nations
Creation
New Heavens and Earth
New Creation = New People
New Heavens and Earth

Diagram designed by Jason Parry.

Notes: The middle horizontal section identifies the servant-king(s) / "son(s) of God" who is/are set up over creation / the nations by the corresponding covenant. The "New Creation = New People" section is provisional and attempts to account for the following:

- 1 Cor. 15:23–24: "But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power" (NASB). The final scene is difficult to portray, since on the one hand, Christ "hands over the kingdom" to the Father, but on the other hand, God and the Lamb share a throne in the new heavens and earth (Rev. 22:1, 3), just as they do after Jesus's resurrection (Acts 2:33). I take "handing over the kingdom" to the Father therefore to mean that Jesus has fulfilled both his first-advent role of creating a new people and his second-advent role of purging the nations of the nonelect, so that he "hands over" a *regenerate* kingdom to the Father, having completed his assigned roles as Priest and Judge. Then the Father and the Lamb corule this new heavens and earth; Christ's "handing over the kingdom" to the Father apparently does not mean laying aside his role as King over the new creation.
- Rev. 20:4: Christ and those "made alive" in Christ reign during the millennium (= interadvent period).
- Rev. 21:1: The new heaven and earth.
- Rev. 21:3: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them'" (NASB).
- Rev. 21:7: "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son" (NASB).
- Rev. 22:5: The servants of God will reign forever in the new heaven and earth.

TYPOLOGICAL PATTERNS FROM ADAM TO CHRIST. Given the foundational role of the creation covenant for all subsequent covenants, it is not surprising that crucial typological patterns begin here that eventually, through the progression of the covenants, reach their fulfillment, terminus, and telos in Christ and the new covenant. For example, think of the creation week, which culminates in God *resting* on the seventh day, after he declared everything "very good" (Gen. 1:31). This not only speaks of God's entering into covenantal enjoyment of his creation and our enjoyment of God as we carry out our creation mandate as servant-kings but also lays down a structure/pattern that grounds the later Sabbath law under the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 20:8–11), which in turn functions as a type that looks back to creation and forward to the new creation and a greater "rest" to come in Christ (Heb. 3:7–4:13).[45] Or think of the close connection between Eden as a garden-temple sanctuary, the emphasis on the land tied to creation, and how these patterns eventually find their fulfillment in our Lord Jesus, who

is the antitypical fulfillment of the temple and who inaugurates the new creation, both of which have a spillover effect and benefit for the church.[46] Or think of the establishment of marriage in Genesis 2:24–25 and how through the biblical covenants marriage pictures a greater reality, namely, God's relation to his people and Christ's relation to the church, which ultimately points forward to the consummation.[47] *All* these patterns eventually terminate eschatologically in Christ and his people. In these ways, the creation covenant plants in seed form structures and patterns that, as the covenants unfold, reach their full mature growth in Christ, the new covenant age, and the church.

At this point, it may be helpful to reflect on where our view is different from a more traditional covenant of works.[48] Although we are sympathetic with the traditional view, we do not think it fully captures the covenant relation in creation. We affirm that Adam is created as God's image-son, a priest-king, and humanity's representative head, to rule over creation and to put everything under his feet (Gen. 1:26–31; Psalm 8). We also affirm that God, as Creator and Lord, rightly demands perfect obedience from his covenant partner, which, sadly, Adam does not render, thus bringing sin and death into the world and placing all humanity under guilt and condemnation (Gen. 2:16–17; 3:1–24; Rom. 5:12–21; Eph. 2:1–3). Furthermore, in light of the end of the Bible's story, we affirm that Adam's original situation was temporary and not permanent, which the tree of life seems to imply, as a fully obedient Adam at some point would have been granted eternal life.[49]

However, it is best to view the creation covenant in more gracious terms —or better, in less contractual terms *and* in more continuity with creation itself. As a result of God's creation of the world and humans in his image, God graciously created us for a covenant relationship, which he entered into with us, as beautifully portrayed by his enjoyment of rest after his work of creation (Gen. 2:1–3). The command, then, given to Adam in Genesis 2:16–17 did not create a "covenant of works" relationship subsequent to creation; instead, Adam, by virtue of his creation as God's image-son, was already in a filial relation with his Creator–covenant Lord.[50] No doubt, Adam was to obey God fully, but as a creature, this is "essential to all human dealings with God, simply by virtue of who God is."[51] Yet Adam, as God's image-

priest-king, was already created in a good and gracious standing before God, which implies that he did not have to merit or earn more favor to remain in his present covenant relationship. As a creature, what was required of Adam was full devotion, obedience, and covenant loyalty to his Creator and Lord. Even if the tree of life implies some kind of subsequent granting of eternal life, as Anthony Hoekema reminds us, it still "must be understood as a gift of God's grace."[52] Adam's relationship to God, then, was "not an impersonal relationship between 'contracting parties'"[53] in which a certain amount of merit must be earned but rather a relationship to be lived and fully enjoyed. Adam knew God by personal fellowship and communion, and it was his privilege and calling to fulfill the purpose of his creation, namely, to rule over the earth by building a community and society, grounded in marriage and the family, thus obeying God in love and ruling over creation to God's glory.

Yet Adam did not remain fully devoted and faithful to God. He disobeyed God's command and failed to rule as God's image-son and priest-king. In judgment, God expelled him from Eden, and sadly, sin and death were transmitted from Adam to the human race. But thankfully, God did not leave Adam and humanity under judgment; instead, he gave a word of promise to redeem and restore. In contrast to a covenant of works, which tends to create too sharp a disjunction between creation and the subsequent redemptive covenants, it is better to view the covenant of creation in more continuity with later covenants, as *foundational* to them and not as their foil. In this way, continuity between the covenants is maintained while also preserving important discontinuities, as we move from the old to the new creation. Greg Nichols captures this point well when he writes,

> The gulf of sin separates creation from redemption. The relationship also exhibits harmony. Redemption is not against creation. It is against sin. Furthermore, there is progress and advancement. Creation was "very good." Redemption is superior to very good. The restoration achieved in redemption is not retrogressive. It doesn't take man back to pre-fall Eden. It produces something better than Eden. God restores sinless hearts, but not pre-fall innocence. The end result of redemption

> is greater than original creation minus sin. In sum, the relation between creation and redemption displays harmony and improvement.[54]

By starting with the creation covenant, then, we discover in a greater way how *this* covenant is foundational for all future covenants and in a more glorious way how the first Adam leads us to the greater, last Adam. Moreover, by starting with Adam and his covenant headship as foundational to all later covenant heads, we also discover how Christ, by his obedient life and death, does not merely recover the original creation but transforms it by the inauguration of God's kingdom through the new covenant, thus bringing God's eternal plan to its eschatological goal in himself and to the dawning of a new and better creation.

THE DISASTER OF SIN AND THE PROMISE OF HOPE. We cannot think of the covenant with creation without mentioning the twofold emphasis on the entrance of sin into the world *and* God's first redemption promise—a promise that receives greater definition, clarification, and expansion in subsequent covenants. Let us highlight both of these emphases since they are central to the Bible's entire storyline as unpacked through the covenants.

The entrance of sin into the world. Genesis 3 is crucial in describing how, in history, sin and evil came into the human race—and along with them the desperate nature of human depravity, which *God alone* can remedy.[55] Scripture, from beginning to end, takes the reality of sin and evil seriously. In moving from Genesis 1–2, we see how quickly human beings transfer from a "very good" world (1:31) to an "abnormal" and cursed one (3:14–24), one now under God's judgment and under the sentence of death. After having received every blessing imaginable from God as well as the direct command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and with the warning still ringing in his ears—"For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (2:17 ESV)—Adam acts in willful, autonomous rebellion against God and thus, tragically, turns the created order upside down. The first temptation and subsequent act of rebellion is stated matter-of-factly in the text: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one

wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate" (3:6 ESV). But behind this statement is the awful reality that human beings preferred their own will and choice to that of the glorious God of creation. In the words of Paul, human beings chose to worship and serve "the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!" (Rom. 1:25 ESV).

The punishment, sadly, fits the crime: death. The human race is now under a death sentence, described in a variety of ways in Scripture—bondage to sin; dead in our trespasses; under the power of sin, death, and the Evil One; and so on (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:1–3). But worse than all these terrible results is that human beings, who were made to know, love, and serve God, are now enemies of God, living under his judgment and wrath and no longer in a living relationship with him—spiritually dead to God (Rom. 8:7; Eph. 2:1–3; 4:17–19). This in the end is death—physically and spiritually—for to live in relationship and fellowship with God as image bearers for his glory is life, but to live apart from him is death.

As the text unfolds, the punishment of our sin is described in terms of initial and immediate consequences, and then in terms of more explicit and prolonged consequences. Initially, we are told, the act of rebellion "opens" the eyes of Adam and Eve, an opening that is viewed negatively, unlike what the serpent had promised (Gen. 3:7). They depart from God's presence in flight and shame, blaming each other and God for what has happened (3:8–13). Explicitly, God acts judicially by bringing judgment on the serpent, on Eve, and then on Adam, which culminates in the Lord taking two steps that initiate the execution of the punishment announced in Genesis 2. First, God drives the human beings from the garden. Second, God blocks the way to the tree of life, signifying that we are no longer in life-giving fellowship with the Lord, living in his presence in terms of blessing, privilege, and relationship. In order to forbid access to the tree of life, God places the cherubim (cf. Ezek. 1:5–14; 10:15; Rev. 4:6–11) and adds "a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24 ESV). The flaming sword represents the justice and holiness of God at work in his judgments (cf. Jer. 47:6; Ezekiel 21). By all

this description, Scripture is clear: as we move through the covenants, the only way back to the presence of God is through God's way and God's provision, which eventually is seen through the covenants and through the provision of the tabernacle, the temple, and ultimately the one who is the fulfillment of the temple, our Lord Jesus Christ (see John 2:19–21; cf. Revelation 21–22).

In addition, there is no doubt that Adam's sin is passed on to subsequent generations, as evidenced in Cain's murderous action (Genesis 4), in the common refrain "And he died . . ." in the genealogical list in Genesis 5 (5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31), and in the flood (Genesis 6–9). Repeatedly, throughout the canon, whether it is the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11) or even the people of God as represented by Abraham, Moses, or David, we find that sin has spread to all of them without exception. Paul's summary statement in Romans 3:23—"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"—is not only given by divine revelation but is also true to the Bible's entire story. From Genesis 3 on, Scripture underscores the fact that *all* of us are under the condemnation of sin and that the only hope for our desperate condition is found in God's provision alone.[56] The only hope for Adam's helpless race is found in another Adam, the last Adam, who, unlike the first man (and the entire human race), does not fail and who secures our redemption, salvation, and justification—literally, a "new creation." However, before we come to Christ, the covenants progressively reveal and anticipate, in instruction and type, the coming of our Lord.

The first promise of hope and redemption. Genesis 3 is also crucial in giving us God's initial promise of redemption—a promise that drives the entire storyline of Scripture, including the covenants, leading us to Christ. Genesis 3 is situated in the canon not only to establish the nature of the human problem but also to prepare for God's gracious redemption. The effects of sin are described in terms of a horrible twofold alienation, which is the reversal and breakdown of the covenant relationship: (1) alienation between God and humans and (2) alienation between humans and creation (which results in further alienation with others, ourselves, our inheritance in the garden, and the entire created order). After describing the awful effects of sin on God's good creation, the narrative wonderfully unfolds God's

word of promise (3:15), which leads us ultimately to the incarnation of God's Son and his redemptive work on our behalf to reverse the alienating effects of sin in all its depth and dimensions.[57] In this regard, it is important once again to note the first Adam–last Adam typological relationship. In the biblical storyline, it is precisely because the first Adam sinned in history that the last Adam had to come.

Scripture is clear: our greatest problem as human beings is our sin before God. This may seem like an obvious point to many, but in today's world such an understanding is not something we can take for granted. We have lost not only the biblical conception of God but also the biblical conception of humans and sin.[58] Whether we are talking about the fallout of modernism or postmodernism, the end result is the same: sin and evil are not viewed primarily in relation to God but are reduced to the things of this world. Yet without viewing sin and evil in relation to God, they begin to be misunderstood and radically removed from a biblical conception of them, which will make it more difficult to grasp correctly how the biblical covenants become redemptive and lead us to the full forgiveness of sin achieved by the work of Christ and the establishment of the new covenant (see Jer. 31:34; cf. Hebrews 8–10).

Ever since Genesis 3, given who God is and who we are as fallen creatures, there is a *tension* in covenantal relations between God and humans. Covenants allow for intimacy with God. God, as our Creator–covenant Lord, is present with his people, and his people enjoy rest and relationship with him as we carry out our responsibilities before him. However, given our sin, how can the holy, just, and righteous God dwell with us? Or better, how can we dwell in his presence? How can God declare us right before him? Since God is self-sufficient, holy, and personal, he requires the punishment of our sin; we cannot dwell in his presence apart from our sin being vanquished. Scripture repeatedly emphasizes that our sin and God's holiness are incompatible. God's holiness exposes our sin, and it must ultimately be dealt with. Sin cannot approach God, and God cannot tolerate it.[59] Furthermore, closely related to God's holiness is his wrath, that is, his holy reaction to evil. Scripture speaks of the wrath of God in high-intensity language, and it is important to note that a substantial part of the

Bible's storyline turns on God's wrath. No doubt, God is forbearing, gracious, and long-suffering, but he is also a God of holiness, wrath, and judgment.[60] The *wrath* of God, unlike the love or holiness of God, should not be thought of as an *intrinsic* perfection of God; rather, it is a function or expression of God's holiness against sin. Where there is no sin, there is no wrath, but there will always be love and holiness. Where God in his holiness confronts his image bearers in their rebellion, there *must* be wrath; otherwise, God is not the jealous and self-sufficient God he claims to be, and his holiness is impugned.[61]

Now it is precisely this *necessity* of God to judge and punish human sin that twists a *tension* into the covenantal relationship and the Bible's metanarrative, what John Stott labels the "problem of forgiveness." He nicely explains it this way:

> The problem of forgiveness is constituted by the inevitable collision between divine perfection and human rebellion, between God as he is and us as we are. The obstacle to forgiveness is neither our sin alone, nor our guilt alone, but also the divine reaction in love and wrath towards guilty sinners. For, although indeed "God is love," yet we have to remember that his love is "holy love," love which yearns over sinners while at the same time refusing to condone their sin. How, then, could God express his holy love?—his love in forgiving sinners without compromising his holiness, and his holiness in judging sinners without frustrating his love? Confronted by human evil, how could God be true to himself as holy love? In Isaiah's words, how could he be simultaneously "a righteous God and a Savior" (45:21)?[62]

Whereas *sin* is an *internal* moral problem for humanity, *forgiveness* is an *intrinsic* moral problem for God. It is an *intrinsic* problem for God in the sense that it arises due to tensions in God's own moral nature. As holy, righteous, and just, God, in order to forgive us, cannot also deny himself; he cannot arbitrarily forgive without full satisfaction of his own moral character and nature, for he himself is the moral standard of the universe. But as Stott asks, "How can he save *us* and satisfy *himself* simultaneously?"[63] How can God express his holiness without consuming us and his love without condoning our sins? How can he satisfy his holy

love? Or how can God be, in the words of Paul, “just and justifier” of the ungodly (Rom. 3:25–26)? How can he be both subject and object in salvation—that is, take the initiative yet satisfy his own righteous requirements? Scripture’s answer to this problem is that *God himself* must solve the problem. God himself—the Creator of the universe and the covenant-making God—will have to take on himself the initiative to save; he will have to act in perfect justice consistent with his own righteous requirements. Yet at the same time, he will choose to manifest his amazing, sovereign grace. If there is going to be a solution at all, he must act.

Now it is in this context that we should understand God’s initial promise of redemption in Genesis 3:15. In addition, as Graeme Goldsworthy rightly observes, “The background to God’s work of rescuing sinners is his commitment to his creation.”[64] Given the fact that God’s plan for the universe is eternal, comprehensive, and unchangeable—a plan that includes and ordains all things, including the free, responsible choice of his creatures to sin—there is no hint that God’s creation of the universe was “on a trial basis, or with a view to scrapping it after a period of time.”[65] Rather, the Genesis narrative, especially with the pronouncement that everything was very good (1:31), is best understood as acknowledging not only God’s approval of all that he had made but also his commitment to it. In this regard, Goldsworthy is right to argue, “The strength of God’s commitment becomes clearer as the narrative progresses. Mankind’s rebellion brings judgment but not instant destruction. God preserves order in the universe and in human society, and at the same time begins to reveal his purposes to overcome the effects of human sin.”[66] And it is precisely these purposes to reverse the effects of sin in all its diverse dimensions, to destroy the powers of “this present age,” and ultimately to usher in a new creation that the storyline of Scripture unpacks in terms of the triune God’s great plan of redemption unfolded through the biblical covenants.

In terms of the promise itself, God promises to put enmity between the “seed”[67] of the woman and the seed of the serpent; the woman’s seed will strike the serpent on the head, signifying defeat, while the serpent’s seed will strike a blow to the woman’s seed on the heel, signifying some kind of battle and conflict. In the textual horizon (the immediate context), as

Stephen Dempster is surely right to argue, "the triumph of the woman's seed would suggest a return to the Edenic state, before the serpent had wrought its damage, and a wresting of the dominion of the world from the serpent."[68] In other words, it is through the seed of the woman that the Adamic role in creation will be restored, that the curses will be removed, and that the serpent will be destroyed. In addition, it is important to observe that the promise entails that the one to bring about this triumphant work will come from the human race. As Dempster notes, "Just as the woman was built from the man to complete the old creation, so a seed will be built from the woman with the task of restoring the lost dominion of the old creation to its rightful heirs."[69]

This narrative fits with what we have seen about the role of humans in creation as God's image bearers. Humanity is the representative of the whole creation, and specifically, Adam is the representative head of the human race. It should not surprise us, then, that God deals with creation on the basis of how he deals with humans. When Adam falls because of sin and the creation is cursed as a result, in order to restore the whole creation God promises to provide and work through the seed of a woman, another man, in order to restore what was lost. In many ways, what is at stake in this context is who will have dominion over the created order—human beings or the serpent. The man and the woman in Genesis 1–2 were already told to be fruitful and multiply and to have dominion over the earth. But in light of the fall, their dominion over the earth is thwarted. The hope for the human race, then, is now found in the seed of the woman who will restore the lost glory. In truth, as Dempster rightly notes, in the seed of the woman, "human—and therefore divine—dominion will be established over the world. The realization of the kingdom of God is linked to the future of the human race."[70]

As the text unfolds, there is evidence that Adam lays claim on the promise. For example, Adam names his wife "Eve"—the mother of all living (Gen. 3:20), which seems to imply more than a mere embracing of life. Rather, in this context, it is evidence that Adam is reclaiming dominion in faith "through *naming* his wife *the mother*, which cannot help but allude to the more specific role she will have as the one who will provide a seed

who will strike the serpent."[71] In addition, God provides clothes to cover the shame and nakedness of Adam and Eve (3:21), which signifies that God will not let his creation project be lost. However, at this point in the storyline, it is no doubt the case that this promise is given in "seed form," and it is truly an enigmatic prediction, which will be fleshed out in far more detail as God discloses more of his unfolding plan through the covenants.

In this light, the church was correct to conclude that Genesis 3:15 is rightly called the *protevangelium*, that is, the first gospel proclamation.[72] God is stating that "someone out of the human race itself ('the woman's offspring'), although fatally 'wounded' himself in the conflict, would destroy the serpent (Satan)."[73] In fact, it is *this* promise that the Bible's entire storyline unfolds through the progression of the covenants, reaching their fulfillment and telos in Christ (see Rom. 10:4; 16:25–27; Gal. 3:16). Also, it is here that we see the start of the important truth that each covenant unpacks in greater detail, namely, that God requires an obedient covenant partner. Yet this is precisely the problem: God remains faithful to his promises, but we do not. It is only if God himself provides an obedient son —his Son—that the covenant relationship will be what it was intended to be from the beginning.

The Noahic Covenant

The word "covenant" first appears with Noah (Gen. 6:18; cf. 9:9–11), but it should be viewed as a continuation of the prior creation covenant. The Noahic covenant is the reinstatement and upholding of God's commitment to creation, now in light of sin. The Noahic covenant is a "creation covenant"; however, the difference from the original situation is that creation is now fallen, as evidenced by God's judgment on the human race in the universal flood, which becomes a typological pattern culminating in final judgment (Genesis 6–8; 2 Pet. 3:1–13). It would seem that God's commitment to humans and creation is threatened in light of human sin and depravity, but given God's promise in Genesis 3:15 and the description of the Noahic covenant—lasting as long as "the earth remains" (8:22)—this covenant reinforces God's intention that creation will not be lost and that our role in it will continue as God's image bearers and priest-kings. We will

continue to relate to God in terms of obedient sonship and to the world as its servant-kings. Furthermore, the "seed of the woman" is given more definition: he will now come through Noah, the covenant head, and through his seed/family, and it is *he* who will reverse the effects of sin and usher in a "new creation" where God's rule and reign are brought to this world and we obey God in covenant loyalty, love, and faithfulness.[74]

In this way, Noah functions as "another Adam" (Gen. 9:1–7; cf. 1:26–30), as the new head of the human race—hence the reason for speaking of the Noahic covenant as a creation covenant. He is given the same creational mandate, and the scope of the Noahic covenant is universal, as it was in Adam. In Noah, the covenant reminds us that God's purposes encompass not just one people but all nations and the entire creation. The universal emphasis of creation that is stressed in Genesis 1–11 is not lost entirely in the subsequent chapters of Genesis (or beyond), despite their narrowing focus in later covenants (see figure 16.1, which pictures the scope of the Noahic covenant as being as wide as the creation covenant).

The Noahic covenant establishes three further points. First, even though God demands obedience from Noah, as he demands from the entire human race, Noah disobeys, like Adam did (Gen. 9:18–28). In fact, by the time we reach Genesis 11, we have Genesis 3 all over again. Although the entire human race is wiped out except for Noah and his family, and God makes a new start with them, the problem of the human heart remains (see Gen. 6:5–7 with 8:21–22). Ultimately what is needed, which the progression of the covenants will clarify, is a greater heart transformation by the Spirit for every person, tied to the forgiveness of sin, so that humans will live out the purpose of their creation in relation to God and each other. Yet at this point in the story, the heart transformation of all the people is still future. Instead, what we see is the contrast between the rebellious human attempt to make a name for itself apart from God and God graciously electing/choosing and calling Abraham to make his name great (see Gen. 11:4 with 12:1–3).

Second, the Noahic covenant explains why fallen humanity simultaneously exists alongside God's people *until* the consummation. Instead of continually wiping away fallen humanity and starting over again, two kingdoms emerge until the end: God's kingdom or saving reign, which

is seen in his people through specific covenant relationships, as evidenced in Noah and then later in Abraham, Israel, and David; *and* the kingdom of man or of this world—identified with Satan—which stands in foolish opposition to God. Obviously, there is a tension between these two kingdoms, which is evidenced throughout the Old Testament and which emerges in the New Testament by the larger church-state distinction. In fact, in the New Testament, even though Christ has come and *already* inaugurated the future age, given the Noahic promise, an overlap of the ages continues until Christ returns and brings "this present age" to its end.

Third, the Noahic covenant also explains why creation order and structures and some typological patterns associated with creation continue *until* the end, even though Christ began to transform them when he inaugurated the new covenant. For example, think of marriage. Marriage and family are part of the creation order (Gen. 2:18–25), which, given the Noahic promise, will continue until the end (8:22; 9:12–17). Yet as the covenants unfold, we discover that marriage also functions as a typological pattern that ultimately reaches its fulfillment in the consummation, where there is no giving in human marriage (Matt. 22:29–30; Eph. 5:31–32). Although Christ has come, due to the overlap of the ages tied to the Noahic covenant, while others have already reached their fulfillment in Christ's first coming, some creation structures/patterns continue to the end (e.g., various persons such as Adam, Moses, and David; the tabernacle-temple; the sacrificial system; and the priesthood). In this sense, although Christ fulfills *all* the covenants in himself and the new covenant, we will still have to think carefully about *how* various aspects of the covenants are fulfilled due to Christ's two advents. We will return to this important subject in chapter 17 as we wrestle with inaugurated eschatology. Yet the observation that the Noahic covenant and thus creation order and its various God-given structures (e.g., human dignity, a proper use of our sexuality, monogamous heterosexual marriage, the family, work) continue to the consummation is important in determining creation norms for us today and how to apply the Old Testament to Christians today, a subject we will discuss in chapter 18.

The Abrahamic Covenant

Given its location in Scripture, the Abrahamic covenant plays a crucial role in the Bible's storyline. In truth, Abraham and his family function as another Adam, called to be God's true humanity, and it is through them alone that salvation comes to the world and God's kingdom arrives. The hope for the human race is found in Abraham and his seed (Israel, David, and ultimately Christ). In the New Testament, Paul stresses this point when he argues that the singular use of "seed" in Genesis 12:3 (cf. Gen. 22:17–18a; 24:60; Ps. 72:17) is ultimately fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16).[75] Here Paul picks up the promise theme from Genesis 3:15, traced through a distinctive line of seed beginning with Adam, running through Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Israel, and David, and eventually culminating in Christ. In Christ, we have the promised seed, the mediator of God's people, the one who fulfills all God's promises, not least the Abrahamic promises. In addition, Paul's argument in Galatians 3:1–25 is that the Abrahamic covenant *preceded* the law-covenant in redemptive history, thus demonstrating that the latter covenant does not set aside the former and that the former is foundational to the latter.

It is also significant that the Abrahamic covenant plays a distinctive role in the biblical-theological systems of dispensational and covenant theology. As discussed in chapter 3, both systems appeal to the Abrahamic covenant to justify their core beliefs. Dispensational theology appeals to the role of national Israel in God's plan tied to the unconditional land promise given in the Abrahamic covenant, while covenant theology appeals to the genealogical principle first given in Genesis 17, which remains unchanged across the covenants, including the new covenant. In light of this, how do we view the nature of the Abrahamic covenant and its relation to the other biblical covenants? Four points will summarize our view.

A Single Covenant. The Abrahamic covenant is one covenant, not two.[76] It starts with God's election and calling of Abraham, God's giving of promises to him (Genesis 12), and the cutting, or inauguration, of the covenant (Genesis 15). The initial promises are further expanded throughout Abraham's life as God gives greater definition and clarity of the covenant (see Genesis 17; 22).

UNIVERSAL PROMISES. In terms of its textual-epochal context, it is important to note the location of the Abrahamic covenant in the storyline of Scripture, coming *after* Genesis 1–11. Similar to the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant stands in contrast to the judgments of God on human sin and presents anew the plan of creation. This can be seen in the way that important elements in the creation of humans are repeated in the blessing to Abraham: God's promise of a great name and seed, the multiplication of humans, the provision of the land, a peaceful relationship between God and humanity, and the restoration of the nations (Gen. 12:1–3; cf. 15:4–5; 17:1–8; 18:18–19; 22:16–18).[77] However, unlike the situation with Noah, where God destroyed everyone except Noah and his family, God does not destroy the human race. Instead, God allows the nations to exist and then calls Abraham out of the nations to become a great nation (*gôy*), that is, *a world community, a political entity, a kingdom in the proper sense of the word*. (See figure 16.1, which emphasizes this narrowing feature of the Abrahamic covenant.) But because it is the answer to Adam's sin, the Abrahamic covenant ultimately has a universal telos, and it is through the Abrahamic covenant that God will undo the effects of sin and death and bring a new creation.

Here we discover further grounding for Scripture's contrast between two kingdoms, especially since the fall and the Noahic covenant. On the one hand, we have the kingdom associated with Babel and all that stands in opposition to God (Genesis 11). On the other hand, we have another kingdom, associated with God's saving initiative and sovereign grace, which will fulfill the role of Adam, bring salvation to the nations, and display to the world the kind of relationships that God originally intended for all humanity. Throughout Scripture these two kingdoms are contrasted, but it is only through Abraham and his seed that God's saving rule will come and the resolution to sin and death will occur. It is only through Abraham and his seed that we will have a recovery of the divine goal for creation and humans, that is, the establishment of God's kingdom and divine rule over this world through this redeemed human society. This is ultimately fulfilled in the arrival of the new covenant, the church as God's

royal priesthood and holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9), and the consummated state of the new creation (Revelation 21–22).

In this light, it is best to view the Abrahamic covenant *as the means* by which God will fulfill his promises for humanity, especially in light of Genesis 3:15. In this way, Abraham and his family constitute "another Adam," a calling into existence of something new, parallel to creation but in this case a "new creation" (see Rom. 4:17). The Abrahamic covenant functions as a subset of the "covenant with creation" yet narrowed now through one family/nation. In Abraham and his seed, first in Isaac, then in Israel (Mosaic covenant), and then epitomized by the Davidic king (Davidic covenant), *all* God's promises for the human race will be realized—promises that God unilaterally keeps, as beautifully portrayed in the covenant inauguration ceremony in Genesis 15. N. T. Wright correctly captures the centrality of the Abrahamic covenant in the Bible's storyline in these words: "Abraham emerges within the structure of Genesis as the answer to the plight of all humankind. The line of disaster and of the 'curse,' from Adam, through Cain, through the Flood to Babel, begins to be reversed when God calls Abraham and says, 'in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'"[78]

Within the Abrahamic narrative, there is a hint that the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant will occur in two stages. First, the nation of Israel will live in the Promised Land and serve as a kingdom of priests under the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 19:4–6; Deut. 4:5–8) and the Davidic king (Davidic covenant). In the Davidic covenant, the king of Israel is the administrator and mediator of the Mosaic covenant, representing God's rule to the people and representing the people as a whole (2 Sam. 7:22–24). Second, Christ, Abraham's royal, *singular* seed, will bless *all* nations (Gen. 17:4–6; cf. 22:17–18a; 24:60; 49:8, 10; Ps. 72:17; Isa. 9:6). Even in Genesis, Abraham's "fatherhood" is expanded "beyond ethnic Israelites to include the nations."[79] This seems to entail not only the promise of a global inheritance but also an *expansion* of the Promised Land "to include the planet and its numerous people (Gen 1:28; Matt 5:5; Rom 4:13; cf. Eph 6:2–3; Heb 11:13–16)."[80] This point is significant in answering the question of what God intended by his promise of land to Abraham. Did God intend

for the land promise to be exhausted in a specific location, or did he intend for it to encompass something far greater? At this point in the story, there are hints that God intended for the land to reach to the ends of the earth. Yet we will have to await further covenantal unfolding to see precisely what God intended by this specific promise. At this point, as Jason DeRouchie notes, "This kind of expansion is suggested in Gen 22:17b–18 where we are told that the unique, male deliverer will not only bless 'all the nations of the earth' but will also possess 'the gate of his enemies,' claiming once-enemy territory, his kingdom expanding to fill the earth (cf. Gen 24:60)."[81] Once again, this makes perfect sense since, in covenantal progression, the Abrahamic covenant is the means by which God will fulfill his promises for humanity (Gen. 3:15).

MULTIFACETED ASPECTS. The nature of the Abrahamic covenant is multifaceted and diverse. In its textual and historical context, it not only encompasses spiritual-internal aspects that link it ultimately to the new covenant but also consists of national and typological elements that must be carefully unpacked through the covenants, which results in some significant discontinuity in the new covenant. This complexity is illustrated by thinking about how Scripture speaks of Abraham and his seed.[82]

First, the "seed of Abraham" refers to a *natural* (biological) seed, namely, every person who was in any way biologically descended from Abraham, such as Ishmael, Isaac, the sons of Keturah, and by extension Esau, Jacob, and so forth. In each case, all these children received the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, namely, circumcision, even though many of them were unbelievers and even though it was only through Isaac that God's promises and covenant were realized (Gen. 17:20–21; cf. Rom. 9:6–9).

Second, the "seed of Abraham" refers to a *natural (biological) yet special* seed tied to God's elective purposes, namely, Isaac, by extension to Jacob and the entire nation of Israel, and to the Davidic king. Built into the Abrahamic covenant is the promise both of Abraham's seed to be a mighty nation (Israel) *and* of the arrival of kings—realized in the Davidic covenant yet ultimately fulfilled in a singular royal seed (Gen. 17:6–8; 22:17–18a; 24:60; 49:8–12; etc.). Yet even within this special sense of Abraham's seed,

the nation remains a mixed people—that is, the individual within the nation may be a believer or unbeliever. Concerning the nation of Israel, salvifically speaking, not everyone in it was the elect, although they, unlike the mere natural-biological seed (e.g., Ishmael), had the supreme privilege of being God's covenant people under the Mosaic covenant. Furthermore, this *special* seed also functioned typologically to point to Abraham's singular, royal seed who, in himself, would bring salvation to the world.

Third, the ultimate "seed of Abraham" refers to the *true/unique* seed, namely, Christ (Gal. 3:16), the antitype of the previous *special* seeds of Abraham. In Christ, then, we have the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, rooted in Genesis 3:15, so that in the truest sense *he* is the seed of Abraham, the true Isaac and Israel, and David's greater Son. In this way, Jesus is the unique seed of Abraham since he biologically comes from Abraham's specific genealogical line, while at the same time, he is greater than those who preceded him since he is the antitype of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Israel, and David.

Fourth, the New Testament teaches that all believers, regardless of nationality are the *spiritual* "seed of Abraham" now that Christ has come and inaugurated a new covenant. This includes all believing Jews and Gentiles in the church (Eph. 2:11–21), thus fulfilling the Abrahamic promises of blessings to the nations. In this last sense, only those who have experienced an internal circumcision of the heart by the transforming power of the Spirit and who are united to Christ by faith are Abraham's *spiritual* seed (Gal. 3:26–29). Under the new covenant, being a true member of Abraham's family, and thus part of the church, does *not* involve biological birth in a specific national lineage or merely receiving the external sign of circumcision but believing in God's covenant promises centered now in Christ and being born of the Spirit.

What is significant about noting the multifaceted nature of the Abrahamic covenant? At the very least, it does justice to the Abrahamic covenant in its historical context, and it is a crucial point of difference between dispensational and covenant theology, as discussed in chapter 3. Let us first focus on covenant theology.

Dispensational theology has often criticized covenant theology for its tendency to "flatten" the Abrahamic covenant by reducing it primarily to its *spiritual aspects* while neglecting its national and typological aspects. On this point we tend to agree with the overall dispensational critique. This is why, in the Israel-church relationship, covenant theology so easily views the church as the "new Israel" with the entailment that just as Israel was a mixed entity, so is the church. And, they say, just as the genealogical principle operative in the Abrahamic covenant—"you and your seed" (Gen. 17:7)—applies to Israel, so also it applies to the church in exactly the same way. And just as the covenant sign of circumcision functioned in Israel, so paedobaptism functions the same way in the church. However, the problem with this view is that it fails to do justice to the multifaceted nature of the Abrahamic covenant, and it reads *too fast* into the Abrahamic covenant many of the legitimate *spiritual* realities of the new covenant. In doing so, it fails to exegete the Abrahamic covenant first in its own immediate context and then think through how it is picked up in later covenants before reaching its fulfillment in the new covenant.

However, it is also important to add that dispensational theology criticizes covenant theology at this point because dispensationalists are convinced that this is the reason why covenantalists do not do justice to the role of national Israel in the future, especially related to the land promise. Yet dispensationalists' critique is only fair if they can demonstrate that their overall understanding of Israel's role in God's plan is correct, something we contend that they have not demonstrated because they have not consistently put together God's plan from creation to new creation as progressively unveiled through the covenants, which is now fulfilled in Christ and the church.

Unconditional and Conditional Elements. The Abrahamic covenant consists of unconditional/unilateral and conditional/bilateral elements, and it is not reducible to one of those features alone. As already discussed in previous chapters, it is common to view the Abrahamic covenant as primarily an unconditional covenant (royal grant), especially as communicated by the unique covenant inauguration in Genesis 15, or, as Paul Williamson argues, to see in it two Abrahamic covenants, due to the

unilateral emphasis in Genesis 15 and the bilateral demands in Genesis 17 (patterned after the suzerain-vassal treaties). Both of these approaches are inadequate; instead, the Abrahamic covenant is *one* covenant, and Genesis 17 is the confirmation of God's covenant with Abraham initiated in Genesis 15, which is grounded in God's promises in Genesis 12. No doubt, as promises are given to Abraham and his seed, and as God then inaugurates the covenant by the dread symbol of a divine dismemberment (Gen. 15:12–21; cf. Jer. 34:18–20), there is an undeniable unilateral emphasis. God unilaterally obligates himself to accomplish his promise to make Abraham and his offspring into a great nation and to give them a place to live with God in peace and prosperity. God will keep his promise regardless of what Abraham does, and Abraham receives God's promises by faith, which is counted to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). Craig Blaising captures this point well:

> The way in which Abraham received the covenant also supports the covenant's unconditionality. In Genesis 15, the Lord repeats His promise to Abraham, and Scripture tells us that in spite of circumstances that made the promise seem impossible, "Abraham believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (15:6). . . .
>
> In Romans 4 and Galatians 3, Paul argues that Genesis 15 is foundational for understanding the promissory nature of the Abrahamic covenant. The blessing was not given to Abraham because he performed certain works. Rather, he received it through faith. God gave Abraham a promise. Abraham believed God. God counted him righteous and formalized the promise to him as a grant covenant.[83]

However, in keeping his covenant promises, God still demands complete obedience from his human covenant partner (Gen. 17:1; 18:19; 22:16–18).[84] God's demand for obedience does not nullify God's promises and make the covenant bilateral; instead, it creates an antinomical tension within the covenant relationship. God, as the covenant maker and keeper will always keep his promises, despite human disobedience, because that is the kind of glorious God he is. *And yet*, God will always demand perfect obedience from a faithful human covenant partner that, as the covenantal

story makes clear, sinful humanity cannot produce. This growing tension between God unilaterally keeping his promises *and* demanding an obedient covenant partner is resolved neither here nor in later covenants, as evidenced by Israel's and the Davidic kings' disobedience. Yet even within the Abrahamic covenant is a hint at how it will be resolved: "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering" (Gen. 22:8). However, as the covenants unfold, God's provision will not merely be a lamb in our place (nor the entire priestly-sacrificial system under the law-covenant); God's provision is his own dear Son, the true seed of Abraham, who, because he is God, can satisfy *God's own righteous demand* and who, because he is human, can fully obey for us as the faithful human covenant partner.

The "Old Covenant," or the Covenant with Israel

In the Old Testament, the amount of space devoted to the "old covenant" is vast, yet Scripture teaches that it functions as a means to a larger end that culminates in a new and better covenant (Jer. 31:29–34; Hebrews 8). This is why Scripture views the old covenant as *temporary* in God's plan; or better, it has a crucial part in God's plan, yet when that to which it points arrives, the covenant with Israel *as a covenant unit* comes to its end, and Christians are no longer under it *as a covenant* (Gal. 3:15–4:7). Unlike first-century Judaism, which viewed the law-covenant as imperishable, immutable, and eternal, Paul, for example, places the old covenant in its proper redemptive-historical/covenantal sequence. He argues, as D. A. Carson points out, that it is almost "a parenthesis (Gal 3:15–4:7)" in God's plan, and as such, that which precedes it, namely, the promise to Abraham (which cannot be understood apart from the creation covenant), "cannot be annulled by the giving of the law (3:17), regardless of how much space is given over to the law in the sacred text, or how large a role it played in the history of Israel."[85] As Carson also notes, this inevitably leads to the question of Galatians 3:19: "What, then, was the purpose of the law?" No doubt the answer is complex and diverse, but at its heart the old covenant revealed and intensified sin *and* functioned "in preparation for the coming of Christ 'when the set time had fully come' (Gal. 4:4), which is itself the fulfillment of the promise."[86]

Thus, to understand properly the role of the old covenant in God's plan, one must think about how it is *organically* related to what preceded it, how it advances the Genesis 3:15 promise, and how it predicts and anticipates, in diverse ways, the coming of Christ and the dawning of the new covenant. Four points will summarize the nature of the old covenant and its overall place and role in the covenants.

Links to Earlier Covenants. When we place the old covenant in its textual and epochal-covenantal context, it becomes evident that God's establishing his covenant with Israel cannot be understood apart from his promises to Abraham, which are also confirmed and passed to his sons Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 26:3–5; 28:13–15; 35:9–12). Due to God's patriarchal promises, God calls Moses to deliver his people from Egypt (Ex. 3:6; cf. 2:24–25; Deut. 4:36–38; 2 Kings 13:22–23; 1 Chron. 16:15–19). God did not set his love on Israel because they were better image bearers or more numerous than the nations (Deut. 7:7). Neither was it for their righteousness that they were given the land of Canaan. The basis for God's election of Israel was not found in them but instead in God's sovereign choice and his covenant loyalty to Abraham (Ex. 19:4; Deut. 7:8). The old covenant, then, cannot be understood apart from the Abrahamic covenant, which in turn cannot be understood apart from the creation covenant in Adam. Moreover, in placing the old covenant in relation to the previous covenants, we also see with greater clarity how the "seed" of Abraham is narrowed to the nation of Israel through Isaac and Jacob (see figure 16.1, which presents the old covenant's scope as if it is as broad as the Abrahamic's, particularly through Isaac, since it is now through the nation of Israel that God will bring blessings to all nations).

In addition, in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise, Israel is called to be a "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation" (*gôy*, Ex. 19:5–6), which speaks of the nation not only in *kingdom* terms but also in *Adamic* terms. Israel, *as a nation*, is called to be "another Adam," a corporate representative of Yahweh and to exercise kingly rule as priest-kings. In so doing, as a nation, Israel was to demonstrate to the other nations what God intended for humanity, to enjoy access to God's presence through the tabernacle-temple structures in the land. In this way, the Promised Land is to Israel what Eden

was for Adam. In that land, the people were to know their covenant Lord and to learn from his Torah what it means to be true image bearers and thus fully obedient sons who are wholly devoted to Yahweh in worship and service. By their covenant relationship with Yahweh, God's rule was to be extended through them, and Israel was to make known the ways of God to the nations and to bring the nations into a right relationship to God.

Furthermore, given the placement of the old covenant in Scripture, this also entails that it is through Israel that God will fulfill his Genesis 3:15 promise, namely, to bring about a resolution of the sin and death caused by the first Adam. Evidence for this assertion is seen in corporate Israel being described as God's "son" (Ex. 4:22–23). In Exodus 4, God threatens judgment on Pharaoh's son unless Pharaoh releases Israel, God's son, since as God's son, Israel was to serve the Lord in complete devotion and obedience, something Pharaoh was not allowing. This relationship between Yahweh and Israel, described as a "Father-son" relationship, not only hearkens back to Adam but is also picked up later in the Davidic covenant, where the Davidic kings are viewed in this same relationship with Yahweh, thus linking these covenants together in God's overall redemptive plan, which first starts with Adam. Israel, then, as a nation, was called to serve as God's son/representative—servant-kings, priests—on the earth. They were to demonstrate what true humanity was to look like, and it was through them that the Abrahamic blessing was to be realized and thus God's redemptive promise brought to pass.

A Covenantal Package. It is best to view the old covenant as an entire unit or package. As an entire package, one of its primary purposes is to reveal who God is and how we are to live before him (see Lev. 11:45)—that is, God's character (*šēm*) and way (*derek*). Further, as the revelation of God's character and ways, the law-covenant also demands our conformity to it. The entire covenant, then, is revelatory of God—not just what some identify as the moral law or the Ten Commandments. In fact, Scripture does not partition the law-covenant into moral, civil, and ceremonial laws; rather, it is a unity that governed Israel's life and now, in Christ, is fulfilled.[87] Even though within covenant theology this is a common way of dividing up the law-covenant and then thinking of its fulfillment in Christ—namely, the

moral law continues, while the civil and ceremonial laws are fulfilled—there is little justification for this in Scripture.[88] The old covenant is a covenantal package: as an entire unit, it governs Israel's life, and as a unit, it is brought to fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant.[89]

TYPOLOGICAL PATTERNS. Building on the previous point, the old covenant, as a covenant package, develops in greater detail a number of typological patterns that find their antitypical fulfillment in Christ and his people. For example, within the old covenant, Israel, as a kingdom of priests, needs Levitical priests to represent them before God. In fact, one cannot think of the old covenant apart from its grounding in the priesthood; the Levitical priesthood is the foundation for the entire covenant relationship, which means that the covenant and the priesthood are intertwined with each other (see Heb. 7:11). This makes sense given the fact of sin, since one cannot have a covenant relationship with the holy and righteous covenant Lord without atonement for sin. Israel, as a kingdom of priests, is to enjoy access to God's presence, as Adam enjoyed in Eden. But given who God is as holy and just, how do sinful people dwell in God's presence, a burning issue that erupted in the episode of the golden calf debacle (Exodus 32–34). So given the problem of sin that results in the larger problem of forgiveness, Israel, as a kingdom of priests, needs specific priests to represent them before God and to offer gifts and sacrifices *for sins* (Heb. 5:1). But as Israel's covenant will also reveal, God's righteousness did not come through the Levitical priesthood and law-covenant (Rom. 3:21). Instead, God's righteousness comes to us "apart from the law-covenant" in Messiah Jesus, who is our Great High Priest and by his work inaugurates a better covenant in his cross (Rom. 3:21–26; Hebrews 7–10).

Related to the priesthood is the entire tabernacle–temple–sacrificial system. All these institutions not only served as a means by which Israel dwelt in the land enjoying God's presence as his king-priests but also pointed to their antitypical fulfillment in Christ and the full forgiveness of sin (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 10:1–18). In God's provision of his Son-Messiah, the servant of the Lord (Isa. 52:13–53:12), the role of the Levitical priest is fulfilled and transcended by Christ, who inaugurates an entirely different order (Heb. 5:1–10; 7–10). In Christ, the entire tabernacle-temple

typological pattern is fulfilled and then applied to us, the church, as God's new temple (see, e.g., John 2:19–22; Eph. 2:19–22).

What is said about priests is also true of the role of the prophet and the anticipation of the king, two other offices that take on typological significance and reach their antitypical fulfillment first in Christ and then in application to the church (e.g., prophet: Deut. 18:15–18; 34:10–12; Acts 3:22–26; Heb. 1:1–3; king: Gen. 17:6, 16; 49:8–12; Num. 24:17–19; cf. 24:7; Deut. 17:14–20; 2 Sam. 7:8–16; Matt. 1:1–17; Rom. 1:3–4; Heb. 1:5, 13; 5:4–6). Or think of the paradigmatic events of the Passover and exodus, which first establish Israel in covenant relationship with God. Through the covenants, the Passover and the exodus become patterns of a greater, new exodus/redemption to come, which is fulfilled by Christ and applied to his people (see Ex. 15:14–17; cf. Isa. 11:15–16; 40:3–5; 41:17–20; 42:14–16; 43:1–3, 14–21; 48:20–21; 49:8–12; 51:9–11; 52:3–6, 11–12; 55:12–13; Jer. 16:14–15; 23:4–8; 31:32; Hos. 2:14–15; 11:1; 12:9, 13; 13:4–5).

Bilateral and Unilateral Elements. Although the old covenant is predominantly bilateral, with God rightly demanding an obedient covenant partner, it is more than this. As with all the covenants, God unilaterally keeps his promises to bring about our redemption. In fact, this is what grounds our hope and confidence that God's plan of salvation will actually come about, regardless of our sin and rebellious hearts. Yet as in the other covenants, God demands that Israel be an obedient son.[90] Israel is called to be a loyal, fully devoted, obedient son, as was Adam and the entire human race. Yet, like Adam, Israel failed. Through Israel, as another Adam, the lost dominion of humanity is to be reclaimed, but the people are unfaithful sons. While the law-covenant held out the promise of life (Lev. 18:5), Israel broke the law and came under its curse of death and exile, as they served as a microcosm of the entire human race. The law was "holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12), but Israel was internally corrupt with sinful desires and thus incapable of keeping the law. The law graciously provided a system of sacrifices to atone for the people's sin under Israel's covenant with God, but it was "impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). The entire priestly-sacrificial-temple system functioned

typologically, ultimately to point forward to the antitypical fulfillment in Christ. Human sin requires human death. So God did not design his law-covenant with Israel to provide a permanent solution to the "problem of forgiveness" or to restore the nation from its corruption into a righteous kingdom that would spread over the earth (Gal. 3:10–12, 21–22; cf. Deut. 27:26).[91] In this very important way, the law-covenant as a whole pointed forward to God's provision of redemption, but in the end, that righteousness comes apart from the law-covenant (Rom. 3:21), tied to God's promise and provision, in our Lord Jesus Christ and the new covenant. That is why Scripture can view the law-covenant as prophetic—it anticipates a greater redemption to come in God's own giving of his obedient Son (Matt. 11:13; cf. Rom. 3:21–31; Heb. 2:5–18; 7–10).

The old covenant, then, is part of God's unfolding plan and covenantal progression leading us to Christ. Yet as with the other covenants, it continues and increases the antinomical *tension* in the coming of God's kingdom through his covenants with fallen humans. God continues in his unilateral determination to keep his unconditional promise to bring forth the offspring of Abraham, now through an Israelite. *And yet*, by breaking the bilateral terms of the covenant, Israel proves that it cannot produce such a man to be the obedient son and faithful covenant partner that God demands. The law-covenant holds out life, but due to sin, it cannot save. In fact, as the history of Israel unfolds, the law-covenant brings greater condemnation because it reveals more and more of Israel's sin, it increases sin quantitatively by defining explicitly what is contrary to God's character and demands (Rom. 5:20), and it imprisons Israel under sin's power and condemnation (Rom. 3:19–20; Gal. 3:10, 13; Col. 2:14). Even God's provision of a sacrificial system, because it was only typological and provisional, functioned as a "reminder of sins" (Heb. 10:3), pointing forward to the need for a new and better covenant, bound up with the full forgiveness of sin and the transforming work of the Spirit.

However, the old covenant, as part of God's unfolding plan, is the means by which God's initial promise of redemption will take place. God's promises are rooted in his sovereign initiative to save, for without this, we are without hope. God must act and God alone, but ultimately that action

requires the provision of an obedient human son. For this reason, the Old Testament Prophets anticipate a permanent, unbreakable new covenant to solve how God will save us by providing an obedient son (Jer. 31:31–34), bound up with the coming of the messianic son-king. This theme is uniquely revealed in the Davidic covenant, to which we now turn.

The Davidic Covenant

The Davidic covenant is the *epitome* of the Old Testament covenants, a point often overlooked. It brings the previous covenants to a climax in the king, who is the representative of Israel, the seed of Abraham, and an Adamic-like figure.[92] In summarizing the significance of the Davidic covenant in God's unfolding plan, two points are crucial. First, we must think carefully about the location of the Davidic covenant in the Bible's storyline in order to grasp its *organic* relationship to what *preceded* it and to what *follows* it, namely, the new covenant. Second, we must unpack the unilateral-bilateral *tension* within the covenant and show how that tension, as with the previous covenants, contributes to the Bible's overall plotline.

Location in Covenantal Progression. There are two main parts to the Davidic covenant: (1) God's promises concerning the establishment of David's house forever (2 Sam. 7:12–16; 1 Chron. 17:11–14), and (2) the promises concerning the "Father-son" relationship between Yahweh and the Davidic king (2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:13; cf. Pss. 2; 89:26–27). In this way, the Davidic king is the administrator and mediator of the Mosaic covenant, the nation of Israel embodied in a person, and as such, the Davidic sons function as the Lord's representative to Israel and as the Lord's servant-priest-king.

This role is confirmed by the Davidic covenant's location in the progression of the covenants. The Davidic king as Yahweh's *son* carries a twofold significance. First, it inextricably ties the Davidic covenant to the previous covenants, and second, it anticipates in type the greater sonship of the new covenant mediator to come. Regarding the former, the sonship applied to *corporate* Israel (Ex. 4:22–23; cf. Hos. 11:1) is now applied to the *individual* Davidic king, who, in himself, is "true Israel." The Davidic king becomes the administrator/mediator of Israel's covenant, thus

representing God's rule to the people and creation and representing the people as a whole (2 Sam. 7:22–24). As developed in detail in chapter 11, in and through the Davidic covenant, kingship becomes the means of accomplishing Exodus 19:3b–6. The king is called to be a devoted servant and son, even functioning sometimes in priestly terms, instructing the nations in the righteousness of God and inviting them to come under the rule of Yahweh. Figure 16.1 captures this point, first, by picturing the Davidic covenant as a subset of the old covenant (for the Davidic king was under Torah as a covenant), and, second, by showing that Israel's representative sonship role is now narrowed in the king, as the corporate representative of the people.

Also, given its epochal-covenantal location, the Davidic covenant is organically related to the Abrahamic covenant and the creation covenant under Adam's representative headship. In regard to the Abrahamic, the great name promise is passed to the Davidic king (2 Sam. 7:9; 1 Chron. 17:8; Ps. 72:17), as well as the promise of a great nation (cf. Gen. 12:2). In this way, the Davidic covenant serves to identify the promised line of "seed" that will mediate blessings to all nations.[93] But there is more: the Davidic king also inherits the role of Adam and Israel as "son of God" to humanity as a whole. As Walter Kaiser has rightly argued, the expression in 2 Samuel 7:19b should read, "This is the charter by which humanity will be directed," indicating David's own understanding of the implications of the Davidic covenant for the entire human race, namely, that his role as covenant mediator would effect the divine rule in the entire world as God intended it for humanity in the original situation.[94] David's understanding of the implications of the Davidic covenant for the entire world not only becomes the basis for messianic expectation in Scripture but also, as noted above, links the Davidic covenant to the Abrahamic, which in turn is linked to God's earlier covenants and promises. Thus, under the Davidic king, the Abrahamic promise of the great nation and great name come together. In fact, the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant coincides with the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. The Abrahamic blessings, linked back to Adam and creation, will be fully realized only through the Davidic son. Indeed, the final fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of blessing in a

Promised Land will take place under the rulership of the Davidic king. The Davidic king, then, becomes the mediator of covenant blessing, tied back to Abraham, and ultimately tied back to Adam as the covenant head of the human race.

This is not surprising if we link the covenants together. At the heart of God's redemptive plan is the restoration of humanity's vice-regent role in creation through the seed of the woman; thus, by the time we get to David, we know who will restore the lost fortunes of creation. In the Old Testament, this truth is borne out in many places, especially in the Psalter, which envisages the Davidic son as ushering in this kind of universal rule and the entire dawning of the new covenant age—psalms, importantly, which are applied to Jesus in the New Testament (e.g., Psalms 2; 8; 45; 72; cf. Isa. 9:6–7; 11; 53; Ezekiel 34). When David's greater Son finally comes, all God's promises will be realized and all the previous covenant mediator's roles will be fulfilled in him. In the king, the role of Israel, tied to the role of Adam, will take place, and ultimately, God's promise to reverse the effects of sin and death and to usher in a new creation will result.

Yet there is a major problem in this regard. As with previous covenant heads—whether Adam, Noah, Abraham, or corporate Israel—God demands obedience, yet none of those mediators were truly obedient. The same is true of David and his sons, which brings us to the larger discussion of the unilateral-bilateral *tension* built within the covenant.

Unilateral and Bilateral Tension. As in the previous covenants, God continues in his unilateral determination to keep his unconditional promise to bring forth the offspring of Abraham, now more specifically a Davidic king, who will reign under God over the whole world. Yet God also continues to demand perfect obedience from his covenant partners as represented by the covenant heads. But none of these covenant partners, including David and his sons, truly obey; they do not fulfill their role to bring God's rule to this world, and they certainly do not overturn the effects of Adam's sin and death. All the previous covenant heads can only typify and anticipate a greater one to come, and in this case, a Davidic son who will obey and bring God's rule to this world.

In regard to the unilateral aspect of the covenant, most biblical theologians rightly emphasize the royal-grant style of the Davidic covenant; however, the issue is whether it can be reduced to this feature alone.[95] As chapter 11 details, when God establishes the Davidic covenant, he promises many things to be fulfilled both during and after David's lifetime—promises that cannot fail. The former are listed in 2 Samuel 7:8–11a: (1) a great name, (2) a place for Israel as God's people, and (3) rest for David from his enemies. The latter are listed in 7:11b–13, including promises for a lasting dynasty, kingdom, and throne. God's intention, then, is to fulfill his promises despite the many acts of disloyalty on the part of this people (see 1 Kings 11:11–13, 34–36; 15:4–5; 2 Kings 8:19; 2 Chron. 21:7; 23:3).

However, as 2 Samuel 7:14–15 makes clear, God demands faithfulness and obedience on the king's part—a faithfulness and obedience that David knows will effect the divine rule in the entire world as God intended it for humanity in Adam (7:18–19). What 7:14–15 teaches, then, is that the covenant will be fulfilled not by a faithful Father alone (i.e., Yahweh acting unilaterally) but also by a faithful son (i.e., the king obeying Yahweh's Torah). This is one of the reasons why it is difficult to classify the Davidic covenant as either a royal-grant or a suzerain-vassal covenant: it includes elements of both.

Further evidence for this unilateral-bilateral tension within the Davidic covenant is found in Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 55:3. As discussed in chapter 11, scholars debate the interpretation of the phrase *ḥasdê dāwîd*, often translated the "sure mercies of David." Yet as argued in chapter 11, this rendering is incorrect. The better way to translate the text in normal linguistic usage of this phrase is to interpret David as the agent or subject, not the object—hence the translation the "sure mercies or faithfulness *performed by David*."

This is significant given the importance of Isaiah 55 in Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah and coming Davidic king. We cannot rehearse all the arguments to demonstrate that the "servant of the Lord" in Isaiah is both Davidic and royal, but this has been shown repeatedly.[96] For example, the figurative language in which the Davidic king and kingdom are portrayed as a great tree cut down (6:13) and the reference to the shoot and root in 53:2

link the “servant of the Lord” texts to the vision of a future king who is another David (11:1, 10). In fact, the ongoing debate regarding the identification of Israel as the servant of the Lord and an individual as the servant who delivers the nation is resolved if we realize that the Davidic king is a representative figure for the entire nation. All this is to say, Isaiah presents us with a unified vision of a coming Davidic king who is identified as the “servant of the Lord,” who as a result of his victorious work will restore Zion (2:1–5), who will delight in the fear of the Lord (11:1–10), who will perfectly represent the Lord by implementing social justice (11:3–5), who will become a banner to the nations (11:10) and through his instruction will teach and rule the nations (42:1, 3–4; 49:1, 6), and so on. Then in Isaiah 55, we have a link made between the Davidic covenant and the new covenant, where it is announced that, on the basis of the work accomplished by the servant of the Lord, God will make an “everlasting covenant,” which is also grounded in the “faithfulness performed by David” (55:3). In this way, the Lord performs his covenant obligation, but he does so through an obedient David, namely, the messianic king, or David’s greater Son. Thus the new covenant is inaugurated, and the promise is fulfilled.

Not only does this demonstrate the demand within the Davidic covenant for faithful obedience on the part of the king, but it also drives us forward in anticipation for such a Davidic son and king to arise. Why? Because in Old Testament history, there is a major problem. As previous covenant mediators disobeyed, so did the Davidic kings, yet the hope of salvation depends on the king. God continues in his unilateral determination to keep his promise to bring forth the seed of Abraham, now more specifically a Davidic king, who will reign under God over the whole world. *And yet*, there is no faithful son-king who effects God’s saving reign. This leads to the message of the prophets and the anticipation of a new covenant.

The Promise of the New Covenant

The Old Testament writing prophets are covenantally located post-David. Why is this significant? Because their prophecies build on what God has already revealed through the covenants.[97] The prophets not only speak of

God's judgment on the people for their violation of the covenant, they also proclaim an overall pattern of renewal by recapitulating the past history of redemption and projecting it into the future. The prophets announce that God will unilaterally keep his promises to save, but he will do so through a faithful Davidic king (Isa. 7:14; 9:6–7; 11:1–10; 42:1–9; 49:1–7; 52:13–53:12; 55:3; 61:1–3; Jer. 23:5–6; 33:14–26; Ezek. 34:23–24; 37:24–28). In this king, identified as the "servant of Yahweh," a new or everlasting covenant will come, and with it the pouring of the Spirit (Ezek. 36:24–38; 37:11–28; Joel 2:28–32), God's saving reign among the nations, the forgiveness of sin (Jer. 31:34), and a new creation (Isa. 65:17). The hope of the prophets is found in the new covenant. Thus, as God's plan is unveiled through covenantal progression, it is in the new covenant that all the previous covenants find their fulfillment, terminus, and telos.[98]

Within the Old Testament, the new covenant is viewed as *national* (Jer. 31:31–40; 33:6–16; Ezek. 36:24–38; 37:11–28) and *international*. It will include Jews *and* Gentiles, and its scope is universal (as figure 16.1 illustrates), thus fulfilling the Abrahamic promise (Isa. 14:1–2; 19:23–25; 42:6, 20; 49:6; 55:3–5; 56:4–8; 66:18–24; Jer. 16:19; 33:9; Ezek. 36:36; 37:28; Amos 9:11–12; cf. Pss. 47:9; 87:3–6; 67:2–3; 117:1). Isaiah projects the ultimate fulfillment of the divine promises in the new covenant onto an "ideal Israel"—a community intimately tied to the servant of Yahweh, the Davidic king (who is true Israel in himself), and located in a rejuvenated new creation (Isa. 65:17; 66:22). This "ideal Israel" picks up the promises to Abraham and is the ultimate fulfillment of the covenants that God established with the patriarchs, the nation of Israel, and David's son (Isa. 9:6–7; 11:1–10; Jer. 23:5–6; 33:14–26; Ezek. 34:23–24; 37:24–28). Paul Williamson nicely captures this point:

> Thus the new covenant is the climactic fulfilment of the covenants that God established with the patriarchs, the nation of Israel, and the dynasty of David. The promises of these earlier covenants find their ultimate fulfilment in the new covenant, and in it such promises become "eternal" in the truest sense.[99]

Yet in the Bible's storyline it is not enough to say that the new covenant merely brings about the Abrahamic blessing to Israel and the nations. One cannot understand the Abrahamic covenant apart from the "covenant with creation," so in truth, when the new covenant arrives, we have the ultimate fulfillment of all God's promises, the reversal of the effects of sin and death brought about by Adam, and the establishment of the new creation.

What do the prophets say is "new" about the new covenant?[100] In chapters 12–15, we sought to answer this question by expounding every "new covenant" text. However, for our purposes here, we want to summarize three key differences, which are also important in the larger discussion of dispensational and covenant theology.

A New Structure. The new covenant is new by changing the *structure* of God's people. Under the old covenant, as D. A. Carson has noted, God dealt with his people in a mediated or "tribal-representative" structure, whereby God related to the covenant people through specially called mediators/representatives—specifically, prophets, priests, and kings.[101] The Old Testament does pay attention to individual believers who savingly know God, as evidenced in the remnant theme. But generally speaking, under the Old Testament covenants, especially the old covenant, the people's knowledge of God and their relationship with him depended on specially endowed leaders. For example, to hear a word from God, one would go to the prophet; to deal with sin, one would go to the priest; to experience the rule of God in the nation, one would depend on the Davidic kings. As it turned out, as the books of Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles describe, the entire nation benefited when these various leaders/shepherds acted justly, but they also suffered when they acted unjustly and thus functioned as miserable shepherds of Israel (Ezek. 34:1–25). Related to this, the Old Testament does not say that God's Spirit was poured out on every individual believer in this empowering/gifting sense but distinctively on prophets, priests, kings, and other designated leaders (e.g., Bezalel). But Jeremiah signals a *structural* change in the covenant community, where *all* God's people will know him, from the least to the greatest: "In those days they shall no longer say: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' But everyone shall die

for his own sin. Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge" (Jer. 31:29–30). As Carson observes,

> In short, Jeremiah understood that the new covenant would bring some dramatic changes. The tribal nature of the people of God would end, and the new covenant would bring with it a new emphasis on the distribution of the knowledge of God down to the level of each member of the covenant community. Knowledge of God would no longer be mediated through specially endowed leaders, for *all* of God's covenant people would know him, from the least to the greatest. Jeremiah is not concerned to say there would be no teachers under the new covenant, but to remove from leaders that distinctive mediatorial role that made the knowledge of God among the people at large a secondary knowledge, a mediated knowledge.[102]

This is *not* to say that the new covenant is not mediated. As both Testaments make clear, the new covenant *is* mediated, in and through its covenant mediator, the Davidic son-king, whom we now know to be Messiah Jesus. In this King, God's Son, he will not only unite the offices of prophet, priest, and king (after all, he is the antitype of these typological patterns), but also, in relation to him, *his* people will now *all* become prophets, priests, and servant-kings. No doubt, we now see all this in hindsight, but already in the Old Testament, the prophets anticipate the day when the new covenant people will be *structurally* different from Israel under the old covenant.[103]

In addition to this structural change within the community, the prophets also anticipate that this new covenant people will consist of believing people from every nation, not merely the nation of Israel (e.g., Isa. 14:1–2; 19:23–25; 42:6, 20; 49:6; 55:3–5; 56:4–8; 66:18–24; Jer. 16:19; 33:9; Ezek. 36:36; 37:28; Amos 9:11–12; cf. Pss. 47:9; 67:2–3; 87:3–6; 117:1). In this international community the Abrahamic promise will be fulfilled, as well as the universal focus that goes back to creation. The prophets are signaling, then, that people will not enter the new covenant by biological birth or by merely receiving the external sign of circumcision but by a circumcision of the heart wrought by God's Spirit and a saving relationship to the head of

the new covenant, namely, the Messiah, God's son-servant-king. Only those in relation to him are his family, and *all* his family will savingly know God.

In light of this, it seems that within the Old Testament, the genealogical principle of the previous covenants is anticipated to change. This principle refers to the relationship between the covenant head/mediator and his seed. In the previous covenants, the genealogical relationship is primarily *natural-biological* (i.e., Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, David). Yet the prophets anticipate a day when, in the new covenant, the relationship between its covenant mediator and his people is one born of the Spirit, described diversely but uniquely as a circumcision of the heart (or law written on the heart). Due to the *effective* nature of the new covenant (in contrast to the old), the *entire* community will become covenant keepers and know God immediately.[104] This is why the prophets speak of *all* those within the new covenant community as people who savingly know the Lord, who have the law written on their hearts, and who have experienced the forgiveness of sins, points we will return to below. This is in contrast to the mixed constitution of Israel as a nation.[105]

Evidence for these kinds of changes in the new covenant is underscored by the prophetic anticipation of the unique work of the Spirit in the coming new age. Although a clear hypostatic distinction between God and his Spirit is not made until the coming of Christ, in the Prophets there is an increased and heightened emphasis on the work of God's Spirit in the dawning of the new covenant, first poured out on the messianic king (see Isa. 11:1–3; 49:1–2; 61:1–3) and then on Messiah's people (see Ezek. 11:19–20; 36:25–27; Joel 2:28–32; cf. Num. 11:27–29).[106] As noted above, under the old covenant, the "tribal-representative" structure of Israel also meant that the Spirit was uniquely poured out on various leaders. But what the prophets anticipate is a change in structure due to the *universal* distribution of the Spirit on God's people in this empowering/gifting sense (see Joel 2:28–32; Acts 2). God will pour out his Spirit on *all* flesh, namely, *all* those within the covenant community. By this change, the new covenant raises *every member* of the covenant to the same relationship with God through the universal distribution of the Spirit. The Messiah, as the first to be anointed with the Spirit, will in turn pour out his Spirit on *all* members of the

covenant community. Thus, *all* those "under the new covenant" enjoy the promised gift of the eschatological Spirit (cf. Eph. 1:13–14).

A New Nature. Organically related to the previous point is another "new" feature of the new covenant, namely, a change in the *nature* of God's people. Jeremiah signals this change in two ways. First, he contrasts the new covenant with the old: "not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on that day . . . my covenant that they broke . . ." (Jer. 31:32). Second, he tells us why this covenant will *not* be like the old: due to a heart change of its members. The prophets announce that under the new covenant *all* will know the Lord, not indirectly through various human mediators such as priests but directly through the Messiah so that *all* will have the law written on their hearts and will experience the full forgiveness of sin.

In fact, it is these last two aspects of the new covenant that highlight the new change that is anticipated. The expression "law written on the heart" is very close to "circumcision of heart" language (cf. Deut. 30:6; cf. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; 9:25), which minimally refers to regeneration. This does *not* entail that no Old Testament person was regenerated; rather, it implies that the *new* people will *all* be regenerate, which is a major change. Instead of the people being a mixed entity, now the entire community will experience a "circumcision of the heart." The *entire* community will know God and obey from the heart because of the Spirit's work.[107]

Jeremiah 31:32 is clear: this is in contrast to the Old Testament people of God. No doubt within national Israel there were many believers saved by grace through faith in the promises of God. But as an entire community, not all Israel was Israel (Rom. 9:6). Within the national Israel, there was a distinction between the natural-biological *and* spiritual seed of Abraham. Under the old covenant, both "seeds" received the covenant sign of circumcision to identify them as God's covenant people, and both were viewed as full covenant members in the national sense. However, it was only the believers within the nation—the remnant—who were the spiritual seed of Abraham, the "true Israel" in a salvific sense. As James White reminds us, the nature of the old covenant was mixed. He states,

> For every David there were a dozen Ahabs; for every Josiah a legion of Manassehs. Unfaithfulness, the flaunting of God's law, the rejection of the role of truly being God's people, the rejection of His knowledge, and the experience of His wrath, were the *normative* experiences seen in the Old Covenant.[108]

But this is *not* what is anticipated of those under the new covenant.

A New Sacrifice. The new covenant is also "new" because it changes the *sacrifice* made for God's people. Related to the previous two points, central to the newness of the new covenant is the promise of *complete forgiveness of sin* (Jer. 31:34). Under the old covenant, the forgiveness of sins is normally granted through the priestly-sacrificial system. However, the Old Testament believer, if spiritually perceptive, knew that this was not enough, as evidenced by the repetitive nature of the system. The author of Hebrews later states it this way: "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). The old covenant sacrifices were designed to remind God's covenant people of their sinfulness through repetition, and in this way, the entire priestly-sacrificial system was typological. Yet Jeremiah says that in the new covenant, tied to its glorious mediator, God "will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more" (Jer. 31:33–34; cf. Heb. 10:17). In the Old Testament, the concept of "remembering" is not simple recall (cf. Gen. 8:1; 1 Sam. 1:19). In the context of Jeremiah 31:34, for God "not to remember" means that no action will need to be taken in the new age against sin. In the end, to be under the terms of *this* covenant entails that one experiences a full and complete forgiveness of sin.[109]

When other new covenant texts are considered, Jeremiah anticipates a perfect, unfettered fellowship of God's people with Yahweh because of the work of a better priest and sacrifice (Psalm 110). Harmony will be restored between creation and God—a new creation and a new Jerusalem—where the dwelling of God is with men and where they will be his people, and he will be their God (see Ezek. 37:1–23; cf. Isa. 25:6–9; Dan. 12:2; Rev. 21:3–4). In truth, with the arrival of the new covenant mediator and age, we have the fulfillment of the *protevangelium* and the reversal of what took place under Adam, the head and mediator of the covenant with creation.

In these three areas, the Old Testament anticipates and predicts something *new* in the arrival of the new covenant, ultimately tied to the uniqueness of its covenant head/mediator. For the Old Testament prophets it is still a future reality, but when it dawns, God's redemptive plan will be brought to its intended telos, and *God's* saving rule and reign—that is, his kingdom—will come, and everything will be made right. Covenantal progression becomes the means by which God's glorious plan and promise are unveiled and achieved, ultimately in Christ. Through the covenants we learn how God alone must initiate, act, and provide in order for redemption to occur; otherwise, there is no salvation. We discover that, in order to undo the disobedience of Adam and destroy sin, death, and the serpent, an obedient human covenant partner must come. This obedient one will come through Adam, Noah, and then be narrowed through Abraham, the nation of Israel, and David's line. He will faithfully discharge his role and thus bring about God's saving rule, or kingdom, to this world, as Adam was to do many years ago as image-son and priest-king, and he will reverse the effects of sin and death and reconcile us to God.

On the latter achievement, this is no small feat in light of the problem of forgiveness discussed earlier. After the fall, one of the crucial tensions within the covenant relationship is how humans can be found acceptable to God, given God's glory, holiness, and righteousness. In creation we see how the entire created order was made for God, especially humans. This is beautifully described in terms of the theme of "rest" (Gen. 2:3). When God finishes his work of creation, not only does he pronounce it "very good," but he then rests, signifying his enjoyment of it and relationship with it. Everything is in its proper place and order. Yet with the entrance of sin into the world, humans are cast out of the presence of God and removed from covenantal relationship with him. God cannot tolerate sin in his holy presence; it must be punished and dealt with. But how, then, are humans—and indeed, the entire created order—going to be brought back into right relationship with God without God in his holiness consuming us? This question is given new form in the covenants since at the heart of the covenant is "intimacy" with God. Think of the nation of Israel. Israel is the apple of the Lord's eye; they are graven on his hands (Deut. 32:10; Isa.

49:16). God's devotion to them is crystallized in the famous term *ḥesed*, that is, a love of devotion in which God binds himself to those who cannot demand or deserve such commitment. But how can there be such intimacy? How can the Lord claim Israel as his own? How can he walk and live among them without destroying them by the flame of his holiness? The very nature of the covenant and covenant relationship raises to new heights the problem of forgiveness.

The only solution is ultimately found in the new covenant and its mediator. In the old covenant God provided a sacrificial system that allowed for forgiveness of sin (Lev. 17:11) and "intimacy" between the holy covenant Lord and his people. But as the Old Testament teaches and the new covenant promise anticipates, it was insufficient. God must provide in a more definitive way. He himself must come and resolve the problem of sin through the provision of a greater priest and mediator, his own beloved Son. It is only in the coming of Christ and the new covenant that the Spirit of God in his fullness is poured out, the hearts of God's people are changed, and the fortunes of a lost creation are finally restored.

However, at this point in the story, this is still future. Let us now turn to the New Testament, which announces that *all* that God promised through the covenants and *all* that the prophets anticipated and predicted has now come to fulfillment in Messiah Jesus and the church.

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1. Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 41.
2. Graeme Goldsworthy, "Kingdom of God," in *NDBT*, 618.
3. See Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 3:879. For a discussion of the belief by past theologians that holiness is the most fundamental characteristic of God, see Richard A. Muller, *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, vol. 3 of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 497–503. Although we must demonstrate care in elevating one perfection of God, there is a sense in which holiness defines the very nature of God. In fact, whenever we combine God's holiness with love, justice, or goodness, we always say that it is holy love, holy justice, or holy goodness.
4. See Muller, *Divine Essence and Attributes*, 497–503. The discussion of holiness here is following a more traditional formulation tying God's holiness to divine aseity. For a slightly different emphasis, see part 2 of this volume and Peter J. Gentry, "The Meaning of 'Holy' in the Old Testament," *BSac* 170, no. 680 (2013): 400–417. However, the views are complementary, and the discussion in this chapter focuses more on the *theological* entailments of divine holiness.
5. See D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000). For a development of this point, see Stephen J. Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior; What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters*, Five Solas Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 31–53, 107–245.
6. Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 94–95. Cf. Goldsworthy, "Kingdom of God," 618.
7. For a detailed treatment of God's plan to have a people for himself in a place for themselves, as it develops through the Old Testament, see Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers

Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

8. Some argue that *goodness* is merely the complete correspondence between divine intention and the universe, which was suitable to fulfill the purpose for which it was brought into being. However, this view does not necessitate a "perfect" world, and thus it allows for death to exist before the fall. On this view, Adam and Eve were created mortal (like animals), and the penalty for their sin was a new kind of death, in anguish and pain. The tree of life, then, would have given them immortality. See William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 20–22; Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 62–64. A better option is to see *goodness* tied to moral realities, thus arguing that death, pain, and suffering did not exist prior to the fall and that these realities are a result of Adam's sin and the curse placed on the world (see Gen. 2:17; 3:19; Rom. 5:12; 6:23). For this view, see, e.g., Andrew S. Kulikovsky, *Creation, Fall, Restoration: A Biblical Theology of Creation* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2009), 204–20.

9. D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 202.

10. On this point, see Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 111–49.

11. Although the diachronic use of *through* is primarily stressed in what follows, the synchronic use of *through* is also crucial. It is *in and through* the covenant relationship that God has chosen to reveal himself, to enter into relationship with us, and to extend his rule to the whole creation. Our triune God has made us to know him and to serve him in the world in relation to others.

12. John H. Walton rightly contends that the biblical covenants are the primary means by which God's plan and self-revelation are made known to us. *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 20. See also the important discussion of how it is *through* the biblical covenants that the character (*šēm*) and way (*derek*) of Yahweh are revealed. For a development of this point, see Peter J. Gentry, "'The Glory of God'—The Character of God's Being and Way in the World: Some Reflections on a Key Biblical Theology Theme," *SBJT* 20, no. 1 (2016): 149–61.

13. John M. Frame rightly points out that the way we come to know God is first through his acts, which allow us then to reflect on his attributes. As God discloses himself over time though the biblical covenants, we grasp who he is, in terms of both his character (ethical qualities) and his nature (metaphysical qualities). *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 13–15.

14. Craig Blaising misses this point in his critique of our work. He wrongly thinks that we affirm that "typology is the progressive movement which directs the narrative from promise to fulfillment." "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom through Covenant*: A Hermeneutical-Theological Response," *MSJ* 26, no. 1 (2015): 115. No, we affirm that the Bible's storyline unfolds *through the progression of the covenants* and that typology is developed by this same covenantal progression.

15. For an application of this point to Christology, see Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 79–245.

16. On this point, refer to chap. 12, where we saw that in Isaiah 65, the new Jerusalem and the new creation are treated as coextensive. See also how Revelation 21–22 makes the same point. Cf. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 313–34; cf. T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: Exploring God's Plan for Life on Earth* (Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008); William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21–22 and the Old Testament* (Homebush West, NSW, Australia: Lancer Books, 1985).

17. In Christ, Paul argues, God's eternal plan is "summed up" (Gk. *anakephalaioō*) (Eph. 1:9–10). This is another way of saying that Christ and his work is the telos (goal, end) of God's plan. On this point, see Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 30–35.

18. For this understanding of fulfillment, see D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *Matthew and Mark*, vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 117–26, 171–80. See also Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 251–88.

19. We are using the word *undoing* in two ways. Christ, as the last Adam, *undoes* the fall by offering himself as a penal substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf. He also *does* what Adam failed to do; namely, as the true Son, he acts in complete devotion and obedience to his Father. These two ways correspond to what Reformed theologians have referred to as the "active and passive obedience" of Christ as our covenant head, acting on behalf of his people.

20. Carson, *Matthew*, 177.

21. See, e.g., Craig A. Blaising, "The Structure of Biblical Covenants: The Covenants Prior to Christ," in Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1993), 128–211; Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 17–43; Michael S. Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 23–110.

22. On this point, see Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 113–88.

23. See chap. 2 for a further discussion of this point.

24. In chap. 2, we noted that within covenant theology there is a dispute over the identification of the parties of the covenant of grace. Does God covenant only with the elect, or does he covenant with believers and their children? Both answers are found within covenant theology.

25. See Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 44–58.

26. See William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1984), 11–26, 31–39.

27. Contra Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 44–58; Jeffrey J. Niehaus, "An Argument against Theologically Constructed Covenants," *JETS* 50, no. 2 (2007): 259–73. For a full treatment of this point, see chaps. 5–6 of this work.

28. See the discussion of these passages in chap. 6.

29. God's demand on Adam is stated in Gen. 2:16–17. In Hebrew the infinitive absolute is used to add great force—"eating you shall eat" and "dying you shall die." In the first case the tone is that of fullness of permission. God is presented as the God of superabundance. God even *commands* this permission. On the other hand, disobedience to the command brings with it the threat of death. The use of the language underscores the importance of humanity's responsibility before God and the juridical aspect of the covenant. On the one hand, there is enjoyment of the Lord's gifts, but on the other hand is the condition that the free creature shall freely approve of his creaturely status in order to continue in his state of happiness. In light of the entire canon, most people see that the relationship established in Genesis 2 was temporary. If Adam obeyed God, he would then pass from a state of probation to one of confirmation in righteousness. But the text is silent on these kinds of details and conclusions.

30. Horton argues the same point. *God of Promise*, 83–104.

31. In terms of biblical data, five texts designate human beings as created as the "image of God" (Gen. 1:27; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7) or according to his "likeness" (Gen. 5:1; James 3:9). A couple of other texts refer to the renewal of humanity to the "image" or "likeness" of God through redemption (Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:24). In addition, we also have important Christological texts that present the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the true "image" of God, thus the archetype of our being created as God's image (Col. 1:15; cf. Heb. 1:3).

32. Carson, *Gagging of God*, 204. For a discussion of what image is, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986).

33. This *dual* relationship of Adam and the human race to God and to the world is important. We cannot rehearse the entire argument regarding "image" and "likeness" from chap. 6. We refer the reader back to the detailed discussion there, which established how the two words, in the ancient Near East, specify both kingship and covenant. "Likeness" specifies a covenantal relation between the king and God, while "image" specifies a covenantal relation between the king and his world.

34. Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 96. Among those who argue that image is primarily functional and focused on the role of dominion, see Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 169–72; David J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *TynBul* 19 (1968): 53–103. Clines concludes that the "image is to be understood not so much ontologically as existentially: it comes to expression not in the nature of man so much as in his activity and function. This function is to represent God's lordship to the lower orders of creation. The dominion of man over creation can hardly be excluded from the content of the image itself." Ibid., 101.

35. Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 96.

36. On this point, see Dan G. McCartney, "*Ecce Homo*: The Coming of the Kingdom as the Restoration of Human Vicegerency," *WTJ* 56, no. 1 (1994): 3–7. See chap. 6 for a full development of this point.

37. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 58–59.

38. See Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 99.

39. See Henri Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*, NSBT 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard de Witt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 44–90; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 41–116.

40. See below for a development of this point.

41. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 315.

42. Ibid., 315.

43. Contra Williamson, whose storyline seems to start with Noah and not Adam. *Sealed with an Oath*, 44–58. Interestingly, dispensational theology privileges the Abrahamic covenant especially in regard to the land promise. Even covenant theology, which begins with Adam, often fixes on the Abrahamic covenant in its theological construction of the church and baptism.

44. Figures 16.1 and 16.2 were designed by Jason T. Parry (figure 16.1 being adapted from a diagram by Peter Gentry); used by permission of Jason T. Parry.

45. For a development of these ideas, see Carson, *Gagging of God*, 202; D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (1982; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000); cf. Thomas R. Schreiner, "Good-bye and Hello: The Sabbath Command for New Covenant Believers," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 159–88.

46. See Beale, *Temple and the Church's Mission*, and the discussion in chap. 6.

47. Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., *God's Unfaithful Wife*, NSBT 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

48. In what follows, I am indebted to Richard J. Lucas, "Re-examining Eden: The Creation Covenant in Theological Systems" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November 16, 2016, San Antonio, TX).

49. For a similar discussion, see Greg Nichols, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed and Baptistic Perspective on God's Covenants* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2011), 321–58; John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 62–81; cf. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 117–21.

50. See Nichols, *Covenant Theology*, 334–38.

51. Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 70; cf. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 119.

52. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 119.

53. Nichols, *Covenant Theology*, 337.

54. Ibid., 335.

55. At this point, I am not focusing on the entrance of sin into the angelic realm. Additionally, it is important to stress the *historicity* of Adam and the fall, for without it we could not affirm what Scripture teaches. Ultimately, only a historical (and thus guilt-inducing) sin and evil may be vanquished and perfectly eliminated. Anything else makes sin intrinsic to what it means to be human, i.e., structurally flawed. But to make sin structural destroys the biblical position in a twofold way: first, by ultimately tracing the responsibility for sin and evil back to our Creator, who made us "flawed" from the outset, and, second, by undercutting the basis for the hope that our fallen condition can be reversed. Ultimately, the hope of a solution to our problem can be found only if our "abnormality" is tied to history and is thus reversible and if God, assuming he so chooses, takes the initiative to reverse what has occurred. On this point, see Blocher, *Original Sin*.

56. Carson, *Gagging of God*, 212–21, says something similar. In commenting on how Genesis 3 and the entire storyline of Scripture lead to the doctrinal affirmation of "original sin" and "total depravity," he warns that such categories must be understood carefully, and even then "they do not entirely capture the subtlety, the texture, the variegation of the Bible's depiction of sin, a depiction that is multi-faceted precisely because it comes across in so many genres, with such rich vocabulary and form that it cannot be encapsulated in a doctrinal slogan or two" (215). However, this does not mean that such categories are not legitimate. As Carson rightly notes, "For there is ample biblical evidence, for example, that we are 'totally depraved'—that is, that the impact of sin on human beings reaches to every facet of our existence, our will, our bodies, our emotions, our imagination, our reason, our relationships. Doubtless the Bible says much more than this; it certainly does not say less. And though it is true that not all of this is explicitly laid out in Genesis 3, that is the chapter that begins this downward spiral, and many of the features of sin that will be unpacked in sordid detail in later canonical writings are already there depicted *in nuce*" (215–16).

57. For a development of this fivefold alienation, see Kulikovsky, *Creation, Fall, Restoration*, 201–4.

58. See David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999). Wells argues that today *sin* has been transformed from being viewed in relation to God and has been replaced with the term *evil*. But if removed from the biblical framework, the term *evil* does not express the moral repugnance that it has in Scripture. This is a major problem of postmodern thought: it cannot explain evil because it has no standard to judge it by, so it leaves people eventually speechless before life's atrocities. As Wells notes, the difference between the cultural use of *evil* and the Christian use of *sin* is that while both words may be used to describe the same phenomenon, *sin* deliberately understands it in relationship to God. In our culture, the use of *evil* simply expresses our abhorrence of something; in the Bible, the word *sin* expresses God's abhorrence of it. But in the absence of God and his moral law, these things really cannot *be* evil; they can only be *called* evil. As the significance of the biblical God disappears from our culture, the realm of sin has correspondingly become contracted, which greatly affects our understanding of the solution to the problem as well.

59. For a helpful development of this point, see John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 124–32.

60. See Carson, *Gagging of God*, 232–34; Carson, *Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*.

61. See Carson, *Gagging of God*, 232–34; Muller, *Divine Essence and Attributes*, 476–503.

62. Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 90–91. What Stott describes is also evidenced in Exodus 34. See chap. 4 for a discussion of this important text and a detailed treatment of the "problem of forgiveness" in the collision between God and his covenant breakers in the golden calf incident.

63. Ibid., 132. See also the discussion in Garry Williams, "The Cross and the Punishment of Sin," in *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today*, ed. David Peterson (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2001), 68–99.

64. Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 112.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. "Seed" (*zera'*) is a key word in Genesis. It occurs 59 times there compared to 170 times in the rest of the Old Testament. See T. D. Alexander, "Seed," in *NDBT*, 769–73. Although the noun does not have distinctive singular and plural forms, one can make a strong case that it is singular, especially given the fact that the rest of Genesis focuses on a single line of seed, descended from Eve to Noah through Abram and so on. See further C. John Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?," *TynBul* 48, no. 1 (1997): 139–48; T. D. Alexander, "Further Observations on the Term 'Seed' in Genesis," *TynBul* 48, no. 2 (1997): 363–67.

68. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 68.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid., 69.

71. Ibid., 68–69; cf. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 96.

72. For a discussion of this point, see T. D. Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible's Portrait of the Messiah* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), 16–19; Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 41–44.

73. Robert L. Reymond, *Jesus, Divine Messiah: The New and Old Testament Witness* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2003), 69. See also Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 65; John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 106–9.

74. See chap. 5 for a detailed discussion of all the parallels with creation.

75. See Alexander, "Seed," in *NDBT*, 769–73; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 73–85; Jason S. DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective," *JETS* 58, no. 3 (2015): 445–85.

76. Contra Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 77–93. See chap. 7 for a detailed discussion of this point.

77. See Blaising, "Structure of Biblical Covenants," 130–40.

78. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 262.

79. DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets," 460. For a development of this point, see chap. 8.

80. Ibid., 461.

81. Ibid.

82. On this point, see ibid., 445–85; Jason S. DeRouchie, "Father of a Multitude of Nations: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective," in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 7–38.

83. Blaising, "Structure of Biblical Covenants," 132.

84. See Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 84–91.

85. D. A. Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul's Understanding of the Old and the New," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2, *The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 412. See also Douglas J. Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian: Five Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 319–24.

86. Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment," 412.

87. See Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, NSBT 31 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 26–44; Moo, "Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 336–37.

88. Within covenant theology there is disagreement on what remains in force from the old covenant. Some say that only the moral law comes over, while others argue for moral and civil, with some qualifications. See *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian: Five Views*.

89. We will return to this issue in chap. 18.

90. For a discussion of suzerain-vassal treaties, see chap. 10.

91. For a helpful summary of the law-covenant's purpose, see Moo, "Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 324–43.

92. On this point see Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 123–49.

93. For a fine discussion of the Davidic covenant, see Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 127–63; Blaising, "Structure of Biblical Covenants," 159–73.

94. For a development of this point, see chap. 11. See also Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Blessing of David: The Charter for Humanity," in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of Oswald Thompson Allis*, ed. John H. Skilton, Milton C. Fisher, and Leslie W. Sloat (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974), 311–14; cf. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 151–52.

95. See, e.g., Blaising, "Structure of Biblical Covenants," 159–65; Horton, *God of Promise*, 43–50.

96. See, e.g., Daniel I. Block, "My Servant David: Ancient Israel's Vision of the Messiah," in *Israel's Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 17–56; J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

97. Again, Goldsworthy strongly makes this point, but he does not tie it to the progression of the covenants. *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 123–32.

98. See O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 280–81.

99. Paul Williamson, "Covenant," in *NDBT*, 427.

100. Scholars debate the meaning of the word "new" (Heb. *hadas*; Gk. *kainos* LXX) in "new covenant." Some argue that the word only means "renewed" (e.g., Lam. 3:22–23), and others argue that it means "new" in a qualitatively different sense (Ex. 1:8; Deut. 32:17; 1 Sam. 6:7; Eccles. 1:10). Ultimately, the newness of the new covenant must be contextually determined. On this debate, see Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 175; James R. White, "The Newness of the New Covenant (Part 1)," in *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology*, ed. Richard C. Barcellos (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2014), 325–55; Carl B. Hoch Jr., *All Things New: The Significance of Newness for Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 105–7; Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 280.

101. See D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 150–58; cf. D. A. Carson, "Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church," in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 347–85. Craig Blaising, in his "Critique of Gentry and Wellum's, *Kingdom through Covenant*," 120–22, misconstrues our meaning of "structural" by our use of Carson's term "tribal-

representative" to refer to the role of Israel's leaders. Blaising oddly thinks that we are using "tribal" to undermine "genetic tribal structures" (121) tied to national identity! We intend nothing of the sort. Our point is this: under the old covenant, "leaders" (e.g., prophets, priests, and kings) were uniquely empowered/gifted by the Spirit to lead God's people and to function as mediators, but this will change under the new covenant. Instead, *all* people within the covenant community will be empowered/gifted by the Spirit and will function as prophets, priests, and kings due to Christ's work as the great Prophet, Priest, and King. A similar misreading is found in David Gibson, "'Fathers of Faith, My Fathers Now!': On Abraham, Covenant, and the Theology of Paedobaptism," *Themelios* 40, no. 1 (2015): 25. He thinks by "tribal" we mean family structures, which is not what we mean either!

102. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 152. From the context, the knowledge spoken of here is salvific. See also Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 177–78; House, *Old Testament Theology*, 317–21.

103. Within covenant theology, Robertson acknowledges this point. *Christ of the Covenants*, 290–97.

104. On this point, see White, "The Newness of the New Covenant (Part 1)," 343–55.

105. For a development of this point, see John D. Meade, "Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart: The Typology of the Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant," in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 127–58. Those within covenant theology, however, reject this argument for a variety of reasons. One reason they emphasize is that the parallel new covenant passage in Jer. 32:36–41 extends the genealogical principle because Jer. 32:39 includes children in the promise and blessings of the new covenant—"I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them." See, e.g., Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 289–90; Jonathan M. Brack and Jared S. Oliphint, "Questioning the Progress in Progressive Covenantalism: A Review of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom through Covenant*," *WTJ* 76, no. 1 (2014): 207–9; Gibson, "'Fathers of Faith, My Fathers Now!,'" 26–27. The problem with this interpretation is that it does not do justice to the changes of the new covenant in structure *and* nature, which imply (1) that the *entire* people savingly know God, have the law written on their hearts, and are forgiven of their sins; and (2) that through its better mediator and the work of the Spirit, the new covenant *effectively* brings about a people who keep the covenant. In fact, Jer. 32:39–40 teaches that God's new covenant people will have "one heart and one way," will "fear God forever," and "will not turn from God," which is not true of either the mixed constitution of Israel or the church. Instead of this text serving as proof that the genealogical principle continues, it teaches the opposite. There is no indication that children are automatically "in" but not "of" the new covenant community; it only confirms that those in the new covenant will know God and be wholly devoted to him. In this text, God displays his goodness to the people by extending his promises to them, their children, and, as in Acts 2:39, those who hear and respond to the gospel by faith. In chap. 18, we will investigate a further response by covenant theologians who describe the mixed nature of the church in terms of inaugurated eschatology: the church is *now* mixed but in the *not yet* it will be a transformed, regenerate people. For a critique of this view, see James R. White, "The Newness of the New Covenant (Part 2)," in Barcellos, *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage*, 357–82.

106. On this point, see Max Turner, "Holy Spirit," in *NDBT*, 551–58; David F. Wells, *God the Evangelist: How the Holy Spirit Works to Bring Men and Women to Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 1–4; Geerhardus Vos, "The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 91–125; Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 55–67.

107. See House, *Old Testament Theology*, 317–21. House writes, "Yahweh's assertion that all the covenant people will know the Lord provides a profound shift in the definition of the elect. From Abraham onward the chosen nation has consisted of those who believe and nonfaithful persons, a situation that creates the notion of a remnant. Now, in effect, the whole covenant group will be believers, or what has been called the remnant up to now. All will receive the future blessings because none will fail to have had God place the covenant on their hearts. The unbelieving majority will no longer exist." Ibid., 318.

108. White, "The Newness of the New Covenant (Part 2)," 363.

109. See Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 181–85.

17

Kingdom through Covenant

The Biblical Covenants Fulfilled in Christ Jesus and the New Covenant

As the New Testament begins, *fulfillment* is in the air.[1] What the Old Testament predicted and anticipated has now come in Christ Jesus.[2] In fact, fulfillment begins with Jesus's conception, as the first man of the new creation, yet most significantly, fulfillment dawns in Christ's life and ministry, culminating in his sacrificial death, glorious resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. Our Lord's entire identity and work are framed by the Old Testament; he is the one who fulfills *all* God's promises as given through the progression of the covenants, and by his obedience, he inaugurates God's promised "kingdom through [new] covenant." Jesus is viewed as the eternal Son of the Father *and* the promised Messiah-Son who has come to achieve God's plan to restore humanity's vice-regent rule over creation.

Furthermore, Jesus, along with the entire New Testament, reminds us that he has come to redeem a *new* people for his kingdom—the church (Matt. 16:18)—a people, whose locus "is no longer national and tribal" but "international, transracial, transcultural."[3] Thus, in Jesus the Messiah, God the Son incarnate, God has laid bare his mighty arm to save his people in grace and power. In Jesus's life and work, the desperate plight begun in Eden now finds solution, and the new creation begins to dawn. In Christ

alone, the prophetic anticipation of God's coming to save in and through David's greater Son is fulfilled. Indeed, as D. A. Carson reminds us,

> The promise that through Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed, gradually expanded into a major theme in the Old Testament, now bursts into the Great Commission, the mushrooming growth of the Jewish church into the Gentile world, the spreading flame reaching across the Roman Empire and beyond, in anticipation of the climactic consummation of God's promises in the new heaven and new earth.[4]

In Christ Jesus *all* God's promises are now being fulfilled; everything is now under his feet (see Gen. 1:26–28; Ps. 8:6; 1 Cor. 15:27; Heb. 2:8). And as the victorious Davidic king and last Adam, he is supreme, or "head," over creation, for the benefit of his people, the church (*tē ekklēsia*) (Eph. 1:22).[5]

Years ago, William Manson captured this sense of fulfillment in this way:

> When we turn to the New Testament, we pass from the climate of prediction to that of fulfillment. The things which God had foreshadowed by the lips of His holy prophets He has now, in part at least, brought to accomplishment. The *Eschaton*, described from afar . . . , has in Jesus registered its advent. . . . The supreme sign of the *Eschaton* is the Resurrection of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church. The Resurrection of Jesus is not simply a sign which God has granted in favor of His Son, but is the inauguration, the entrance into history, of *the times of the End*.
>
> Christians, therefore, have entered through the Christ into the New Age. Church, Spirit, life in Christ are eschatological magnitudes. Those who gather in Jerusalem in the numinous first days of the Church know that it is so; they are already conscious of tasting the powers of the World to Come. What has been predicted in Holy Scripture as to happen to Israel or to man in the *Eschaton* has happened to and in Jesus. The foundation-stone of the New Creation has come into position.[6]

We will present the *fulfillment* of God's covenant promises in three steps: (1) how *Christ* fulfills the previous covenants in himself, (2) the nature of fulfillment in relation to inaugurated eschatology, and (3) how the church is *new* and receives *all* God's covenant promises *in and through Christ*.

Christ Jesus Fulfills the Biblical Covenants

From the opening verse of the New Testament, Jesus is identified as "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1), which is full of covenantal significance. Jesus, the eternal Word/Son made flesh (John 1:1–2, 14) has come, and in him, all God's promises are fulfilled. In his work, we see God's resolution to take on himself our sin and guilt in order to reverse the horrible effects of the fall and to satisfy his own righteous requirements, to make this world right by the inauguration of God's saving reign, and to do so by establishing the new covenant in his blood. In Christ, the Word made flesh, we see the perfectly obedient Son, who is also the Lord, taking the initiative to keep his covenant promises by assuming our human nature, veiling his glory, and winning for us our redemption. In him, we find the divine Son, one with the Father and Spirit, who now in his incarnation is our new covenant head and mediator. In Christ, *all* God's promises are "Yes" and "Amen" (2 Cor. 1:20). Let us look at some of the New Testament data to see how Jesus is viewed as the Messiah, who fulfills the previous covenants and their promises in himself.

Jesus's Unique Conception: The First Man of the New Creation

Matthew begins his Gospel with a genealogy that ties Jesus to God's promises and the covenants (Matt. 1:1–17). As most commentators acknowledge, the genealogy is purposefully structured in terms of David the king, the exile of Israel, and the fulfillment of God's promises in the birth of Christ.[7] Jesus's unique conception is not some strange occurrence in history; it is part of God's plan now being fulfilled. Specifically, Matthew links Jesus to God's promises that have developed through the covenants to create the expectation that the Creator–covenant Lord himself will come in and through the Davidic king to redeem humanity and restore his creation.

Matthew stresses God's supernatural work through the Holy Spirit in Jesus's conception (see Matt. 1:18–25), which is pregnant with Old Testament expectation of the coming of Yahweh and the king tied to the dawning of the new covenant/creation. In fact, the conception of Jesus is evidence that in him the new creation has come; literally, Jesus is the first man of the new creation. Significantly, the angel tells Joseph, "You shall call his name Jesus, for [*gar*] he will save his people from their sins" (1:21). Anyone steeped in the Old Testament would immediately recognize two crucial points: first, the stress on the agency of the Spirit tied to the expectation of the coming Messiah and the messianic age (see Isaiah 11; 42; 61; Ezek. 36:25–27; Joel 2:28–32); second, the fact that this child will save his people from their sins according to the new covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:34. The angel's announcement and the virginal conception are interpreted within the promise/plan of God, according to which God's long-awaited kingdom is now dawning.[8] And citing Isaiah 7:14, Matthew confirms that we should interpret the conception and birth of Christ in terms of God himself coming in the flesh to be with his people through their deliverance: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)" (Matt. 1:22–23).

Luke's presentation of Jesus's conception is similar to Matthew's, but it comes closer to telling us how it happened. The angel Gabriel explains to Mary that "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow [*episkiasei*] you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). This description is not mythological or even primarily metaphysical; rather, Jesus's conception is explained in redemptive-historical and eschatological terms.[9]

First, the virgin conception is placed in the context of creation and new creation realities. Genesis 1:2 presents the Spirit of God hovering in divine power over the waters as God begins the creation of the world. Luke now presents the Spirit overshadowing Mary with the power of the Most High as God conceives a human nature. God himself worked as the efficient cause in the conception of Christ as the head of the new creation. As a further parallel to the Spirit's work in the first creation, God produces what he calls

“good” or “holy.” Jesus’s conception, then, did not originate in human initiative; instead, it is a result of God’s unilateral action: the last great, culminating irruption of God’s power into the plight of humanity as the first man of the new creation arrives in fulfillment of Old Testament expectations.

Second, the “overshadowing” work of the Spirit connects the conception of Christ to God’s unique covenantal presence. In the Septuagint, the Greek verb *episkiazō* translates the Hebrew *shakan*, which is used for the settling of the cloud of God’s glory-presence under the old covenant (Ex. 40:29, 35; cf. LXX; see Ps. 91:4; cf. 90:4 LXX). Later known as the *shekinah*, this glory of God guarded and guided Israel through the wilderness and reappeared in the cloud representing the presence of God in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34–38) and in the temple (Isa. 6:1–4). Significantly, in response to Israel’s idolatry, the *shekinah* glory departs from the temple (Ezek. 10:1–22) and does not reemerge until the coming of Christ (John 1:14–18), who is the Lord of glory and the antitypical fulfillment of the temple (John 2:19–22).[10] In the Son’s incarnation, God’s glory-presence breaks into the world; in *this* man, God is with us as Immanuel. In Christ, a greater than Adam has come to achieve what no one before him could do.

Jesus’s Baptism: The Appointment of the Promised Davidic Son-King

Jesus came to the Jordan and John the Baptist with the understanding that “it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). And upon his baptism, “immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’” (Matt. 3:16). Jesus knew that to have the Spirit from the Father for the sake of righteousness signaled that he is the promised Messiah and that the messianic age had dawned—an age identified with God’s sovereign, saving rule and the new covenant (Isa. 61:1–2; Ezekiel 34; Luke 4:16–21).[11] As such, to be the Spirit-anointed Messiah according to the Bible’s storyline is to be identified with God himself, who must act to fulfill the Old Testament expectation of

redemption and restoration (Isa. 9:6–7; 11:1–16; 42:1–9; 49:1–7; 52:13–53:12).[12]

Significantly, the Gospel accounts make the man Jesus the recipient of the divine action at his baptism and focus our attention on Jesus's understanding of the event: "*He saw* the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending *on him*" (Mark 1:10). Jesus joined others in John's "baptism of repentance" (Acts 12:24) to identify with us in covenant solidarity in his ministry of reconciliation between God and humans. Yet at the same time, God spoke to *this* man to declare, "'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased'" (Mark 1:11). As a blend of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1,[13] these words confirm that Jesus knows himself to be the son-king who will bring justice to all the nations through the sovereign and saving reign of the Lord himself, thus fulfilling the previous covenant promises.[14] This event certainly signals that Jesus is the promised Messiah, but he is also more than this. Given Jesus's virginal conception (Matt. 1:18–25; Luke 1:26–38), the typological significance of his status as the "beloved" (*agapētos*) Son, and his ability to inaugurate *God's* kingdom, Jesus is more than a mere human son; he is also the divine Son.[15] Jesus's baptism, then, reminds us that *he* is the promised Davidic son-king; in him all God's promises are now coming to fulfillment.

Jesus's Inauguration of the Kingdom: The Fulfillment of the Prophetic Hope

These same truths are reinforced in the Gospels' teaching that Jesus is the one who inaugurates God's promised kingdom. One cannot think about the New Testament's teaching concerning the kingdom apart from its Old Testament background. As noted in chapter 16, the "kingdom of God" refers primarily to God's *kingly* and *sovereign rule*, and it is especially tied to God's *saving reign* that will come in the Messiah, which the New Testament announces has now begun in Christ's coming, life, death, and resurrection.[16] Until the consummation, when God's rule will not be contested and yet will be coextensive with the new creation, it now does *not* primarily refer to a certain geographical location; rather, the phrase tells us

more about *God* (the fact that he reigns) and *his saving reign* (that it has now come to this world in Christ).

In the Gospels, especially the Synoptics, Jesus's life, ministry, death, and resurrection all focus on the kingdom of God. John the Baptist first announces the kingdom's arrival in Jesus (Matt. 3:2). As Isaiah had prophesied about John (Isa. 40:3), he would recognize Jesus as the promised righteous Davidic king who would bring justice to God's people and to all the earth (Isa. 40:9–17; Matt. 3:11–12). In fact, Jesus's entire self-identity is that in him God's kingdom has come (Matt. 4:12–17; Mark 1:14), especially tied to his death, resurrection, and ascension and to Pentecost. Paul tells us that due to Christ's work, he is now seated at God's right hand as the enthroned Davidic king. Jesus is currently ruling over all creation (Eph. 1:20–22) even as we await the consummation at his return (Matt. 24:29–31; 25:31–46; Mark 9:1). Thus, all that Jesus taught, all the miracles he performed, and all that he accomplished in his cross work was tied to the dawning of God's kingdom, which in turn, is bound up with the fulfillment of the covenants and the inauguration of the new covenant age. As we have seen, by the time the Bible's storyline reaches into the New Testament, we expect that *God's* kingdom will come by *God's* initiative and *through* the Davidic king tied to the new covenant, thus restoring the fortunes of Israel, bringing salvation to the world, and ultimately restoring our human role as God's image bearers / sons over creation.

Furthermore, in Jesus's inauguration of the kingdom, he also demonstrates how much greater he is than anyone who preceded him. In all his teaching and miracles, in Jesus's self-understanding of his work, *he* sees himself as the antitypical fulfillment of David, Israel, Abraham, and Adam —indeed, as the eternal Son who has become son by his incarnation— in order to usher in God's saving reign and fulfill all God's covenant promises. While we cannot consider every text that teaches this truth, Matthew nicely captures it by locating Jesus's teaching and miracles in the context of the kingdom—a kingdom that no previous covenant head/mediator could inaugurate and that only God himself can establish. Matthew tells us on two occasions that Jesus "went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom

and healing every disease and every affliction among the people" (Matt. 4:23; cf. 9:35). As Murray Harris observes, Matthew carefully places the two verses in the narrative as an *inclusio* to bookend and characterize Jesus's ministry up to his death, which has the effect of demonstrating Jesus's teaching and works as qualitatively (not just quantitatively) greater than everything that has preceded him.[17]

For example, in Jesus's teaching (Matthew 5–7) and miracles (Matthew 8–9), he is *not* merely presented as a new Moses. Instead, Jesus is viewed as having a unique authority and power, indeed, the authority and power of God himself. In other words, Jesus is no mere man—even a sinless man—analogous to previous Spirit-empowered men who performed mighty works of God (e.g., Moses, Elijah). Jesus is presented in a category all by himself, for it is only in him that God's long-awaited and promised kingdom has come. The previous prophets, priests, and kings may have functioned as types of him, but he is their antitypical fulfillment. In fact, everything that the apostles would say and do later was based solely on Jesus's authority and his authorization of them (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 3:6; 4:10; 9:34); Jesus's authority and power was utterly unique.

Matthew 5:17–20 is an excellent example of how Jesus viewed his teaching authority, especially in relation to the Old Testament. Debate has surrounded how best to interpret Jesus's words "'I have not come to abolish [the Law or the Prophets] but to fulfill them'" (Matt. 5:17).[18] The best interpretation stresses the *antithesis* between *abolish* and *fulfill* to see that Jesus claimed to be the prophetic end toward whom all the teaching under the old covenant with Israel pointed for its ultimate significance.[19] This interpretation understands *fulfill* to have the same meaning as its use in Matthew (and the New Testament), which relies on the prophetic function of the Old Testament. The Old Testament anticipates the Messiah and leads us to him in the person of Christ, specifically through typological persons, events, and institutions. Jesus was not abolishing the canonical authority of the Old Testament but correctly orienting it to terminate in his own authority. D. A. Carson explains that "the OT's real and abiding authority must be understood through the person and teaching of him to whom it points and who so richly fulfills it."[20] The Christological claim is simply

staggering. Jesus understood himself to be the eschatological goal of the entire Old Testament and the sole authoritative interpreter of its teaching. In other words, Jesus views himself as sharing authority with God and bringing all God's promises to pass in himself.

Along with his teaching, Jesus's healing and nature miracles bear witness to his unique authority and power as the divine Son, who has become the human son-king to redeem and restore us. Jesus's healing miracles evidence the arrival of the new covenant age (Luke 7:22–23; cf. Isa. 29:18–19; 35:5–6; 61:1) and manifest God's supernatural rule coming in and through him. In relation to nature, as Jesus rebukes the stormy sea and it obeys him (Matt. 8:26), as he walks on the sea and the waters support him (Matt. 14:25, 28–30), these acts of authority and power are viewed not as isolated acts but as evidence that God's kingdom rule is now here. When placed in the Bible's storyline and covenantal progression, these dramatic acts of redemption reveal that Yahweh alone triumphs over the stormy sea (see Pss. 65:7; 107:23–31) and treads upon its waters (Job 9:8 LXX; cf. Ps. 77:19; Isa. 51:9–10), yet now these acts are identified with Jesus.[21] In a similar manner, the New Testament presents many other healings and miracles and even the exorcism of demons (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 10:7–8; Luke 9:11; 10:9, 17; 11:20) as an indication that in Jesus, *God's* kingdom has come.

Further evidence that God fulfills his plan in Jesus by inaugurating the kingdom through (new) covenant is in Jesus's authority and power to exercise divine judgment and to bring resurrection life. Jesus understood himself to be the man appointed by his Father to exercise divine judgment (Matt. 7:22–23; 16:27; 25:31–33, 41; cf. John 5:22–23). But Scripture is clear that judgment is the work of God alone (Deut. 1:17; Jer. 25:31; Rom. 2:3, 5–6; 14:10; 1 Pet. 1:17). And yet, Jesus knew that he came as the appointed Judge of all humanity and that his verdict assigns every person to either eternal punishment or eternal life (Matt. 25:46; cf. John 5:29; 2 Cor. 5:10). And in relation to this judgment, Jesus understood that he had the authority and power of resurrection. But one cannot understand these claims apart from their fulfilling the prophetic anticipation of God's kingdom, which is tied to the hope of resurrection life (Ezek. 37:1–23; cf. Isa. 25:6–9; Dan. 12:2). Once again, Jesus is presented as the divine Son, identified with

the Father but appointed as the promised Davidic son-king, who fulfills all the promises of God in himself.

Or think of how Jesus has the authority to forgive sins, which is tied to the promise of the new covenant. In Mark 2, Jesus tells a paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (2:5). The religious leaders who charge Jesus with blasphemy are correct that God alone can forgive sins (2:7), so Jesus does not challenge their theological reasoning. But he does challenge their theological conclusion that Jesus is not God the Son, who has the authority to forgive sins: "Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, Your sins are forgiven, or to say, Rise, take up your bed and walk?" (2:8–9). Jesus steps into the plotline of Scripture at a point where he is now inaugurating God's kingdom through new covenant. Healing the paralytic *and* having the authority to forgive sins, especially outside the temple, is proof that Jesus is the one in whom God's saving rule has finally come and that he is the true temple (see Matt. 8:17; cf. Isa. 35:5–6; 53:4; 61:1; Jer. 31:34; John 2:19–22). As Carson notes, "This is the authority of Immanuel, 'God with us' (Matt. 1:23), sent to 'save his people from their sins' (Matt. 1:21)."[22] The plotline, the scene, and the dialogue combine to reveal that the promised forgiveness of sin and covenantal reconciliation between God and man is fulfilled in Jesus. The temple, priesthood, and sacrificial system played their typological role to set the stage for God himself to come in Christ to redeem a people for himself.[23]

Lastly, in relation to the Old Testament teaching that it is *God* who ushers in his kingdom but through the Messiah, Jesus's use of the "I am" (*egō eimi*) in John's Gospel further confirms that he is the unique divine Son *and* that he is the antitypical fulfillment of the previous covenant heads and typological patterns. Regarding the former, when Jesus refers to himself as "I am" *without a predicate* (John 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 18:6), he connects his personal identity with the covenantal identity of Yahweh. In Exodus 3, God identifies himself to Moses as the "I am" (3:6, 14), which becomes the unique and personal name for God in his covenant with Israel and with David. And in Isaiah 40–48, the prophet uses God's covenantal name to make the point that as the one true and living God, Yahweh is unique and incomparable by nature (41:4; 43:10, 25; 45:8, 18, 19, 22; 46:4, 9; 48:12,

17). The “I am” is in a category by himself as the eternally self-existent being who alone is God. The Old Testament reserves “I am” for Yahweh; by definition, this name cannot apply to any mere man. So when Jesus steps into the Old Testament covenantal storyline and refers to himself as “I am,” he identifies himself as Yahweh, the divine Son who is equal with the Father (John 8:58; cf. 13:19).[24]

Regarding the latter, when Jesus refers to himself as the “I am” *with a predicate* (“the bread of life,” 6:35; “the light of the world,” 8:12; “the gate,” 10:7, 9; “the good shepherd,” 10:11, 14; “the resurrection and the life,” 11:25; “the way, the truth, and the life,” 14:6; and “the true vine,” 15:1, 5), he sees himself as the antitypical fulfillment of the previous covenant heads and typological patterns. For example, in John 6, Jesus declares, “‘I am the bread of life’” (6:35, 48) to reveal that he is greater than the manna that sustained Israel in the wilderness, because in him is eternal life (6:51, 58). Or in John 10, Jesus declares, “‘I am the good shepherd’” (10:11). By using this predicate within the Bible’s plotline, Jesus is claiming to fulfill the role of Israel’s kings and leaders to shepherd the people where all those kings and leaders failed (Ezek. 34:1–9). But Jesus also identifies with Yahweh, who promised, “I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. . . . And I will bring them out from the peoples . . . and will bring them into their own land” (Ezek. 34:11–13). Or in John 15, Jesus says, “I am the true vine” (15:1), which identifies him as the antitypical fulfillment of Israel. In the Old Testament the vine is a common symbol for Israel (Ps. 80:9–16; Isa. 5:1–7; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 15:1–8; 17:1–21; 19:10–14; Hos. 10:1–2), and it mostly refers to Israel’s unfaithfulness as a covenant partner. Yet Jesus is the *true* vine, which, as Carson notes, in this context entails that Jesus sees himself as “the one to whom Israel pointed, the one that brings forth good fruit” and the one who “supersedes Israel as the very locus of the people of God.”[25] In all these ways, the Old Testament hope is fulfilled in Jesus by his kingdom work.

Jesus’s Death and Resurrection: The Inauguration of the New Covenant

From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus knew he was the Messiah and had to die to fulfill his Father’s will.[26] From his use of the title “Son of Man”

(from Dan. 7:13–14); to the application of Isaiah 61 to himself (Luke 4:21); to the prediction that the bridegroom would be "taken away" (*apairō*) from his disciples (Mark 2:20), an allusion to Isaiah 53:8 (a description of the suffering servant, who "by oppression and judgment . . . was *taken away*," speaking of his violent death); to the comparison of himself with Jonah (Matt. 12:40); to the serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14)—all this demonstrates that Jesus knew his death was "because it was so determined in God's counsel and predicted in Scripture (Matt. 16:21; 26:54; Luke 22:22; 24:26, 44–46; John 3:14; 7:30; 8:20; 10:18; 11:7–15; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1; 20:9; 1 Pet. 1:20)."[27] As Herman Bavinck notes, "Prophecy, especially the prophecy of Isaiah (ch. 53), was always present to his mind (Luke 4:21; 18:31; 22:37; 24:26, 46) and instructed him concerning his departure."[28]

This truth is especially evident at Caesarea Philippi, where Peter rightly confesses that Jesus is the Messiah *and* where Jesus instructs his disciples about the nature of his messianic work. Jesus insists that precisely because he is *the* Messiah, he *must* (Gk. *dei*) suffer, die, and be raised on the third day—a fact he reiterated on three separate occasions (Mark 8:31–32; see 9:31; 10:32–34). Jesus reinforces this truth after his resurrection, when he reminds his disciples what he taught them before his death: that his death and resurrection were central to God's plan and thus the fulfillment of Scripture (Luke 24:25–27, 44–47).

In addition, the transfiguration also reminds us how central Christ's death is to his mission, the inauguration of the kingdom, and the dawning of the entire new covenant age. On the mountain, our Lord receives further confirmation of his Father's love (Mark 9:7), and then he meets with Moses and Elijah. What did they discuss? Luke tells us: "They spoke about his departure [*exodos*], which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). Why is thinking about Christ's death as his *exodos* significant? Because this language sets Christ's cross in the larger context of God's divine plan by suggesting that it is the antitypical fulfillment of the exodus, the Old Testament's great act of redemption. Christ's impending death is not the death of a martyr or victim. Jesus dies as the Messiah, the divine Son

incarnate, who as the Passover Lamb and the conquering priest-king fulfills God's plan and achieves a new exodus in his blood.

This truth is also reinforced in Jesus's celebration of the Passover and establishment of the Last Supper. In the upper room, Jesus interprets his upcoming death in covenantal terms: first, as the fulfillment of the Passover, and, second, as the inauguration of the new covenant. Let us look at each of these points.

Jesus's Death as the Fulfillment of the Passover

First, given the Passover context of the meal, Jesus views his upcoming death as a *sacrifice*, the antitypical fulfillment not only of the sacrificial system but also of the Passover lamb (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7). Also, the sacrificial nature of Jesus's death is reinforced by his words: "This is my body given for you. . . . This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:19–20).[29] New meaning is given to the Passover, which reveals how Jesus views the import of his upcoming death, namely, as a priestly sacrifice, in obedience to his Father's will, and fulfilling the typological significance of the sacrificial Passover lamb. Just as the Passover lamb functioned as a God-provided substitute for human life and deliverance from divine judgment of sin, it also was linked to the exodus, which constituted Israel as God's covenant people.[30]

However, in a much greater way, Jesus, as the fulfillment of the Passover, is the willing and gracious provision of the Father to redeem his people from sin and to constitute the church as God's new covenant people. This truth is already present in the Old Testament, which one can see by working through the covenants. As the Passover is given to Israel at the beginning of the old covenant, it is also linked to elements of the sacrificial system and, most importantly, in the Prophets to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. From the perspective of Jesus and the New Testament authors, Isaiah 53 is probably the most important text in the prophetic literature for interpreting the cross, and it serves as the backdrop to Jesus's ransom sayings in the Gospels. In Isaiah 53, the servant not only suffers undeservedly because of human sin but also suffers in the people's place, as a substitute, the righteous for the unrighteous (see 1 Pet. 2:24–25). As John Oswalt

demonstrates, Isaiah 53, in its context, points to the servant as both the means of salvation anticipated in chapters 49–52 and the one who achieves the salvation that the people are invited to participate in, in chapters 53–55.[31] Also, in context, Isaiah teaches that even though the exile was a temporary punishment for sin, it did not automatically restore the people to fellowship with God. Something more was needed because of the seriousness of their situation under the curse of God. Only the affliction of the servant could make them whole, and only by his bruises could they be healed (53:5)—language that echoes the sacrificial system and the previous Passover celebration. Only by the suffering of God's righteous servant-king in our place is salvation accomplished.

Jesus's Death as the Inauguration of the New Covenant

Second, given the context of the Passover-exodus, it is not surprising that Jesus sees the purpose of his death as inaugurating what these events ultimately anticipated: the establishment of the promised *new covenant* (Luke 22:20).[32] Paul and other New Testament authors confirm this point when they later identify Christ's cross work as a new covenant sacrifice (1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3; Hebrews 8; 10). As noted in our exposition of the new covenant, at its heart is the promise of the complete forgiveness of sins (Jer. 31:34), which only occurs through priestly, sacrificial action. In fact, in biblical thought, the concepts of *priest* and *covenant* are inseparable, which is the argument of Hebrews 7:11, where the parenthesis helps us understand the relationship between the priesthood and the covenant: "For on the basis of it [the Levitical priesthood] the law [old covenant] was given to the people." Here the author contends that the old covenant is grounded in the Levitical priesthood. That is why, given this relationship, the author argues in 7:12 that the Old Testament, in announcing the coming of a *new* priest (Psalm 110; see Hebrews 7), also anticipates the arrival of a *new* covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; see Hebrews 7–8), *because* a change in priesthood requires a change of covenant.[33]

Why? Because at the heart of the covenant relationship is the reality that God dwells with his people. But how can *God* dwell with a *sinful* people? Through the progression of the covenants, we learn that God can do so only

by the provision of his own dear Son, our Great High Priest and new covenant head—the one whom the entire priesthood, tabernacle, and sacrificial system anticipated. By Christ alone, the obedient Son, the covenant's demands are fully met and our ransom price paid. All this speaks to how Christ Jesus is the fulfillment of the covenants in himself.

These truths are explicitly taught in two important texts (Rom. 3:21–26 and Heb. 9:15–28) that wonderfully explain the meaning of Christ's cross in new covenant terms and demonstrate *why* the new covenant is the fulfillment of the previous covenants and thus greater. Let us look at each of these texts in turn.

ROMANS 3:21–26. First, think of Romans 3:21–26. In a number of places, Scripture explains the *why* of the cross but nowhere more explicitly than here. It is set in the larger context of Paul's argument, starting in 1:18–3:20, where Paul establishes that apart from the cross, all humans are under divine wrath, are guilty, and stand condemned before God.[34] Following the Bible's storyline, Paul establishes that God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all people (Jew and Gentile), ultimately due to Adam's disobedience as our covenant representative (5:12–21). As God's image bearers, although we clearly know God from creation, we suppress the truth, turn from him, and stand under his judgment. With a litany of Old Testament texts, Paul concludes in 3:9–20 that apart from God's gracious initiative to redeem, all people stand guilty and condemned before the Judge of all the earth.

But thankfully, in Romans 3:21, Paul shifts to the good news centered on God's grace, initiative, and provision of Christ set in the context of the covenants. The text highlights the redemptive-historical shift that has now occurred in Christ's coming ("But now . . .")—a shift that introduces a key contrast between the old and new covenants and a shift that explains *why* the cross is necessary in our justification before God and why the new covenant is better.[35] In Christ's cross, the righteousness of God (*dikaiosunē theou*)—that is, God's justifying activity[36]—is now revealed, a righteousness that is rooted in his covenant promises and that results in God declaring all who believe in Christ *justified* before him.[37] In fact, as Paul explains the glory of Christ and his work, he speaks of the revelation of

God's righteousness in Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament (3:21) *and* as necessary to demonstrate that God is truly just (3:25–26).

Paul stresses that God's righteousness is "apart from the law" (old covenant), though that same law-covenant and its prophets testify to it. Under the old covenant, God entered into relationship with his people, and through the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system, God granted forgiveness to them as they believed God's promises (Gen. 15:6; see Romans 4). Yet Scripture is clear: God never intended the old covenant to ultimately redeem us. Built within the old covenant were God-given limitations—for example, no adequate substitute, an inability to fully forgive sin as revealed by the repetitious nature of the system, and no provision for high-handed sins.[38] But in diverse ways the law-covenant *and* the prophets predicted the dawning of a new covenant, a greater priest, and a better sacrifice. Yet given the fact that the previous covenants did not fully pay for sins, how could God declare Old Testament believers justified if sin remained unpunished (e.g., Gen. 15:6; Ps. 32:1–2)? Within the Old Testament, as we have demonstrated, this is a major *tension/problem*, given that God left "sins committed beforehand unpunished" (Rom 3:25b).[39] How can God declare ungodly people just before *him*, if God's righteous, holy demand was not fully satisfied? The answer is found in Christ, his work, and the new covenant, which would finally secure full atonement. Because of *who* Jesus is and *what* he has done, *he* has inaugurated a *new* covenant, which fulfills the previous ones.

HEBREWS 9:15–28. Second, think of Hebrews 9:15–28, which teaches the same truths. Central to the book of Hebrews is Christ's incomparable high-priestly, new covenant work, which fulfills all the previous covenants. Already in Hebrews 2:5–18, the author has located the necessity of Christ's incarnation and work in the context of Adam and creation. God the Son took on our humanity to undo the work of Adam and restore us to the purpose of our creation, and he did so by becoming our merciful and faithful High Priest. As the priestly theme is developed, especially in chapters 5–10, it is done in a twofold way, tied to typological and covenantal fulfillment. First, Christ is a *greater* priest because he *transcends* the entire Levitical order. Christ comes in a *new* order, namely,

in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7; see Psalm 110), which requires a change in covenants, given the organic covenant-priesthood relationship in biblical thought (Heb. 7:11–12). Second, Christ is a *greater* priest because he *fulfills* all that the Levitical priests typified (5:1–10; 8:1–10:18). For example, if the Levitical priest was selected by God, then so was Christ; if the priests offered a sacrifice, then so did he; and if they functioned as mediators of a covenant, then so did he, but in a far greater and more glorious way.

By the time we get to Hebrews 9:1–10:18, the author has already established that Christ has inaugurated the new covenant (Hebrews 8), but now he explains why the new covenant is so much better. The specific focus turns to Christ's greater sacrifice compared to the Levitical sacrifices. Yet in contrasting the old sacrifices with Christ's new covenant sacrifice, the rationale for Christ's cross is given, rooted in covenant inauguration. As Hebrews 9:1–14 explains, the old covenant sacrifices were never intended by God to be the final sacrifice. The tabernacle-temple served many purposes in the old covenant, but one of its primary tasks was to reveal, instruct, and point forward to Christ's coming and the entire new covenant era (9:8–10).[40] The limitations of the old system were apparent within the system. For example, the Levitical priest offered *daily* sacrifices, but the repetitious nature of the sacrifice revealed that they were never sufficient. Also, the Levitical priest could *never* enter the Most Holy Place, and even the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place only *once* a year and only by first offering a sacrifice for *his own sins*, thus revealing that the high priest too needed redemption. In all these ways, the old system was incomplete and insufficient in paying for our sin and giving us full access to God's covenantal presence. Ultimately, as the author states, the Levitical priest and his sacrifice "are not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying *until the time of the new order*" (9:9–10). But Christ and the sacrifice of himself are greater. As Hebrews 9:11–14 reminds us: Christ served not in the shadow but in the reality. He did not offer anything for himself since he was perfect. And he did not offer the "blood of goats and calves"; instead, he offered *himself* "once for all by

his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (9:12). By *his* one-time sacrifice, *eternal* redemption is accomplished, which at its heart requires the complete forgiveness of sins (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 10:1–18).

But the author does not stop here. He explains the *reason* why Christ had to die. By setting Christ's death in its new covenant context, he argues from covenant inauguration for the necessity of Christ's cross (Heb. 9:15–22). In 9:15, he states, "for this reason" (*kai dia touto*), which establishes a strong causal relationship between 9:11–14 and 9:15. Jesus not only fulfilled the priesthood-sacrifices of the old covenant, but he also fulfilled the *covenant* itself, thus bringing it to its God-appointed telos. Jesus's death is viewed as a *covenant sacrifice*, a representative death, first, for those under the penalties of the old covenant—"as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant" (9:15)—and, second, as the judicial grounds for the inauguration of the new covenant, which is bound up with the full forgiveness of sin. In an important way, Hebrews 9:15 is very similar in thought to Romans 3:25–26. In Romans 3, the rationale for Christ's cross was due to God's "postponement" of the full payment of human sin, even though God had already declared Old Testament believers just. In doing so, God's integrity was at stake unless the full satisfaction of sin was ultimately met. In a similar way, Hebrews argues that the people's sins were not fully paid for under the old system. Thus, for the new covenant to be inaugurated, which promised the permanent forgiveness of sin, a greater priest-sacrifice had to pay for the sin of God's people completely.[41]

This truth is reinforced in the parenthesis of Hebrews 9:16–22. These verses explain further *why* it was necessary for Christ to die. The cross's necessity is *rooted in covenant practice* based on patterns from the Old Testament. To inaugurate a covenant, it was necessary for animals to be cut in two and the parties of the covenant to walk between the pieces. In this way, the blood of the animal was brought forward, and the legal grounding of the covenant was established. With this in mind, Hebrews argues that the legal basis for the new covenant was established not by the blood of animals but by the blood of God's own dear Son.

Why, then, is the new covenant greater? The answer is simple yet glorious: it is greater because of our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as Christ is the antitype of the previous typological patterns and thus greater, so the new covenant he secures by his person and work is greater, and thus he is "able to save completely those who come to God through him" (Heb. 7:25a).[42]

Before we leave this section, there is one further point to highlight. The New Testament not only teaches that the new covenant promises are fulfilled in Christ, it also applies those promises to the church (2 Corinthians 3; Galatians 3–4; Hebrews 8; 10). Why is this significant? Because Jeremiah 31:31 says that the new covenant is made "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." Yet now in Christ, the New Testament applies it to the church, *consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles*. This New Testament application renders classic dispensationalism untenable since it argues that Jeremiah 31 does not apply to the church. Does Jeremiah 31, then, have a double fulfillment, as many within dispensationalism now claim? A spiritual fulfillment in the church but a literal, national fulfillment to Israel in the future? Or should we view the church as directly the new Israel? Minimally, one has to view the church as the renewed eschatological Israel, but better, one should view the church by her relationship to the Lord Jesus, her new covenant head. Because Jesus is the antitype of the previous covenant heads, *he*, as the true Israel, David's greater Son, Abraham's true seed, and the last Adam, constitutes a *new covenant* people, who are in continuity with believing saints of old but who are *new* in the covenant sense of a believing, transformed people. Thus, contrary to dispensationalism, a sharp ontological Israel-church distinction is untenable. Yet contrary to covenant theology, an equation of the two without noting their covenantal differences is also untenable. Israel, as a nation, serves many vital purposes in God's plan, yet it also functions as a type of a greater Son, Christ Jesus. Within national Israel there has always been a believing elect (Rom. 9:6), yet as a people, *through Christ Jesus*, they pointed forward to a renewed, transformed Israel, the church—an international kingdom of priests and a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9). However, it is a mistake, which covenant theology makes, to think that the church, as

God's new creation people, remains at present a mixed people, like Israel of old.

Jesus as God the Son Incarnate: The Antitypical Fulfillment of the Previous Sons

Central to the New Testament's presentation of Jesus is that he is the *Son of God*.[43] The title appears throughout the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 3:17; 11:25–27; 28:19; Mark 1:1, 11; 9:7; Luke 1:32; 3:38; 9:35) and occupies a central role in John's Gospel (John 3:16, 17, 35–36; 5:19–23; 6:40; 8:36; 14:13; 17:1).[44] *Son of God* is applied to Jesus at his baptism (Mark 1:11), temptation (Luke 4:9), and transfiguration (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). And the title is used to address Jesus by the centurion (Mark 15:39), the high priest (Mark 14:61), and the demons (Mark 3:11; 5:7). In fact, *Son of God* is so central to the identity of Christ that John wrote his Gospel "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31).

To grasp the significance of what Jesus meant by calling himself the Son of God, along with that of the New Testament authors employing the term, we must think in both functional and ontological terms. First, the New Testament does not hesitate to emphasize a strong functional aspect to Jesus's sonship, rooted in the typological figures of the Old Testament as developed through the progression of the covenants—Adam, Israel, and the Davidic king. Building on this pattern and fulfilling it, Jesus is the true Son, the antitype of the previous sons, who is the last Adam, the true Israel, and David's greater Son. And by virtue of his incarnation and work, Jesus *becomes* the Son and Lord. By the Son becoming flesh (John 1:1, 14), identifying with us, and obediently representing us as our covenant head and substitute, Jesus secures our eternal redemption and takes up the title *Son of God* at a particular time in history (see Rom. 1:3–4; Phil. 2:6–11).[45]

However, Jesus's incarnational sonship culminating in his representative and substitutionary death is only half the story. By virtue of *who he is from eternity*, Jesus has always been the Son in relation to the Father and Spirit (John 1:1, 18). In fact, Jesus's eternal sonship serves as the basis for his incarnational and redemptive sonship. Jesus regularly addressed God directly as "Father" (e.g., Matt. 11:25; Luke 23:46; John 11:41; 12:28) and

referred to him as “my Father” (e.g., Matt. 16:17; 26:29; Luke 22:29; John 15:8). Even by themselves, these expressions go beyond a relationship of obedience to a relationship of begottenness. As a child, before he had accomplished the works given to him by the Father, Jesus spoke of his heavenly sonship to his earthly parents: “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49). And just before his death, Jesus prayed to God on the basis of his own life as the eternal Son: “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (John 17:5).

Jesus, then, by identifying himself as the Son, claims that he is both the eternal Son (ontological) and the antitypical son (functional), who is the only true, faithful human covenant partner and, by virtue of his work, the only one who can restore his people to their image/sonship. In other words, understood within the Bible’s storyline, to say that Jesus is the Son of God in his person and work explains why in Christ alone *all* God’s covenant promises are fulfilled and are “Yes” and “Amen” (2 Cor. 1:20).

For example, Jesus as Son explains why *he* is David’s *greater* Son and why the Davidic covenant is fulfilled in him. As the Davidic king, Jesus receives the Spirit in full measure (Isa. 11:1–5; 61:1–2; Luke 4:14–21) *and*, by his work, secures the new covenant blessing of the greater work of the Spirit in the entire people of God, pouring out the Spirit on his people at Pentecost (Luke 3:16–17; John 20:21–23; Acts 2:1–36; 10:44–48; Gal. 3:1–6; 3:26–4:7) and thus fulfilling the prophetic expectation of the new covenant. In Christ, God’s kingdom has come, and even now, Jesus is seated as the Davidic king, leading history to its consummation at his return (Matt. 1:1; 28:18–20; Luke 1:31–33; Acts 2:32–36; Rom. 1:3–4; Eph. 1:9–10, 18–23; Phil. 2:9–11; Col. 1:15–20; Hebrews 1 [cf. Psalms 2; 45; 110]).

Also, Jesus as Son explains why *he* is the *true* Israel, who fulfills Israel’s role and brings the old covenant to its terminus in him (Gal. 3:1–4:7).[46] In Christ, the Son, Israel’s exile is brought to its end in a new exodus (his cross). In Christ, the Son and true Israel, *he* is what Israel was not, namely, the faithful, covenant partner. And in his obedience in life and death, he wins our eternal salvation (Matt. 2:15 [Hos. 11:1]; Matt. 3:15–17 [cf. Isa. 11:1–2; 42:1; 61:1]; Matt. 4:1–11; John 15:1–6 [Isa. 5:1–7]).[47] Jesus, as the

Davidic king who *is* Israel representatively, inherits all Israel's promises as given through the Abrahamic, old, and Davidic covenants and pours them out to his people (Rom. 8:17–27; Gal. 3:26–29; Eph. 1:11–14).

Or consider that Jesus as Son explains why *he* is Abraham's true seed (Gal. 3:16) and why *he* fulfills the Abrahamic promises in himself. *He* constitutes all those in faith union with him as true children of Abraham and inheritors of *all* the Abrahamic promises (Rom. 2:25–29; 4:9–22; Gal. 3:6–9; Heb. 2:14–18; Rev. 5:9–10).[48]

Furthermore, Jesus as Son explains why *he* is the last Adam and the first man of the new creation, who fulfills the foundational role of Adam and the creation covenant (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–22; Heb. 2:5–18; 8–10).[49] As noted above, in Jesus's conception, the Spirit, parallel to the first creation (Gen. 1:2), overshadows and brings about the beginning of the new creation (Luke 1:35). In his incarnation, Jesus is *not* "in Adam" as we are; instead, he is the beginning and head of the new creation. Moreover, in his work, Jesus fulfills Adam's role of ruling over the creation as the obedient royal son-priest (Heb. 2:5–18; cf. Psalm 8), evidenced by his healings and miracles, tied to the inauguration of *God's* kingdom (Matthew 8–9). And significantly, in Christ's *bodily* resurrection, the new creation is *now* visible *and physical*.[50] No wonder that in and through Christ we are now a "new creation" by the Spirit, both individually (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1–10) and corporately as the church (Eph. 2:11–21).

In every aspect of Jesus's life, ministry, and cross work, *he fulfills* all the promises, instruction, and typological patterns of the previous covenants and their covenant heads, thus bringing God's eternal plan to its intended end.[51] Whether he is viewed as David's greater Son, the true obedient Israel, a greater than Moses (Heb. 3:1–6), the fulfillment of the temple (John 2:19–22), or the one who fulfills the priestly sacrifices in his one-time offering of himself as our Great High Priest (Heb. 9:1–10:18), *all* God's promises find their fulfillment, terminus, and "summing up" in him (Eph. 1:9–10). What the Old Testament Prophets anticipated in the coming of Yahweh and his Messiah, tied to the dawning of God's saving reign through the new covenant, is *now* here in Jesus. Yet it is important to think about the nature of *this* fulfillment in terms of inaugurated eschatology.

Inaugurated Eschatology and the Nature of Fulfillment in Christ

The New Testament clarifies how Christ fulfills all the Old Testament promises and covenants. The Old Testament prophets speak of the *one* coming of Yahweh and his Messiah to consummate all things. This one coming will result in the end of "this present age" (characterized by sin, death, and opposition to God) *and* the beginning of "the last days" / "the age to come" (characterized by resurrection life, forgiveness of sin, the defeat of God's enemies, and the arrival of a new covenant bound up with the new creation).[52]

Additionally, the Old Testament prophets think of the age to come in terms of an *entire package*. Minimally, when Yahweh and Messiah come and the new covenant is established, we will see the following: the arrival of God's saving reign, the pouring out of the Spirit, a new temple, the full forgiveness of sin, the judgment and defeat of God's enemies, resurrection life, eschatological rest, a restored Israel, a transformed people composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, and a new creation.[53]

As the New Testament opens, it never contravenes this Old Testament expectation, but it does modify the Old Testament outlook in what is famously known as *inaugurated eschatology*. The New Testament announces that in Christ Jesus, the promised age is now here ("already") because *he* has, in his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost, inaugurated God's kingdom through the new covenant. Yet the full consummation of what the Old Testament prophets anticipated and predicted is "not yet" here in its fullness.[54] Inaugurated eschatology and the already–not yet tension not only characterizes the basic framework of New Testament eschatology but also functions in two other important ways.

First, inaugurated eschatology helps explain why and how Old Testament promises, hopes, expectations, and covenants are *fulfilled* in Christ *and* applied to the church.[55] The *why* is due to *who* Jesus is as God the Son incarnate and his glorious triumphant cross work for us. The *how* is not only in terms of the already–not yet relationship but also in underscoring *how* fulfillment in Christ has resulted in significant epochal-covenantal changes in redemptive history associated with the dawning of the new

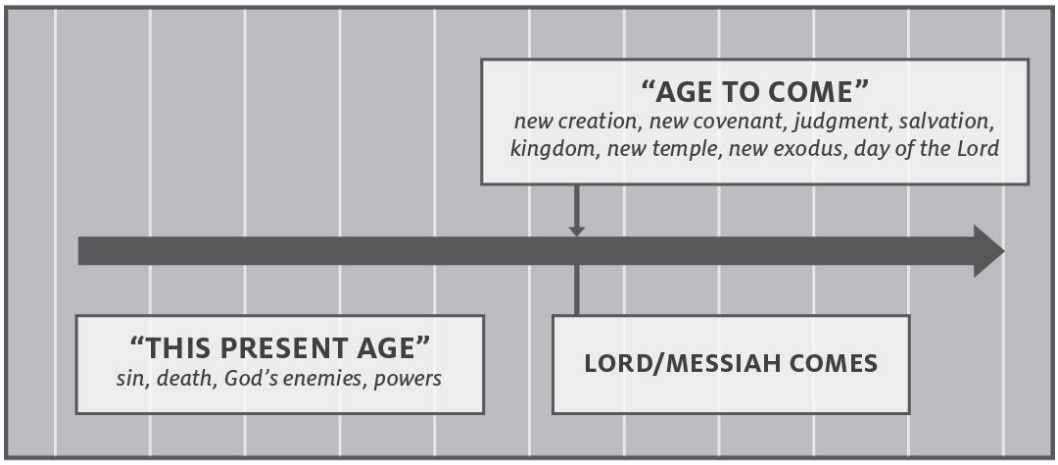
covenant. Although the New Testament continues the Old Testament's basic storyline,[56] building on the progression of the covenants, once Christ comes —the one whom all the promises, types, and covenants pointed forward to —it is not surprising that many of the themes that were basic to the Old Testament have now been transposed and transformed. In light of the epochal-covenantal shift Christ has inaugurated, D. A. Carson notes a few examples of the kind of transposition that has taken place:

> "Kingdom" no longer primarily conjures up a theocratic state in which God rules by his human vassal in the Davidic dynasty. It conjures up the immediate transforming reign of God, dawning now in the ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and session of Jesus, the promised Messiah, and consummated at his return. Eschatology is thereby transformed. The locus of the people of God is no longer national and tribal; it is international, transracial, transcultural. If the Old Testament prophets constantly look forward to the day when God will act decisively, the New Testament writers announce that God has acted decisively, and that this is "good news," gospel, of universal, eternal significance and stellar importance. Thus kingdom, Christology, eschatology, church, gospel, become dominant terms or themes. Temple, priest, sacrifice, law, and much more are transposed; national and tribal outlooks gradually fade from view.[57]

Second, inaugurated eschatology also explains how the New Testament modifies, or better, clarifies, the basic timeline of the Old Testament to speak of *two* comings of Christ. The Old Testament distinguished between "this present age"—an age characterized by sin, death, and opposition to God as represented by earthly *kingdoms*—and the "age to come"—an age in which the covenant Lord will come to rescue his people through his Messiah, the Davidic king, and inaugurate his *kingdom through the new covenant*. The relationships between these two ages, as David Wells explains, is *one of chronological sequence*. He writes, "This αἰών ['age'] ended with the coming to earth of the Messiah, and with his arrival there began the heavenly αἰών."[58] For this reason, from an Old Testament view, there is only *one* coming of Yahweh and his Messiah-son-king in grace and

power to usher in the “last days” / “age to come”—an age characterized by the eschatological hope of the prophets (see figure 17.1).

Figure 17.1 Old Testament

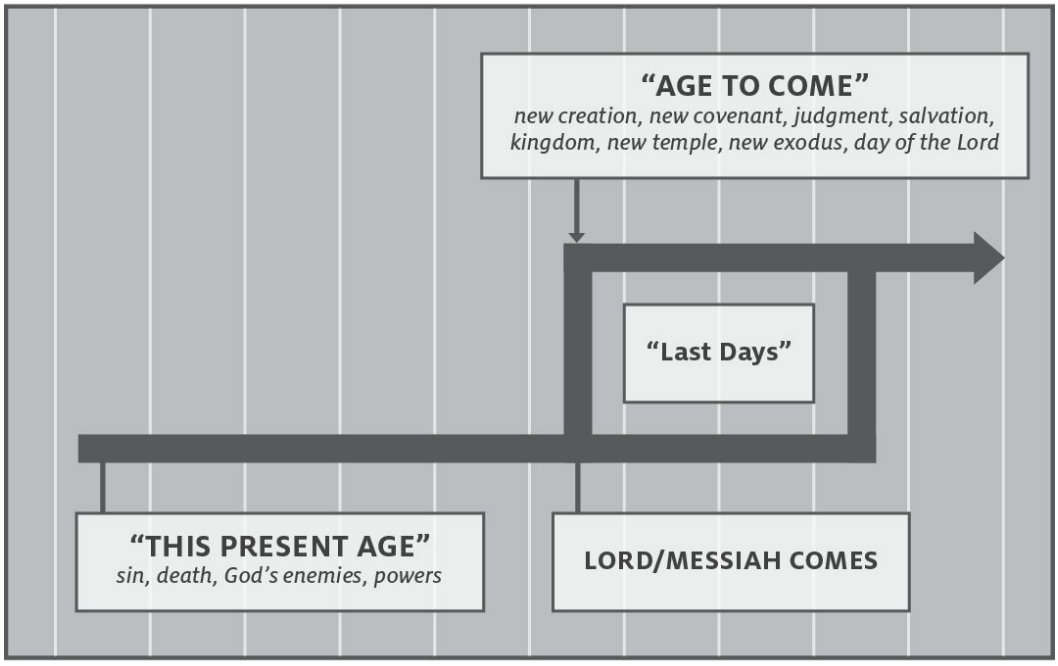


However, the New Testament modifies this basic redemptive-historical timeline and now speaks of *two* comings of Christ and an overlap of the ages. In Christ’s first coming, Jesus appears as Yahweh in relation to his Father *and* as Messiah, and he brings all that the Old Testament associates with the “age to come” into “this present age” *in principle*, just as the prophets anticipated. Yet the New Testament also teaches that the *consummation* of the “age to come” awaits Christ’s *second* coming. Between these two comings, our Lord is currently reigning over his creation-kingdom, and the realities of life in the age to come have *already* come into this present age but *not yet* in full. This present age, then, characterized by sin and death, continues until Christ’s second coming even though he has already inaugurated the age to come, hence the overlap of the ages.

Sometimes this overlap of the ages is illustrated by a World War II analogy between D-day and V-day.[59] In World War II, D-day brought about an incredible victory for the Allied troops. As a result of that day, the enemy was decisively defeated, and it was only a matter of time before final victory would be achieved, even though the war was not yet over. D-day is then compared to the first coming of Christ, which, in principle, has ushered in the age to come but not yet in its fullness. Thus, in Christ’s first coming

God's promise of redemption has now been realized. God's sovereign saving reign—his kingdom—has broken into this world, and along with it have come the new covenant and the new creation. Sin, death, and the power of the Evil One have been destroyed. It is only a matter of time before final victory is won; in principle, the victory has been won, and it is now guaranteed. Yet our D-day still awaits our V-day, that is, our final victory when Christ comes again and consummates what he began. In this overlap of the ages, then, even though we as God's people are no longer identified with this present age because we have been transferred from being "in Adam" to being "in Christ" (Rom. 5:12–21; Eph. 2:1–10), and even though we are now participants of the future age and have eternal life, justification before God, and the transforming power of the Spirit (all realities associated with the age to come), we still await the fullness of Christ's victory and the arrival of his kingdom in consummated glory. But what Christ has won in his first advent is now our guarantee and pledge that the consummated age is not a vain hope but a certainty. In light of this, we can draw the New Testament restructuring of the Old Testament time line as follows (see figure 17.2):

Figure 17.2 New Testament



Inaugurated Eschatology as the New Testament Framework

Given the New Testament's teaching of inaugurated eschatology and its relationship to consummated eschatology, it is not an overstatement to say that it forms the entire context within which the New Testament expounds how Christ fulfills all the promises, hopes, and expectations of the Old Testament. One cannot understand the nature of the kingdom, eternal life, the gift of the Spirit, the church, salvation, eschatology, and, most importantly, Christ's person and work, apart from this larger framework.[60] This is one of the reasons why inaugurated eschatology has almost become a given within evangelical theology.[61] To say that Christ has *fulfilled* all God's plans and purposes is another way of explaining how *he alone* has ushered in the promised age to come and all that is associated with that age, which is pregnant with Christological import and the warrant for the *newness* and the greater nature of the new covenant.

In the New Testament, the already–not yet tension is presented in a number of ways. For example, we see it in regard to the coming of God's kingdom and saving rule in Christ. The New Testament teaches that the Creator–covenant Lord who rules over all (e.g., Pss. 93:1; 97:1; 99:1; 103:19; Dan. 4:34–35) has now brought his saving reign and rule to this fallen world in Christ, as evidenced by the coming of the Spirit (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20) and the miraculous signs and preaching (Luke 4:16–30; cf. Isa. 61:1–2; 58:6; 29:18). Truly in Jesus, as he himself announces, God's sovereign, saving rule has broken into this world (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14–15). Yet even though the kingdom is now here, Jesus still teaches us to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10), and he speaks to his disciples of a future day when he will come "in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:28; Luke 23:51), "which clearly refers to the future fulfillment of the kingdom promise."[62] Because it is in "the present evil age" (Gal. 1:4), then, that Christ sits on the throne of heaven—"far above all rule and authority and power and dominion . . . not only in this age but also in the one to come" (Eph. 1:21)—there is both continuity and discontinuity between his present and future rule. His future rule is here *in kind* (continuity), and the present kingdom of Christ will increase *unto completion* (discontinuity) at his return.

What is true regarding the already–not yet dynamic of Christ's rule and the inauguration of the kingdom is also true of *the entire package* of prophetic anticipation of the age to come. For example, think about how the New Testament presents the pouring out of the promised Holy Spirit, associated with the new covenant age. Because Jesus is the risen and exalted Davidic king and Lord, *he* pours out the *promised* Spirit on his new covenant people, in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:32–36; cf. Luke 24:46–51; John 14:15–17). Yet the present gift of the Spirit is the *arrabōn*, the deposit and guarantee of our future inheritance awaiting us in the consummation (Eph. 1:13–14).[63] Thus, the reception of the Spirit signals that the Old Testament restoration promises, first given to Israel, are *now* taking place in Christ *and* his people (the church), which entails that everyone *in Christ* has the Spirit and is *now* a participant in the promised age and a partaker of the powers of the age to come.[64] Yet the New Testament insists that what the Spirit gives is only a foretaste of far greater blessings to come. As Anthony Hoekema summarizes,

> We may say that in the possession of the Spirit we who are in Christ have a foretaste of the blessings of the age to come, and a pledge and guarantee of the resurrection of the body. Yet we have only the firstfruits. We look forward to the final consummation of the kingdom of God, when we shall enjoy these blessings to the full.[65]

We can think of other Old Testament promises that are here *now* yet still await their final consummation in their fullness. In Christ, we are *now* justified and forgiven of our sin, partakers of new covenant blessings (Jer. 31:34; Rom. 3:21–26; 8:1), yet we will still publicly stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Currently, in Christ, we are raised from spiritual death to life, adopted, redeemed, reconciled, and holy (Rom. 8:9–17; 2 Cor. 5:16–21; Eph. 1:7–8; 2:1–10). Yet we still await our bodily resurrection at Christ's return, the full benefits of our adoption and inheritance, and our glorification (Rom. 8:18–27; 1 Cor. 15:35–58; Eph. 1:13–14; 1 Pet. 1:3–9). In Christ, we *now* experience salvation rest (Matt. 11:28–30; Heb. 3:7–4:11)—a rest that was introduced in creation, lost in the fall, and typologically foreshadowed in the Sabbath and entrance into the

land, but is *now* entered into by faith in Christ (Heb. 4:1–11). Yet the fullness of our covenant rest waits the dawning of the new creation (Heb. 11:16; 12:22–29). Related to our rest, *in Christ*—the antitype of the temple (John 2:19–22)—new covenant believers are *now*, individually and corporately, God's temple indwelt by the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:5). Yet we still await the new creation, where there is no temple, "because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Rev. 21:22).

Even the new creation promise is fulfilled in an already–not yet way. Our Lord is the first man of the new creation in his incarnation *and* resurrection. G. K. Beale notes, "Christ's resurrection . . . placed him into the beginning of the new creation. The resurrected Christ is not merely spiritually the inauguration of the new cosmos, but he is literally its beginning, since he was resurrected with a physical, newly created body."[66] And in union with Christ by the Spirit, we, individually and corporately, are *now* a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1–21), although we wait for a new creation where we will live forever and fulfill our role as image-sons.

Lastly, note how the new covenant promise of a transformed, obedient people participates in the already–not yet dynamic. The prophets anticipate that Messiah's new covenant people (composed of believing Jews and Gentiles) will *not* be like Israel (Jer. 31:29–32). Why? Because God will circumcise their hearts (Deut. 30:1–6; Jer. 31:33) by the Spirit's resurrection work (Ezek. 36:25–27; 37), and by the same Spirit, God will empower/gift the *entire* community (Joel 2:28–32; cf. Num. 11:29). The end result is a transformed community of people who will *all* savingly know God and experience the full and complete forgiveness of their sins (Jer. 31:34). In Christ, this is fulfilled in God's people, individually and corporately. In fact, a Christian is *now* no longer "in Adam" but "in Christ," which entails that *all* new covenant blessings are ours *now*: we are born of and empowered by the Spirit, we are forgiven of our sin, and we know God. Yet we still await our glorification, resurrection bodies, and a greater experience of the knowledge of God in the consummated new creation.

Inaugurated Eschatology in Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology

Inaugurated eschatology, then, is important in thinking about *how* Christ fulfills all God's promises as unfolded through the covenants. What the Old Testament prophets looked forward to has now come in Christ, yet we await the fullness of what Jesus has achieved at his return. As noted, within evangelical theology inaugurated eschatology is a kind of "assured result of scholarship" that most affirm. Yet despite its widespread acceptance, even by various dispensational and covenant theologians, we are convinced that inaugurated eschatology is often applied inconsistently, especially *at the specific points central to dispensationalism and covenant theology*. This is particularly evident in each view's understanding of the Israel-church relationship, an issue that we argued in chapter 3 was a central point of division between the two theological systems.

On the one hand, dispensationalism distinguishes Israel from the church ontologically so that in the future, national Israel must receive certain promises tied to the land, "distinct" from believing Gentile nations. The church is *not* viewed as the renewed, eschatological Israel that receives *all* the promises, including the inheritance of the land, which is ultimately fulfilled in the new creation. So although Jeremiah speaks of the recipients of the new covenant as "the house of Israel and Judah" (Jer. 31:31) and the New Testament clearly applies Jeremiah 31 to the church (Hebrews 8; 10; cf. 2 Corinthians 3; Galatians 3–4), many dispensationalists explain this New Testament interpretation by appealing to inaugurated eschatology. In the *already*, the new covenant is *spiritually* applied to the church, but in the *not yet*, the new covenant will be applied *literally* to national Israel in the land. In the future, Israel, *as a nation*, will receive her "distinct" promises and privileges (tied to the land) differently from believing Gentile nations.[67]

This view has at least two problems. First, it assumes a faulty understanding of the Israel-church relationship because it does not properly follow the Bible's covenantal progression. It does not start with creation/Adam and then situate Israel and her role within the covenantal storyline. It does not consistently see how Christ, as David's greater Son, *is* the true Israel and last Adam, and how *he* fulfills *all* God's promises.[68] In turn, it fails to view Messiah's people, the church, consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles, as receiving *all* the Old Testament promises equally *as*

the one new man (Eph. 2:11–21), a point we will return to below. No doubt, in Christ, people do not lose their ethnicity and gender; we are embodied creatures. Yet the church is not merely a *spiritual* installment of the final state, which results in discrete believing nations receiving slightly different promises and privileges. Within God's new covenant community, *all* are "co-inheritors" and "co-partakers" of God's promises in Messiah Jesus (Eph. 3:6; cf. 2:12).[69] As Paul reminds us, God's promise, which includes our inheritance, "depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations'" (Rom. 4:16–17a). In the church, Christ fulfills all God's promises to Abraham, because Christ—Abraham's true seed (Gal. 3:16), Israel's king, and the last Adam—has secured our salvation and every blessing for redeemed Jews and Gentiles alike, who together are Abraham's spiritual seed (Gal. 3:29).[70]

Second, regarding inaugurated eschatology, dispensationalists appeal to it inconsistently to buttress their specific view of the Israel-church relationship. The New Testament teaches that *all* new covenant promises and blessings, as an entire package, are *now* here in Christ *and* applied to the church *in principle*. No doubt, we await the *fullness* of those same blessings at Christ's return, but the covenant privileges are a unit that are *now* here in inaugurated form. It is difficult, then, to argue that various *spiritual* blessings of the new covenant are *now* here *in the church* but that the material-physical blessings of the new covenant are still *future* and *for national Israel*. This not only assumes the Israel-church distinction of dispensationalism, which we contend is incorrect, but also fails to recognize that both the material-physical *and* spiritual blessings of the new covenant are *now* here in Christ *and* applied to the church, although we still await the fullness of both.[71] For example, think once again about how the new covenant expectation of the new creation is fulfilled in an already–not yet way. In Christ, the new creation is fulfilled in his incarnation *and* resurrection.[72] Then, in union with Christ by the Spirit, we, individually and corporately, are *now* the "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1–21),

although we wait for the new creation as a place. Inaugurated eschatology does not divide up the blessings of the new covenant as dispensationalism does.

On the other hand, covenant theology insists on the *continuity* between Israel and the church, especially regarding its *nature*. The church, like Israel, is a mixed people, constituted by believers and unbelievers so that the locus of the covenant community and the locus of the elect are distinct *and* the continuity of covenant signs continues from circumcision to baptism, hence the warrant for paedobaptism. But this view seems to conflict with the Old Testament expectation that Messiah's people will be a *regenerate* people who will *all* be born/empowered/indwelt by the Spirit, *know* God, and experience the *full* forgiveness of their sins. Covenant theologians admit that Jeremiah 31:31–34 anticipates such a people; however, to explain *why* the church is *at present* still mixed, they appeal to inaugurated eschatology. Richard Pratt, for example, argues that Jeremiah 31's anticipation of an *entire* people who are *regenerate* is realized only in the *not yet*. *At present*, the church remains a people constituted by true believers *and* sanctified unbelievers.[73] G. K. Beale argues that *at present* the church is different from Israel since she is more "democratized"—namely, there is no categorical distinction between priests and prophets and the rest of God's people. But the church *now* remains a mixed people; her *nature* as an entire regenerate people awaits the *not yet*.[74]

This view also has two problems. First, it does not sufficiently account for the relationship of Christ—the head of the new covenant—to his people. Through covenantal progression, the genealogical principle—namely, the relationship between the covenant mediator and his seed—is transformed in the new covenant. In the previous covenants, the relationship is more biological-natural (e.g., Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, David), but now in Christ, the relationship is *spiritual*, that is, of the Spirit. One is *in Christ and the new covenant* not by natural-biological birth or a circumcision of the flesh but by spiritual rebirth and faith. Only those in faith union with Christ are *his* family and thus savingly know God. We will develop this argument further in chapter 19.

Second, regarding inaugurated eschatology, similar to dispensationalism (but for different reasons), covenant theology fails to see how *all* new covenant blessings are *now* here in Christ *and* applied to the church *in principle*. Now that Christ has come, one is either in the new covenant or not, and to be *in* the new covenant entails that one *now knows* God, is *forgiven* of his or her sins, and is *circumcised in heart*. In other words, *all* these new covenant blessings come to us as a unit fulfilled in Christ. Once again, it is no doubt true that the fullness of new covenant blessings is still future, but *already*, in Christ, both individually and corporately, we currently enjoy and partake of the blessings of the future age, which is now here. For the church, this entails that she is a regenerate people *now* since in Christ, *all* God's promises are *here* in him (2 Cor. 1:20). In fact, as James White astutely notes, in speaking of new covenant fulfillment in Christ, the author of Hebrews never argues that the new covenant is only partially here or that it "is only *partly* better now, and will get *much* better in the future."[75] Instead, the author argues that the new covenant "has been enacted" (*nenomothetētai*, perfect tense), which speaks of a completed action and a present reality.[76] The new covenant, then, is *now* here in Christ's person and work; what has resulted is a *new* people who *all* savingly know God *and* the forgiveness of their sins.

But if we argue that the new covenant is only partially *here* or partially *fulfilled*, then we have to bifurcate its blessings. Yet this hardly makes sense of how the author of Hebrews applies Christ's perfect once-for-all-time work when he writes, "For by a single offering [Christ] has perfected [*teteleiōken*, perfect tense] for all time those who are being sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). As Beale and others admit, this text demands that we acknowledge that our justification is *inaugurated*,[77] but if one blessing of the new covenant is *now* here, then on what basis do we argue that other blessings are still future, such as the reality of a transformed, regenerate people? Instead, it is better to see that both new covenant blessings are *now* here, yet our glorification as a justified people, both individually and corporately, is still future. The church, then, as God's *new* covenant people, is different from Israel in her *nature*, *now* and *forever*. In fact, it is this Israel-church *difference*, tied to their covenantal differences, that explains

why baptism, as a new covenant sign, signifies something different from circumcision *and* why it is to be applied only to those who know God, have circumcised hearts, and are forgiven of their sins.

The Church Receives All God's Promises in Christ

It is not an overstatement to say that the church is central to God's redemptive plan and our Lord's entire work. For example, our Lord Jesus as the Messiah reminds us how central the church is to his messianic mission with these famous words: "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). By this time in his ministry, Jesus has already begun to gather his messianic community by calling the twelve disciples and constituting them as the new Israel (Matt. 4:18–22; 10:1–4) in relation to him, the true Israel (Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15).[78] Also, the future tense of "I will build" (*oikodomēsō*) looks ahead to the time after Jesus's cross and resurrection when the promised Spirit is poured out at Pentecost, thus signaling the arrival of the new covenant age. In fact, as Christ's redemptive mission unfolds in the book of Acts, Jesus's messianic people (*ekklēsia*) begins with the Twelve and other believing Jews (Acts 1–2), reunites Israel with the conversion of the Samaritans (Acts 8), and then incorporates into it believing Gentiles, which together constitute the church (Acts 10; cf. Eph. 2:11–21). In Christ, the church as his people has entered God's kingdom through the new covenant, and she now faithfully lives, worships, and proclaims the gospel to the ends of the earth as she awaits Christ's return. Central to Jesus's work, then, is the fulfillment of his Father's will by redeeming, establishing, and building his church.

If the church is central to Christ's work, then it follows that she is also central to the entirety of our triune God's redemptive plan. For example, Paul can say that due to Jesus's triumphant work, the Father has "put everything under [Christ's] feet and appointed [Christ] as head over everything *for the church*" (Eph. 1:22). Christ's lordship over the universe is for the benefit of his people, which certainly places the church at the center of God's redemptive purposes. This truth is also borne out in Ephesians 3:1–10, where Paul identifies the "mystery" of God—that is,

God's eternal plan, which was hidden in ages past but is now revealed and made known in Christ—with the church.[79] As Paul proclaims the "incalculable riches of the Messiah" (3:8), it results in the birth and growth of the church. The "mystery" is not an abstraction. In Christ and his church it takes on concrete shape before our eyes, as a new multiethnic humanity is formed and grows, consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles, who display "God's multifaceted wisdom" (3:10). The church is the public display of God's power, grace, and wisdom and thus is central to God's entire redemptive plan.[80]

Given the centrality of the church to God's plan and Christ's triumphant work as our new covenant head, there is an inseparable relationship between Christ and his people, signified by our union with Christ. All that Christ has achieved is for the benefit of the church, and as an entire church without distinction, she has received *all* God's promises *in him*. Since the new covenant is the fulfillment of the previous covenants, the church, as God's *new covenant* kingdom people, is the community that continues forever, while all the kingdoms of this world fade away and ultimately come under divine judgment (Revelation 18–22).

Two crucial entailments follow from the unbreakable Christ-church relation, which explains why the church receives *all* God's promises *in Christ*. First, the church is part of the *one* people of God (elect) across time, yet it is covenantally *new* and constituted *now* as a transformed, regenerate community and not a mixed people in the present time (against covenant theology). Second, the church is God's *new creation* eschatological community that remains *forever*, consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles, who, in Christ, equally and fully receive *all* God's promises. The church is *not* a parenthesis in God's plan or merely a *present* illustration of what Israel as a nation and the Gentile nations will be like in the millennium and consummation as recipients of "distinct" blessings (against dispensationalism). Three points will summarize the New Testament data that support these two entailments and distinguish progressive covenantalism from both dispensational and covenant theology *on these specific points* due to a different way of "putting together" the Bible's progression of the covenants.

The Church Is Part of the One People of God

From the outset, it is important to establish that there is only *one* people of God (elect) across time (against some forms of dispensationalism).[81] Most people today agree on this point because of the abundant data in favor of this claim. For example, under the Old Testament covenants, God's people were saved by grace through faith in the promises of God, and the same is true under the new covenant, yet now there is greater knowledge and clarity regarding how God's promises reach their terminus and fulfillment in Christ (Gen. 15:6; Luke 24:25–27; Rom. 4:9–12; Gal. 3:6–4:7; Heb. 11:8–19). "Promise" has given way to "fulfillment" so that now one cannot savingly know God apart from faith in Christ (John 5:23; Acts 4:12; cf. 1 John 2:23; 4:2–3).

Furthermore, Scripture speaks of the *one* people of God by assuming a genuine continuity between Old and New Testament saints in the language used to describe each (see Rom. 1:1–2, 11; Phil. 3:3, 7, 9). Descriptions of Israel as God's covenant people are applied to the church *through her identification with Christ*. For example, think of how Old Testament language describing Israel (Ex. 19:6; Deut. 32:15; 33:12; Isa. 43:20–21; 44:2; Hos. 1:6, 9; 2:1, 23) and Old Testament texts that were applied to Israel (Jer. 31:31–34; Hos. 1:10–11) are now applied to the church (Rom. 9:24–26; Gal. 3:26–29; 1 Thess. 1:4; cf. Eph. 2:12, 19; 3:4–6; Heb. 8:6–13; 1 Pet. 2:9–10). Or think of how the language of "assembly" (Heb. *qāhāl*; Gk. *ekklēsia*) is applied to both Israel and the church (Deut. 4:10; Josh. 24:1, 25; Isa. 2:2–4; Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 11:18; Heb. 10:25). These textual data serve as strong evidence in favor of the claim that there is only *one* people of God throughout the ages.[82]

However, affirming this point does *not* entail that Israel and the church are the same kind of community. Through Jesus, the last Adam and true Israel, the church may be viewed as the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), yet there are significant redemptive-historical differences.[83] The church is covenantally *new* and constituted as a believing, regenerate people and not a mixed community. Evidence for this claim is first found *in the Old Testament* and later confirmed in the New Testament's description of the church, a point to which we now turn.

The Church Is Covenantally New and Constituted as a Regenerate People

To state that the church is "God's new covenant people" is to say a lot, given the progression of the covenants and their fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant. However, our central point is that the church is *new* and *at present* constituted as a regenerate people in contrast to Israel. Three lines of data support this point.

The Church Is New as a Transformed People

In chapter 16, we noted that the Old Testament anticipated that the new covenant would be "new" in at least three ways. First, the new covenant is *new* by changing the *structure* of God's people. Despite remnant themes and an emphasis on individual believers under the old covenant, there God dealt with his people primarily in a mediated or representative structure, through specially called mediators/representatives—prophets, priests, and kings. Related to this, the Old Testament taught that God's Spirit was poured out on these leaders in an empowering/gifting sense, which was not true of every individual believer. But Jeremiah and the prophets signal a *structural* change in the covenant people. *All* God's people in the covenant will know him, from the least to the greatest, and in relation to the new covenant mediator (who we now know is Christ), *all* God's people will become prophets, priests, and servant-kings, which in turn will result in God's new covenant people *keeping* the covenant (Jer. 31:29–34). Evidence for this kind of change is also underscored by the prophetic anticipation of the Spirit's unique work in the "age to come." The Prophets speak of an increased and heightened work of the Spirit, first on the messianic king (Isa. 11:1–3; 49:1–2; 61:1–3) and then on Messiah's people (Joel 2:28–32; cf. Num. 11:27–29), given the inseparable relationship between Messiah and his people. In light of the Old Testament context, this prophetic teaching anticipates a *universal* distribution of the Spirit on Messiah's people in this empowering/gifting sense so that *all* those in the new covenant will have the Spirit and *every* member will be gifted for service.

Second, the Old Testament also anticipates that the new covenant is *new* by changing the *nature* of God's people. Jeremiah signals this in two ways. First, he contrasts the new covenant with the old, and second, he tells us

why the new is better due to the heart change of its people. Different from the mixed community of Israel, *all* people in the new covenant will know God, have the law written on their hearts, and experience the full forgiveness of their sins (Jer. 31:32–34; cf. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25; Ezek. 11:19–20; 36:25–27). This does *not* mean that there were no regenerate people in the Old Testament. Instead, it signals that *all* members of the new covenant will stand justified before God and know the transforming work of the Spirit in their lives. Within national Israel there were many believers saved by grace through faith in the promises of God (which looked forward to Christ), but as an *entire* community not all Israel was Israel (Rom. 9:6). But this is *not* what is anticipated of those under the new covenant.

Third, the Old Testament anticipated that the new covenant is *new* by changing the *sacrifice* made for God's people, signaled by the promise of the complete forgiveness of our sin (Jer. 31:34).

In these three areas, the Old Testament anticipates that the new covenant is really *new*, ultimately because of its unique covenant head/mediator, Christ Jesus. What the Old Testament predicts is what the New Testament testifies is now here. For example, think of the New Testament's emphasis on the scope of the Spirit's work in the *entire* new covenant people, thus signaling a *structural* change in the church. As the New Testament opens, John the Baptist announces this coming age (Matt. 3:11), the cross work of Christ procures and secures it (John 7:39; 16:7; Acts 2:33), and Pentecost inaugurates it with Christ pouring out his Spirit on the entire community (Acts 2). As the Spirit is given, God's people are not only made alive (regeneration, or circumcision of the heart), but they are empowered with gifts for ministry, and the entire church mediates the knowledge of God to the world as a kingdom of priests (1 Cor. 12:4–7; 1 Pet. 2:9–10). The role Israel was supposed to play is now fulfilled in the entire church, by the Spirit.[84] Everyone within the new covenant community is given the Spirit as a seal, down payment, and guarantee of the promised inheritance (Eph. 1:13–14). To be a member of the church is to be united to Christ and to have the Spirit. In fact, *not* to have the Spirit is *not* to have Christ or to be his people (Rom. 8:9).

Once again, this is *not* to say that there were no believers prior to Pentecost or that the Spirit was not active in the Old Testament. The lives of people like Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Hannah, Ruth, David, and others attest otherwise. Yet what is *new* about the new covenant as demonstrated at Pentecost is the *extent* to which the Spirit was given, the fact that he was given to people permanently, and the fact that the *entire* community received the promised Holy Spirit, fulfilling the words of both the prophet Joel and our Lord (Joel 2:28–32; Acts 1:4–5; cf. John 7:37–39). Pentecost also fulfilled what Moses longed for centuries before: "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" (Num. 11:29). On that occasion the Lord had taken the Spirit that was on Moses and put the Spirit on the seventy elders of Israel. But what Israel ultimately needed was not more leaders or even more Spirit-endued leaders. The nation needed to know the Lord and be filled with the Spirit *as an entire people*. Then, at Pentecost, Moses's hopes were realized. The Spirit was abundantly poured out on *all* members of the covenant community, which suggests that what the Old Testament anticipated has now been fulfilled in Christ and the church.

Furthermore, think about how the New Testament teaches that the *nature* of God's people as an entire community has changed due to the final *sacrifice* of Christ. On the basis of Christ's work (Rom. 3:21–31), those who have entered God's saving reign and have become *his* people are those who have been born of the Spirit (John 1:12–13; 3:1–21), have repented of their sin and believed in Christ, and by union with Christ have been declared just before God and adopted into God's family (Rom. 3:21–26; 5:1–11; 8:1–2; Gal. 3:26–4:7). In other words, such people have been brought from death to life, have been transferred from being "in Adam" to being "in Christ," and have now begun to experience in their lives the promised blessings of the new covenant (Rom. 5:12–21; Eph. 2:1–10; Col. 1:13–14, 21–23; 2:6–15). Due to Christ's work, the new covenant as a package is *now* here. Although we await the fullness of what Christ has inaugurated, the anticipated new covenant changes of the *structure* and *nature* of God's people tied to the better *sacrifice* of our Lord Jesus are *here* (Hebrews 8–10). To support this point, James White refers to the use of the

perfect passive in Hebrews 8:6—God "has enacted"—to underscore the fact that the new covenant is here now. As White rightly comments,

> There is nothing in the text that would lead us to believe that the full establishment of this covenant is yet future, for such would destroy the present apologetic concern of the author; likewise, he will complete his citation of Jeremiah 31 by asserting the obsolete nature of the first covenant, which leaves one to have to theorize, without textual basis, about some kind of intermediate covenantal state if one does not accept the full establishment of the new covenant as seen in the term νενομοθέτηται, "has been enacted."[85]

There are many implications of this point, but the central one to emphasize now is that the church, as God's new covenant community, is a transformed, regenerate people and not a mixed community. Under the new covenant, the locus of the covenant community and the locus of the redeemed are one, precisely unlike Israel. Due to the fulfillment work of Christ, the church is *new* in her *structure* and *nature*. In Christ, *his* new covenant people are here, the Spirit has been poured out on the entire community (Acts 2), *all* those in the church know God in a direct and immediate fashion (Eph. 2:18; Heb. 10:19–25), and *all* are declared forgiven of their sins before God (Rom. 8:1). Although we wait for the consummated state, *at present* we enjoy and live out what it means to be God's *new* people.

The Church Is the New Eschatological Assembly

Further evidence to support the claim that the church is *new* as a transformed, regenerate people is the New Testament's description of the church as an *eschatological* and *gathered* (*ekklēsia*) community.[86]

The New Testament identifies the church with the dawning of the kingdom and the ushering in of the "age to come," which has now arrived in Christ and which he will consummate at his return. As such, the church is part of the already–not yet tension in the New Testament. Her identity is not with "this present age" (identified with Adam) but with the "age to come" (identified with Christ).[87] As a result of Christ's work, those in faith union with Christ are now citizens of the new, heavenly Jerusalem (our final

destination tied to the new creation). In one sense this new Jerusalem is still future, but in a profound sense, it is already here.

This is the point of Hebrews 12:18–29. In contrast to the Israelites who assembled at Sinai (12:18–21), new covenant believers have *already* gathered to meet God at the "heavenly" Jerusalem (12:22–24) tied to the new creation.[88] As the church and participants of the "age to come" (see Col. 1:18; cf. Heb. 12:22–24),[89] we begin to enjoy by faith the privileges of that city that is still future (Heb. 13:14). We wait for Christ's return, but as the gathered/assembled people of God, we already experience the realities of the end, though not yet in its fullness.

Three conclusions result from these biblical truths for our understanding of the *newness* of the church. The first pertains to the relationship between the local church and the eschatological, heavenly gathering. D. A. Carson spells out this relationship by first saying what the local church is *not*. He writes, "Each local church is not seen primarily as one member parallel to a lot of other member churches, together constituting one body, one church; nor is each local church seen as the body of Christ parallel to other earthly churches that are also the body of Christ—as if Christ had many bodies."[90] On the flip side, we should think of the relationship in this way:

> Each church is the full manifestation in space and time of the one, true, heavenly, eschatological, new covenant church. Local churches should see themselves as outcroppings of heaven, analogies of "the Jerusalem that is above," indeed colonies of the new Jerusalem, providing on earth a corporate and visible expression of "the glorious freedom of the children of God."[91]

If so, then a second conclusion follows. This view of the church presupposes something about her *nature*. Those who are members of the church are a *regenerate, believing* people. Why? Because to have already come to the new, heavenly Jerusalem and to have begun to participate in its realities is another way of saying that those in the church are, by definition, part of the new creation, members of the new covenant, and people already raised and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (see Eph. 2:5–6; Col.

2:12–13; 3:3). But biblically speaking, this reality is only possible for those who have been born of the Spirit and united to Christ by faith.

As new covenant people, we receive the benefits of Christ's work in only one way: individual repentance toward God and faith in Christ. In salvation we are transferred by God's grace and power from being "in Adam" to being "in Christ" with all the benefits of that union.[92] To be "in Christ" now that he has finally come and fulfilled the previous covenants (and to be a member of his *ekklēsia*) entails that one is a believer, born of the Spirit, transformed, and justified before God. The New Testament knows nothing of one who is "in Christ" who is not also regenerate, effectually called by the Father, born of the Spirit, justified, holy, and awaiting glorification. That is why it is so difficult to think of the church as a mixed entity.

There is a third conclusion. If this understanding of the church is basically right, then, as Carson notes, "The ancient contrast between the church visible and the church invisible, a contrast that has nurtured not a little ecclesiology, is either fundamentally mistaken, or at best of marginal importance."[93] Why? Because the New Testament views the church as a *heavenly* (tied to the "age to come" and the new creation, not "in Adam" but "in Christ") and *spiritual* (born of and empowered by the Spirit in faith union with Christ) community. She lives her life out now while she awaits the consummation, as "the outcropping of the heavenly assembly gathered in the Jerusalem that is above,"[94] which assumes a regenerate people. The church is not viewed as a "visible" community in the sense that it comprises believers and unbelievers simultaneously until the end, like Israel of old (with the "invisible" church as the true, believing, regenerate community of all ages). It may be true that the church is universal and "invisible," given the fact that there is only one people of God throughout the ages. But it is not the case that the "visible," local church is *constituted* in its very nature of a mixture of believers and unbelievers.

Instead, the New Testament church, unlike Israel under the old covenant, is *constituted* of those who profess that they have been transferred from death to life, from being "in Adam" to being now "in Christ." They have become participants in the new creation tied to the inauguration of the entire new covenant age. No doubt, it is true that not all those who profess

faith in Christ are regenerate and that some who are admitted into membership in the church later show themselves not to have belonged. In the words of the apostle John, “If they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us” (1 John 2:19). The New Testament knows of false professions and spurious conversions; in fact, the Scripture exhorts us to examine ourselves (see 2 Pet. 1:10). Yet the New Testament also assures us that all those united to Christ and born of the Spirit will be kept to the end. This contrasts with covenant theology, which affirms a mixed view of the church or asserts that the visible church is constituted by believers and unbelievers until the end of the age. The New Testament speaks of the visible local church but not in this way. It is mistaken to think that the New Testament church is constituted in the same way as Israel of old.

The Church Is God’s New Temple

The tabernacle-temple typological pattern runs through the covenants, especially developed under the old covenant.[95] At the heart of the covenant relationship is the triune God dwelling with his people, and vice versa. The tabernacle-temple was the means by which God in his holiness dwelt among a sinful people without destroying them. It was also the means by which atonement was made for the covenant people’s sin, through the mediation of the priesthood and the sacrificial system.

When Jerusalem became the capital under David, and Solomon later constructed the temple, God’s dwelling with his people took on a note of permanency. God is omnipresent, but the temple was the means by which he manifested his unique covenantal presence among his people. In fact, God’s presence in the midst of the nation distinguished Israel from all the other nations (Ex. 33:15–16). With the construction of the temple, the nation was now able to assemble annually in Jerusalem and go to the place where God dwelt (Pss. 42:2; 63:2; 65:1–2). Worship was centered on a place, and the covenant community was able to meet with God at the temple, though their interactions with him were mediated through the priests.

When the nation went into exile and the temple was destroyed, it was as if the entire covenant had come to an end. But in the midst of God's judgment on the nation, the prophets held out hope. They reminded the people that God's presence was not limited to a place; the temple itself was only a type of something greater (see Ex. 25:40; cf. Ezek. 11:22–23; Heb. 8:3–5). The hope for Israel was in God himself, who would act to keep his promises, to save his people, and ultimately to make all things new by definitively dealing with human sin through a new covenant (Isa. 2:2–4; 53–55; Ezekiel 34; 36–37; Jer. 31:31–34; cf. Hebrews 8). In that new covenant, Yahweh himself would come through the Davidic son; he would be present among his people as Immanuel; he would be anointed with the Spirit and would also pour out the Spirit on his people (Psalm 110; Isa. 7:14; 11:1–5; 61:1–3; Joel 2:28–32; cf. Acts 2). He would secure everything necessary for our redemption, supremely associated with the forgiveness of our sin and the inauguration of the new creation (Isa. 53; 61:1–3; 65:17–25; Jer. 31:34).

As we move from Old Testament "promise" to New Testament "fulfillment," our Lord Jesus fulfills the prophetic expectation in at least two important ways. First, Jesus is the fulfillment of the temple (John 1:14–18; 2:19–22).[96] As the Lord (who is also David's greater Son and the Great High Priest of the new covenant—see Hebrews 5–7), he is the very dwelling of God with us (Matt. 1:23; John 1:14). In his life and cross work, he fulfills the purpose and function of the earthly temple (Matt. 27:51; Heb. 9:1–10:18). Second, as the temple builder and Lord of the house (Heb. 3:1–6), Jesus now builds *his* church, from every nation, tribe, and tongue (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:11–22; cf. Rev. 5:9–10). By God's sovereign grace, the church becomes his house/temple by being transferred from one covenant head to another, from Adam to Christ. By the agency of the Spirit (who regenerates us and empowers/gifts us, individually as Christians and corporately as Christ's church), we are now God's *new* temple (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:5). In Christ, the temple is no longer associated with a specific building and place (Jerusalem); instead, the temple is identified with Christ *and* his body, the church.[97] In

Christ, the church is his temple-people, who now have direct access to the Father through him by the Spirit (Eph. 2:18; Heb. 4:14–16; 10:19–22).

What is the significance of this truth for the church? First, to describe the individual Christian and the corporate people of God as his *new* temple highlights something of the *newness*, superiority, and glory of the new covenant. Nowhere in the Old Testament is Israel as a people described as the temple of God in which God's Spirit dwells. Instead, Israel as a nation had a physical temple in their midst. They could travel to it, and their worship centered around it. God condescended to dwell in it. But never was Israel overtly described as God's temple. On the other hand, the church experiences a *greater* covenantal access to God than Israel knew, precisely because Jesus has come and has brought all the types and shadows of the Old Testament to their God-ordained end. The church is something *new* in God's plan, not ontologically (against dispensationalism) but redemptive-historically. God's plan of salvation has now reached its fulfillment in Christ.

Second, the individual Christian and the church can only be described as God's new temple if the church is constituted by a *regenerate, believing* people and not a mixed body (against covenant theology). Why? This description is true only of people brought from death to life by the call of the Father and the new birth of the Spirit. They have been united to Christ by faith, a union that is permanent and secure (Rom. 8:28–39; Eph. 1:3–14). This description is not true of unbelievers, though it does describe those who profess faith but in the end demonstrate (by their lack of perseverance) that they were never truly God's people in the first place (1 John 2:19; cf. Col. 1:21–23; Heb. 3:6, 14).

The Church Is the Covenant Community That Remains Forever

The church is *new* not only as a transformed, regenerate people but also as God's *new creation* community that remains forever. The church comprises believing Jews and Gentiles, who, in Christ, equally and fully receive *all* God's promises. The church is *not* a parenthesis in God's plan or merely a *present* illustration of the spiritual unity that Israel as a nation and the Gentile nations will exhibit in the millennium and consummation as

recipients of “distinct” blessings or privileges (against dispensationalism). Given that the new covenant is the fulfillment of the previous covenants and that beyond it there is no other covenant relationship that defines our relationship to the triune God, the church, as the people of the *new* covenant, remains forever. In relation to Christ, who is the antitypical fulfillment of the previous covenant heads/mediators, the church, as his people, now lives out what God intended us to be, namely, his image-sons. As such, we function as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation and are restored to the purpose of our creation to know, love, and worship the triune God and to rule as his people over the entire creation (Heb. 2:5–18; 1 Pet. 2:9–10; Revelation 21–22). In this way, the church lives out what Israel as a nation was called to be but now as the renewed eschatological Israel.[98] And as the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), the church is composed of believers in Christ, the true seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16), who are now the spiritual seed of Abraham in Christ and who receive *all* God’s promises equally in him (Gal. 3:29).[99] Two lines of evidence will substantiate these points from the New Testament.

The Church Is God’s New Humanity

The description of the church as the “new humanity (man)” is drawn from Ephesians 2:11–22.[100] This title nicely captures something of the *newness* of the church and why she exists *forever* as God’s covenant people. The title is linked with the new creation and the biblical covenants, and it underscores the church’s newness in God’s unfolding plan, as everything is fulfilled and “summed up” in Christ (1:9–10).

In Ephesians 2:1–10, Paul speaks of what individual believers are in Christ. No longer are we “in Adam” and dead in our sins and transgressions (2:1–3). But now, by God’s sovereign grace and “in Christ,” we have been made alive and been seated with Christ in the heavenlies (thus participants of the “age to come”) as God’s new creations or masterpieces (2:4–10).

In Ephesians 2:11–21, Paul speaks of the same truths of what we once were and what we now are in Christ—but now by the use of corporate and covenantal categories. Gentile Christians, for example, given their covenantal position “in Adam,” were once excluded from “the citizenship

of Israel," "foreigners to the covenants of promise" and "with no hope and without God in the world" (2:11–12). But now, in Messiah Jesus, everything has changed.[101] In Christ, because of God's grace and according to his eternal plan (3:1–13), Gentiles have now been brought near. They are now recipients of God's promises, given first to Adam and then through Abraham to the nation of Israel. In Christ and in his reconciling cross, the law-covenant has been brought to fulfillment and thus torn down.[102] The law-covenant purposely given to temporarily separate Jews and Gentiles is now fulfilled. The result is the creation of the church, so that both Jews and Gentiles together now have peace with the triune God and covenantal access to him (2:14–18) and together inherit the same promises. Incredibly, believing Gentiles have become (alongside believing Jews) "fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone." Together, as God's "one new man," they are being built as a new temple "for God's dwelling in the Spirit" (2:22).

Given what Paul has said, how should we think of the church as God's new humanity and new covenant people? A number of conclusions may be drawn. The church is *not* simply an extension of Israel. It is related to Israel and the covenants of promise, but it is a *new* humanity, part of the new creation associated in Old Testament expectation with the inauguration of the new covenant. The church now lives out what Israel was supposed to be but only because of Christ, who first fulfills Israel's role, along with the role of every covenant head, in himself. The church is *not* merely some kind of amalgam made out of the best elements of Israel and the Gentiles. The church is also *not* merely a phase in God's redemptive plan to end in the future when God returns to his previous plan for Israel and the nations. The church is a *new* creation, a third entity that is neither Jewish nor Gentile but Christian, and both believing Jews and Gentiles are now *one* in the church (see 1 Cor. 9:19–23). God's eternal plan *always* anticipated the creation of *the church* (Eph. 3:8–13). Now that Christ has come and by virtue of his saving work, this new entity has been created. In this way, the "new humanity" transcends the two old entities, even though unbelieving Israel and disobedient Gentiles continue to exist "in Adam" now that Christ has

come. Believing Gentiles are now able to receive the blessings of God and have equal standing with believing Jews without having to submit to the old covenant (circumcision, food laws, and so on).[103] In Christ the old covenant has come to its fulfillment, and the "new humanity" is identified with the inauguration of a new and better covenant.[104]

Does this mean that the church has "replaced" Israel? This is not how Paul states it. Instead, the person who has fulfilled the covenants, including the role of Israel, is Christ. By virtue of our relationship to him, we, as his people, inherit and receive all God's promises in him. Christopher Wright captures this point well:

> In all of this, then, it is not a case of abolishing and "replacing" the realities of Israel and the Old Testament, but of taking them up into a greater reality in the Messiah. Christ does not *deprive* the believing Jew of anything that belonged to Israel as God's people; nor does he give to the believing Gentiles anything *less* than the full covenantal blessing and promise that was Israel's. On the contrary, we share together in all of it and more—in him, and for ever.[105]

What makes all this possible is Messiah Jesus, who fulfills God's promises and applies them to his people. One cannot understand the *identity*, *nature*, and *newness* of the church apart from him. Dispensational theology views Israel and the church as distinct without sufficiently accounting for Jesus as the last Adam and true Israel. He fulfills the role of both Israel and Adam, thus creating not an ontologically distinct people but "*one* new man." Covenant theology tends to move from Israel to the church too quickly without sufficiently accounting for the differences between the two communities due to the person and work of Christ. As we progress through the covenants, we move from type to antitype, from the covenant heads—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses/Israel, and David—to Christ. Our Lord's work brings with it God-intended change. Because of its identification with Christ, the head of the new covenant and the new creation, the church is the "one *new* man." This is why the church is identified with the "age to come" and not with the structures of the old era. This is why the church is viewed as the *new* assembly and the *new* temple,

born, empowered, and indwelt by the Spirit. This is why the church must be viewed not as a mixed entity but as a regenerate, believing community.

The Church Receives All God's Promises in Christ

The way that the Old Testament restoration promises for Israel are applied to the church *in Christ* provides further evidence that the members of the church, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles in Christ, equally and fully receive *all* God's promises.

For example, in Acts, before Christ ascends, he teaches his disciples about the *kingdom* and tells them to wait in Jerusalem for *the promised* Spirit, tied to Old Testament prophetic restoration hope. As noted previously, the promise of the Spirit is tied to the promises of the Messiah's coming and the entire messianic age rooted in the new covenant *and* Israel's restoration as a nation. The disciples ask, "When are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Jesus answers *not* by redirecting their attention to the church age, "implicitly postponing a restoration of Israel to the future,"[106] when she will finally receive promises "distinct" from believing Gentile nations. This dispensational view does not sufficiently account for who Jesus is as the true Israel and last Adam, how *he* fulfills *all* the covenants, *and* how he applies God's promises to the church.[107]

Instead, Jesus answers their question by saying that *Israel's* end-time restoration is about to occur at Pentecost (Joel 2:28–32; Acts 2:14–21), starting in Jerusalem with Jewish believers and extending to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8, thus a reconstituted Israel) *and* to the Gentile nations (Acts 10–11), thus creating a *new humanity* in Christ. Jesus responds to his disciples with language ("when the Holy Spirit comes on you," "you will be my witnesses," and "to the ends of the earth") drawn from Isaiah (Isa. 32:15; 43:12; 49:6), which anticipates the day when God will save *through his servant*, bring about *Israel's* restoration, *and* include Gentiles in that restoration program. Jesus heralds that what the Old Testament prophets anticipated is now occurring in him *and* the church, which is precisely how Paul and the apostles see their mission (see Isa. 49:6; Acts 13:47). Exactly *how* the Gentiles are included in God's people is yet to be shown (Acts 10–11; 15; cf. Ephesians 3), yet there is no question that Gentiles will be

included, and it is now about to commence at Pentecost. The sequence of restoration is significant: first to Israel, then to the nations (cf. Acts 3:26), which is precisely how the risen and exalted Christ builds his church, and how the church grows in the book of Acts.[108]

Acts 15 is also instructive. As the church wrestles with Gentile participation in God's covenantal promises, it becomes clear that Gentiles join with believing Jews to form the *one* new humanity and that all members equally receive all God's promises. Gentiles come to participate in Christ with Jewish believers by faith alone, by receiving the same Spirit, and by coming under the new covenant (Acts 15:7–11; cf. Eph. 2:11–21). In fact, James speaks of God's "visitation" (*episkeptomai*, Acts 15:14) of the Gentiles by using the same terminology used of God to save his people Israel (Ex. 3:16; 4:31; 13:19; Ruth 1:6). When James says that believing Gentiles were taken "from the Gentiles" (Acts 15:14), he once again employs the same terminology used of Israel as taken from the nations to be God's people (Deut. 7:6; 14:2). Alan Thompson rightly draws the following conclusion: "The language that James uses here therefore indicates that he views Gentiles who have placed their faith in the Lord Jesus as being just as much a part of God's people as Jews who have also placed their faith in the Lord Jesus."[109] Furthermore, James appeals to the words of the Prophets to warrant the fact that God in his plan has always intended to form *one* people that would include believing Jews and Gentiles. Specifically, James quotes Amos 9:11–12, which indicates an important sequence of God's saving work tied to the Davidic covenant being fulfilled in Christ and the new covenant. After the restoration of David's house, which James and the book of Acts see as occurring in Christ (Acts 2; 13), the Messiah also restores his people, given the inseparable relationship between them (cf. Luke 1:32–33, 68–69). Yet what Amos anticipates, and James says has now occurred in the church, is that the Messiah's people will include believing Jews and Gentiles together as inheritors of the Davidic kingdom. In the church, then, "James recognizes that God is fulfilling his saving promises to accept Gentiles in this Davidic kingdom through their faith in the Davidic King Jesus."[110] God has joined believing Jews and Gentiles together under the new covenant on the same basis: faith in Jesus, the son of David.[111]

Throughout its pages, the New Testament repeatedly teaches the truth that in Christ, the members of the church, including believing Jews and Gentiles, equally and fully receive *all* God's promises. In fact, as we have seen in the Bible's covenantal progression, our Lord Jesus Christ first fulfills the previous covenants in himself and then applies his work to his people. As God's people, we are restored to the purpose of our creation and thus fulfill what Israel—indeed, Adam—only typified: a transformed people who function as a royal priesthood and holy nation (Ex. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9). As the church, we function as the restored Israel and Abraham's *spiritual* children (Rom. 4:9–22; Gal. 3:6–9); *true* Jews because of our heart circumcision (Rom. 2:25–29; Phil. 3:3); the *one* new man (Eph. 2:11–21); from the same olive tree (Rom. 11:17–24); and part of the 144,000, which symbolically refers to the entire church (Rev. 7:1–8; 14:3). Also, in Christ, the church receives her "inheritance" (Eph. 1:13–14; Col. 1:12–14), which is more than mere spiritual blessings.[112] In the Old Testament, the inheritance is tied to Israel's land, which in the progression of the covenants, becomes a type of the entire creation.[113] For this reason, the church is said to inherit the "earth" (Matt. 5:5) and receive what Abraham was promised, namely, that he would inherit the "world" (Rom. 4:13) as he looked for the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, which would last forever and ultimately is identified with the new creation (Heb. 11:8–16). Captured in Scripture's final vision, the church is Christ's bride, the heavenly Jerusalem, whose foundation is the twelve tribes of Israel *and* the twelve apostles (Rev. 21:9–14), an international people (Rev. 5:9–10) that inherits the new creation as God's covenant people forever (Revelation 21–22).[114] The covenant people that lasts forever is Christ's bride, the church.[115]

Is there, then, no future for national Israel? We will return to this question in chapter 19, but for now, we simply state that Paul in Romans 9–11, specifically in 11:1–32, addresses this question, and his answer is no. Yet as we will argue, regardless of how one understands the meaning of "all Israel will be saved" (11:26), there is no warrant from this text to think that national Israel will receive an outstanding promise in the millennium or consummated state *distinct* or *different* from believing Gentiles. Nothing in

Romans 9–11 speaks of the "restoration" of Israel as a nation in her land with a specific identity and role of service to the nations apart from believing Jews and alongside believing Gentiles, participating in covenant community that lasts for eternity, namely, the church. Romans 11 can only serve as "evidence" for the restoration of national Israel apart from or distinct from the church if the entire dispensational view is assumed, which is precisely what is at debate. Instead, the Bible's storyline as unfolded through the covenants teaches that *all* God's promises are fulfilled in Christ and *his* people, the church.

To summarize, in chapters 16–17 we have sought to provide a biblical-theological summary of *kingdom through covenant*. In the end, we contend that the entire Bible gloriously reveals our triune God's eternal plan in and through the biblical covenants, from creation to consummation. At the center of all God's plans and purposes is God's own dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In him, all God's promises are "Yes" and "Amen" (2 Cor. 1:20), and by grace, we, as the church, are the beneficiaries of his all-sufficient work. In the final two chapters, we will briefly highlight a number of implications of our view for selected areas of systematic theology. Our focus is on showing how understanding the progression of the covenants has *theological* significance for our theological formulations, with specific focus on areas of contention between dispensational and covenant theology, thus showing how progressive covenantalism functions as a *via media*.

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1. Parts of chap. 17 are adapted from Stephen J. Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," chap. 4 in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H, 2006); Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus: What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters*, Five Solas Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017); Wellum, "An Evaluation of the Son-Spirit Relation in Clark Pinnock's Inclusivism: An Exercise in Trinitarian Reflection," *SBJT* 10, no. 1 (2006): 4–23. Used by permission of B&H, Zondervan, and the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, respectively.

2. For the meaning of "fulfillment," see D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *Matthew and Mark*, vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 172–79; Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 70–79.

3. D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 254.

4. Carson, *Gagging of God*, 263.

5. See Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 61–82.

6. W. Manson, "Eschatology in the New Testament," in *Eschatology*, SJTOP 2 (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1953), 6; cited in Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 14.

7. For example, the use of three fourteens is artificially constructed for a theological point. It highlights the significance of David and the exile, since the number fourteen probably represents the numerical value of "David" by *gematria*. On this point, see Carson, *Matthew*, 85–95; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 26–33.

8. France, *Matthew*, 50–51.

9. See Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 156.

10. On Jesus as the antitypical fulfillment of the temple, see Paul M. Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

11. See France, *Matthew*, 121–22; Carson, *Matthew*, 134–39; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 172–73; Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: In the New Testament Church and Today* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 19–30; Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 45–52; Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, 149–77.

12. See David G. Peterson, *Transformed by God: New Covenant Life and Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 50–52.

13. See France, *Matthew*, 123–24; Carson, *Matthew*, 134–39.

14. See France, *Matthew*, 119–21; Carson, *Matthew*, 134–36.

15. See Carson, *Matthew*, 136–39.

16. "Kingdom" is mentioned thirteen times in Mark (nine of them in common with Matthew and Luke), twenty-seven times in Matthew (not in common with Mark), twelve times in Luke (not in common with Mark), and twice in John. See Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 45–49. John's Gospel speaks of the kingdom in the language of "eternal life," which belongs to the "age to come." See I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 498; cf. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 187–90. As Andreas Köstenberger instructs, "That the expressions 'kingdom of God' and 'eternal life' are essentially equivalent is suggested by their parallel use in Matthew 19:16, 24 pars." Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 123. Contrary to classic dispensationalism, there is no major distinction between "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God," as discussed in chap. 2. In Matthew, the two expressions are basically synonymous, except, as Jonathan T. Pennington has shown, that "kingdom of *heaven*" stresses that God's kingdom is from above and that his kingdom represents his rule over all earthly kingdoms. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, NovTSup 126 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 67–76.

17. See Murray J. Harris, *Three Crucial Questions about Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 82–83.

18. For a discussion of the various options, see Carson, *Matthew*, 171–80; France, *Matthew*, 177–91.

19. For a defense of this view, see Carson, *Matthew*, 171–80; cf. France, *Matthew*, 182–84.

20. Carson, *Matthew*, 175.

21. As Simon Gathercole explains, "The reference to walking on the sea is a 'theophany' motif which is taken over from Yahweh to Jesus. . . . the combination of the two passages showing Jesus' mastery of the sea (Matt 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–52) points very strongly to a close identification of him with Yahweh in the OT." Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 64.

22. Carson, *Matthew*, 261.

23. For a further discussion of this point, see Peterson, *Transformed by God*, 53–55.

24. On John 13:19, see Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 253.

25. Carson, *John*, 513.

26. Luke offers a brief glimpse into Jesus's thinking at the temple when he is twelve. Jesus speaks of his intimate relationship with the Father and, in the words of John Stott, "an inward compulsion to occupy himself with his Father's affairs. He knew he had a mission. His Father had sent him into the world for a purpose. This mission he must perform; this purpose he must fulfill." John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 31. What is the mission? As the Gospels unfold, it becomes clear, but Matthew, for example, frames Jesus's entire mission by the new covenant promise that the angel announces to Joseph: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, *because he will save his people from their sins*" (Matt. 1:21).

27. Herman Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 387. Bavinck's references in John's Gospel are significant. Jesus links his death to the "hour," which is tied to the Father's eternal plan. See Carson, *John*, 171, 437, 553–54; Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 34–35.

28. Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 387; see Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 31–38.

29. See Donald Macleod, *Christ Crucified: Understanding the Atonement* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 23–27; Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 69–74; Peterson, *Transformed by God*, 57–58.

30. On this point, see David Peterson, who writes, "The Passover is more than a demonstration of God's love. The blood averts the judgement of God (12:12–13) and this deliverance initiates the whole process by which God brings the Israelites out of Egypt and enables them to function as his chosen people (12:50–13:16)." "Atonement in the Old Testament," in *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today*, ed. David Peterson (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2001), 4.

31. See John Oswalt, *Isaiah 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 377, 385; see also J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 331–47.

32. Peterson rightly notes, "Luke does not explicitly contrast the New Covenant with the Mosaic or Sinai Covenant, but implies that it is the fulfilment of the covenant made with Abraham and the fathers of Israel (Luke 1:73–75; cf. Acts 3:25; 7:8). Nevertheless, he clearly shows that the blessings of the New Covenant are based on the saving work of Christ, rather than on the exodus redemption or the atoning provision of the law." *Transformed by God*, 60.

33. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 214–17.

34. On Rom. 3:21–26, see D. A. Carson, "Atonement in Romans 3:21–26: 'God Presented Him as a Propitiation,'" in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 119–39.

35. See Carson, "Atonement in Romans 3:21–26," 121–23; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 178–81.

36. On the debate surrounding the "righteousness of God," especially in light of the New Perspective on Paul, see Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 79–89, 222. Moo argues that the "righteousness of God" is best understood as "the justifying activity of God." From God's side, this includes his active, miraculous intervention to vindicate and deliver his people in fulfillment of his covenant promises (see Isa. 46:13; 50:5–8; Mic. 7:9)—that is, his saving work and activity. From the human side, to those who receive God's "righteousness," it also includes the aspect of *gift* or *status* of acquittal acquired by the person declared just.

37. On this point, see Moo, *Romans*, 79–89, 227–30; Carson, "Atonement in Romans 3:21–26," 124–25; Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 182–85.

38. See Bruce K. Waltke, "Atonement in Psalm 51: 'My Sacrifice, O God, Is a Broken Spirit,'" in Hill and James, *Glory of the Atonement*, 57–58.

39. John Ziesler and Stephen Travis argue that "passing over" (*paresis*) refers to God's forgiveness, *not* to his forbearance or postponing of the full requirement for the payment of our sin. Given this interpretation, there is no tension between God's righteous demand against sin and his "passing over" our sins. John A. Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (London: SCM, 1989), 115–16; Stephen H. Travis, "Christ as Bearer of Divine Judgment in Paul's Thought about the Atonement," in *Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 332–45. But as Carson argues, *paresis* does *not* mean "forgiveness" but "postponement," which warrants the traditional view that there is a tension between God's righteous demand against us and his declaration of justification in the Old Testament and his "leaving sin unpunished." Carson, "Atonement in Romans 3:21–26," 136–38.

40. On this point, see Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 262.

41. See Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 272–80.

42. See ibid.

43. For a detailed treatment of the title *Son*, see D. A. Carson, *Jesus the Son of God: A Christological Title Often Overlooked, Sometimes Misunderstood, and Currently Disputed* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Son of God and the New Creation*, SSBT (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

44. On *Son* in John's Gospel, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel*, NSBT 24 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 75–92.

45. See Moo, *Romans*, 44–53; Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 104–33; Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 372–401.

46. For a detailed defense of Christ as the true Israel, see Brent E. Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern: A Theological Critique of Covenant and Dispensational Theologies" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), chap. 5.

47. See Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1997).

48. Jason S. DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Prospective," *JETS* 58, no. 3 (2015): 445–85.

49. On this point, see Christopher A. Beetham, "From Creation to New Creation: The Biblical Epic of King, Human Vicegerency, and Kingdom," in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis; Essays in Honor of G. K. Beale*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 237–54.

50. See G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 227–354.

51. Bavinck rightly notes that the covenant heads prior to Christ (Adam, Abraham, Israel, David), as important as they are in God's plan, are only types of Christ. *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 228.

52. See Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 41–116; cf. Jonathan Menn, *Biblical Eschatology* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2013), 21–55.

53. See Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 3–22; G. K. Beale, "The End Starts at the Beginning," in *Making All Things New: Inaugurated Eschatology for the Life of the Church*, Benjamin Gladd and Matthew Harmon (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), 6–8; cf. Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 88–116; Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, 21–37.

54. For a more in-depth discussion of inaugurated eschatology, see Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 41–116. See also Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard de Witt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 44–90; K. E. Brower, "Eschatology," in *NDBT*, 459–64.

55. As noted above, we are using the word *fulfillment* in its broad prophetic sense; i.e., Jesus "fulfills" the Old Testament in that it points to him and, now that he has come, is fulfilled. In the New Testament, fulfillment can be direct in the sense of prophetic prediction (e.g., Mic. 5:2; Matt. 2:1–12), but it is not limited to this alone. It can also be prophetic in a more indirect

sense tied to typological patterns that are fulfilled in Christ. Both senses are prophetic but not in exactly the same way, a point we discussed in chap. 3. On fulfillment, see Carson, *Matthew*, 72–79; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 70–79; Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 251–86.

56. See Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 129–84.

57. Carson, *Gagging of God*, 254.

58. David F. Wells, *The Person of Christ: A Biblical and Historical Analysis of the Incarnation* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984), 29.

59. Oscar Cullmann used this famous way of describing the different results achieved by Christ in his two advents. *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Concept of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950). See also Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 21.

60. See David F. Wells, *God the Evangelist: How the Holy Spirit Works to Bring Men and Women to Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 9–10; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 41–116.

61. Within evangelical theology, inaugurated eschatology has now become a major point of agreement. For a defense of this view, see Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), esp. 25–80.

62. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 51. The "not yet" reality of the kingdom is also seen in such texts as Matt. 5:3–12; 8:11–12; 13:24–30, 36–43; 22:1–14; 25:1–13, 31–46; 26:29. See ibid., 50–68.

63. The already–not yet tension in terms of the Spirit's relationship to the believer is worked out in five ways in the New Testament. First, the Spirit testifies of our "sonship" (Rom. 8:14–27; Gal. 4:4–5). The Spirit bears witness that we are the children of God now, even though we still await our full rights associated with sonship. Second, the role of the Spirit is that of "firstfruits" (*aparchē*; Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23), which speaks both of what we have now and of what we still await in the future. Third, the Spirit is our "pledge" or "deposit" (*arrabōn*; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14) guaranteeing our future inheritance. Fourth, the Holy Spirit is also called a "seal" (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 4:30; 1:13), which signifies that believers are nothing less than God's possession. Fifth, the Spirit is related to the resurrection of our bodies (Rom. 1:3–4; 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:42–44). The Spirit is said to be active not only in relation to Christ's resurrection but in relation to ours as well, which signifies that someday our bodies shall be raised from the dead, just as Christ was risen from the dead, the last Adam, so that we may share in the glorious existence of the final, consummated state. For a further discussion of these points, see Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 55–67.

64. See Peterson, *Transformed by God*, 61–76; Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*, NSBT 27 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 71–143.

65. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 67.

66. Beale, "The End Starts at the Beginning," 10. Also, for the importance of the resurrection in prophetic hope and fulfillment, see the discussion in Thompson, *Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 71–101.

67. See Bruce A. Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 84–97; Michael Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 157–58; Michael Riccardi, "The Seed of Abraham: A Theological Analysis of Galatians 3 and Its Implications for Israel," *MSJ* 25, no. 1 (2014): 60–63; Robert Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 50, 200.

68. See Jason S. DeRouchie, "Is *Every* Promise 'Yes'? Old Testament Promises and the Christian," *Themelios* 42, no. 1 (2017): 16–45.

69. On this point, see G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 159–73; Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Fearn, Rossshire, Scotland: Mentor, 2013), 177–227.

70. See DeRouchie's discussion in "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets," 478–81.

71. On this point, see Richard J. Lucas, "The Dispensational Appeal to Romans 11 and the Nature of Israel's Future Salvation," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 237–42.

72. Once again, see Beale, "The End Starts at the Beginning," 10.

73. See Richard L. Pratt Jr., "Infant Baptism in the New Covenant," in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 127–74.

74. Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 728–49.

75. James R. White, "The Newness of the New Covenant (Part 2)," in *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology*, ed. Richard C. Barcellos (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2014), 380.

76. Ibid., 379–81; cf. DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets," 481–85.

77. See Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 735. Beale argues that Christ's new covenant work has resulted in a decisive forgiveness of sin so that in the inaugurated stage, it refers to "Jesus's sacrifice of forgiving sins so that those forgiven are considered positionally forgiven (i.e., through identification with Christ and his representative work), though they are still existentially not without sin. Such a final and complete personal cleansing of sin will come at the consummate stage of the Jeremiah fulfillment, when saints receive their resurrected bodies and souls."

78. See Andreas J. Köstenberger, “The Church According to the Gospels,” in *The Community of Jesus: A Theology of the Church*, ed. Kendell H. Easley and Christopher W. Morgan (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 35–63.

79. Beale and Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed*, 159–73.

80. See the helpful discussion of this text in John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God’s New Society*, BST (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 122–30.

81. On this point, progressive dispensationalism, in contrast to its earlier forms, and covenant theology agree.

82. For a detailed development of this point, see Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 651–49. Also see Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 27–36.

83. For a defense of this identification, see Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 670–72, 719–24. Also see Andreas Köstenberger, “The Identity of the *Israel tou theou* (Israel of God) in Galatians 6:16,” *Faith and Mission* 19, no. 1 (2001): 3–24.

84. See Schreiner, *Romans*, 395–468.

85. James R. White, “The Newness of the New Covenant (Part 1),” in Barcellos, *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage*, 340.

86. See D. A. Carson, “Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church,” in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 363–67; as well as the helpful discussion in Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 694–95, 712–13; Clowney, *The Church*, 27–33.

87. See Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 41–116, 675–754.

88. “You have already come” (*proselēluthate*) is in the perfect tense, which stresses the point that believers have come to their final destination even now, starting with conversion. We *already* participate in new covenant realities as the gathered people of God, even though we await the consummation of those realities. On this point, see Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 389–408; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, WBC 47B (Dallas: Word, 1991), 459–91.

89. In the New Testament, *ekklēsia* is used in the plural and singular. In the plural, it refers to the various assemblies of a region or province (e.g., “the churches of Judea,” Gal. 1:22). It is used in the singular in two ways: (1) when referring to assemblies of Christians in any one city (e.g., the church at Jerusalem), and (2) more importantly, when referring to our participation in the heavenly, eschatological church, i.e., the *heavenly* Zion or the *new* Jerusalem, that which is identified with the “age to come” and which is now here. In this latter sense, the language of *heavenly* or *new* Jerusalem is not a spatial image but an eschatological one, identifying the people of God with the eschatological realities that Jesus has won for us in his finished work. See, Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 694–95, 712–13.

90. Carson, “Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church,” 366.

91. Ibid. Also see Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 712–13; D. J. Tidball, “Church,” in *NDBT*, 407–11.

92. On the reality of union with Christ and all that it entails, see Ferguson, *Holy Spirit*, 93–138.

93. Carson, “Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church, 367.

94. Ibid., 371.

95. For a development of the temple theme in Scripture, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); R. J. McKelvey, “Temple,” in *NDBT*, 806–11.

96. See Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple*.

97. The idea that the church is God’s new temple due to our union with Christ, the true temple and our covenantal head, and is indwelt by the Spirit is very close to the New Testament teaching that the church is the “body of Christ.” Biblically, it is best to understand the body imagery in covenantal terms: Christ is our representative head, and we are his body, i.e., his covenantal people. Headship has more to do with representation, primacy, and authority than Christ as the top member of the body. This is why Paul can speak of the members of the body to include ears, eyes, and noses—technically all parts of the head (1 Cor. 12:16–21). This is also seen in Paul thinking of the church as a body in terms of one whole man in Christ, not merely in terms of one part of the body in relation to other parts.

98. For a development of this argument in more detail, see Robin Routledge, “Replacement or Fulfillment? Re-applying Old Testament Designations of Israel to the Church,” *STR* 4, no. 2 (2013): 137–54; David Starling, “The Yes to All God’s Promises: Jesus, Israel and the Promises of God in Paul’s Letters,” *RTR* 71 (2012): 185–204; Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Israel, the People of God, and the Nations,” *JETS* 45, no. 1 (2002): 35–57.

99. Jason S. DeRouchie summarizes this point well: “Nevertheless, when King Jesus, Abraham’s ultimate ‘seed’ and Israel’s representative (Isa 49:3, 5–6; Gal 3:16), performs all required obedience, he secures life and blessing for redeemed Jews and Gentiles alike (Gen 22:17b–18; Jer 4:2; Ps 72:17; Gal 3:8, 14), who together make up one regenerate people of God, the ‘seed’ of Abraham (Gal 3:29). Rather than being an unexpected formation, the new covenant church in Christ is the natural, anticipated end in the progress of the biblical covenants.” “Father of a Multitude of Nations: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective,” in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 30–31.

100. On this text, see Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 122–65; Stott, *Ephesians*, 89–112; Joshua Greever, “The Nature of the New Covenant: A Case Study in Ephesians 2:11–22” *SBJT* 20, no. 1 (2016): 73–90.

101. See Beale and Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed*, 159–73.

102. “The law of the commandments and regulations” is a reference to the old covenant as a whole. On this point, see Greever, “Nature of the New Covenant,” 73–90; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 139–46.

103. Dispensationalism argues that the "one new man" in Eph. 2:15 shows only that the Gentiles are on the same "spiritual plane in their relationship to God" as the Jews but that Israel maintains a "specific identity and corresponding function in God's historical kingdom program." Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 218. However, Paul's point is that the "two" have now become "one" *in Christ*. Paul's point is *not* to distinguish between Jewish and Gentile believers, whether in terms of their identity or their function in Christ's kingdom. Also, the parallel between Eph. 2:11–12 and 2:19–22 shows that everything Israel once possessed—including "kingdom" elements like the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of "citizenship"—the Gentiles now equally and fully possess.

104. Storms says this: "The reference to the 'commonwealth of Israel' and the 'covenants of promise' alerted me to the fact that whatever privileges and blessings they entailed were now equally shared by Gentile believers. Any thought of Jewish priority or some unique and separate inheritance couldn't explain Paul's language. . . . *Whatever a believing Jew can point to in the Old Testament and say, 'Mine,' is no less the inheritance and future of a believing Gentile*." *Kingdom Come*, 185.

105. Christopher Wright, "A Christian Approach to Old Testament Prophecy concerning Israel," in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*, ed. Peter W. L. Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 19; cf. Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 180–89.

106. Thompson, *Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 105; cf. David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 108–13; Peterson, *Transformed by God*, 61–76.

107. Darrell L. Bock argues from Acts 3:21 that the "restoration" will occur *after* Jesus's return (by appeal to the preposition *until*, Gk. *achri*). *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 176–77. However, even if Acts 3:21 teaches that the "restoration" will occur *after* Jesus returns, this does not preclude it *already* taking place in the church, which is what Acts teaches. This text only speaks of Israel's future national restoration if the dispensational view is assumed. Yet "until" is better interpreted as follows: "whom heaven must receive *until after* the times of restoration of all that God spoke by the prophets" (Acts 3:21)—to stress that the restoration is not complete until the end. This makes better sense of Acts 3:24 since Peter declares that "all the prophets . . . have foretold these days," which assumes that the time of fulfillment is contemporary with Peter's audience. See Thompson, *Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 108n14; Peterson, *Acts*, 182–83.

108. For a detailed treatment of Old Testament restoration promises applied to the church, see Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 651–749; Thompson, *Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 71–143.

109. Thompson, *Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 122.

110. Ibid., 123–24.

111. See Gladd and Harmon, *Making All Things New*, 29–30.

112. Contra Riccardi, "Seed of Abraham," 59–63. Riccardi and many progressive dispensationalists acknowledge that Christ is the true seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16), but when the Abrahamic promises are applied to the church, they apply only the "blessing," or spiritual promise, not Israel's national land promise. The problem with this is multiple, but minimally, it fails to see that Christ is the fulfillment of the plural *promises* (Gal. 3:16). In Galatians 3, Paul has in mind multiple promises, not just one promise focused on blessing. Furthermore, in 3:16, Paul is most likely quoting "and to your seed" from Gen. 17:8 (or Gen. 13:15; 24:7), which includes the promise of land. The church, then receives *all* the Abrahamic promises *in Christ*. Further evidence of this claim is Paul's language of "inheritance" in Gal. 3:18, which, as DeRouchie notes, "is rooted in the OT land promise (e.g., Num 26:53–56; Josh 11:23)." "Father of a Multitude of Nations," 33. Tracing out the covenants shows that the inheritance of the land was part of the larger inheritance of the world, given who Jesus is as the true Israel, David's greater Son, and the last Adam.

113. Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 750–72; DeRouchie, "Father of a Multitude of Nations," 30–34.

114. Beale lists a number of texts that demonstrate that the church is viewed as the one eschatological people of God—composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, fulfilling Israel's role in Christ, and being restored to what God created us to be as his image-sons and priest-kings. Here are a few examples of Israel in the Old Testament *and* the church in the New Testament having the same name or title applied to them: (1) "elect" and "beloved of God" (Deut. 32:15; 33:12; Isa. 44:2; Jer. 11:15; 12:7; Rom. 9:25 [Hos. 2:23]; 1 Thess. 1:4); (2) God's "son(s)," "Abraham's seed," "Israel," "Jerusalem," "circumcised Jews" (Ex. 4:22–23; Deut. 14:1; Isa. 1:2, 4; 63:8; Hos. 1:10; 11:1; Rom. 2:26–29; Gal. 3:26, 29; 4:26, 28, 31; 6:16; Phil. 3:2–3; Col. 2:11); (3) part of the end-time temple (1 Cor. 3:10–17; 6:19; Eph. 2:20–22); (4) the bride (Isa. 54:5–6; Ezek. 16:32; Hos. 1:2; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25–27; Rev. 21:2); (5) a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10); (6) the olive tree (Isa. 17:6; Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:6; Rom. 11:17, 24). Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 669–749. In addition, the New Testament also applies Old Testament restoration promises to the church in and through Christ's work. See, e.g., (1) Isa. 42:3, 6b–7, 16; 49:5–6 in Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47; 26:18, 23; (2) Amos 9:11–12 in Acts 15:16–18; (3) Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:16–21; 10:44–48; 11:15–18; (4) Isa. 32:15; 43:10, 12; 49:6 in Acts 1:8; (5) Isa. 52:7; 57:19 in Eph. 2:17; (6) Jer. 31:31–34 in Hebrews 8; 10.

115. For an excellent summary of this data, see Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 177–227; Gladd and Harmon, *Making All Things New*, 15–35.

18

Kingdom through Covenant

Some Theological Implications: Christology and the Christian Life

We now turn to the question, So what?[1] Given our proposal of *kingdom through covenant*, or *progressive covenantalism*, for putting together the metanarrative of Scripture, what are some of the implications for systematic theology? Obviously, in two chapters we can only sketch *some* of the implications. In truth, every locus[2] of theology is affected by one's understanding of the progression of the covenants, since the covenants are the backbone of the Bible's storyline. Perennial polemics within theology—such as the law-gospel divide, the application of the old covenant to Christians today, the question of creation ordinances related to Sabbath regulation, church-state issues that have implications for how Christians engage politically in society, and so on—are directly related to one's view of the covenants.

In addition, in order to do justice to all the theological implications, full book-length treatments, at minimum, are required for each topic, with alternative views described and critiqued in terms of their overall fit with Scripture. Given our space limitations, our goal is to hint at the direction our proposal would take in a few areas with special focus on differences between dispensational and covenant theology. A full treatment of further areas will require future writing projects to flesh out the implications in

more detail. We will focus on four main loci: Christology, the Christian life, ecclesiology, and eschatology.

Christology

In what ways does an understanding of the progression of the covenants affect Christology? We will focus on two related areas: one pertaining to the *person* of Christ and the other to his *work*. In regard to the *person* of Christ, we are using the term *person* to address the question, Who is the Jesus of the Bible? or, in today's terminology, What is the *identity* of Jesus the Christ?[3] In terms of the *work* of Christ, our focus will turn to the debated issue of the active obedience of Christ.

Kingdom through Covenant and the Identity of Jesus

Who is the Jesus of the Bible? Scripture presents a straightforward answer that the church has confessed throughout the ages: Jesus is *God the Son incarnate*. As God the Son, he has existed from all eternity, coequal with the Father and Spirit and thus fully God (John 1:1–2, 18). Yet at a specific point in time he took to himself our human nature and became incarnate in order to save us from our sin by his glorious life, death, resurrection, and ascension (John 1:14). As summarized by the later Chalcedonian Definition, Jesus is fully God and fully man, one person existing in two natures now and forevermore.

How does Scripture teach that Jesus is God the Son incarnate? How did the church draw this theological conclusion from the diverse biblical data? For the most part, the church appealed to individual texts that not only establish Jesus's unique relation to the Father and Spirit but also demonstrate his unique divine status and prerogatives, his divine work and acts, and his divine name and titles.[4] However, an often neglected way of establishing Jesus's identity is by tracing out the Bible's storyline. As God's redemptive plan is disclosed *through* the progression of the covenants, the identity of the coming Messiah (Son) becomes more defined.[5] By the time the curtain of the New Testament opens, the prophetic testimony has already revealed and anticipated a Messiah to come who will inaugurate God's saving reign and usher in the new covenant age. From the Old

Testament teaching, the Messiah is viewed as both the obedient son-priest-king, the antitype of all the previous covenant heads/mediators, and the one who is also uniquely *the* Son, who is identified with Yahweh, hence God the Son incarnate. Four steps will sketch out how Scripture identifies the Jesus of the Bible by unpacking *kingdom through covenant*.[6]

The Initial Promise

Scripture begins with the declaration that God, as Creator and triune Lord, is the sovereign ruler and King of the universe. From the opening verses of Genesis, God is introduced and identified as the all-powerful Lord who created the universe by his work, while he himself is uncreated, self-sufficient, and in need of nothing outside himself (Pss. 50:12–14; 93:2; Acts 17:24–25). As the Lord, he chooses to enter into covenant relationships with his creatures through the first man, Adam. But sadly, Adam willfully and foolishly rebels against God's sovereign rule, and by his act of disobedience, sin and all its disastrous effects are brought into this world. Instead of God leaving us to ourselves and swiftly bringing full judgment on us, he acts in grace, choosing to save a people for himself and to reverse the manifold effects of sin.[7] This choice to save is evident in the *protevangelium* (Gen. 3:15), given immediately after the fall to reverse the disastrous effects of sin on the world through a coming deliverer. This promise, in embryonic form, anticipates the coming of a Redeemer, the "seed of the woman," who, though wounded himself in conflict, will destroy the works of Satan and restore goodness to this world. This promise creates the expectation that when it is finally realized, all sin and death will be defeated, and the fullness of God's saving reign will come to this world as God's rightful rule is acknowledged and embraced.

Further Definition

God's initial promise receives greater definition and clarity *through* the progression of the covenants. As God's plan unfolds in redemptive history and as God enters into covenant relations with Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David, step-by-step, God, by his mighty acts and words, prepares his people to anticipate the coming of the "seed of the woman," the deliverer, the

Messiah—a Messiah who, when he comes, will *fulfill* all God's promises by ushering in God's saving rule to this world.[8] This point is important for establishing the identity of the Messiah, especially the truth that he is God the Son incarnate. On the one hand, Scripture teaches that the fulfillment of God's promises will be accomplished *through a man*, as developed by various typological persons such as Adam, Noah, Moses, Israel, and David, all seen in terms of the covenants. On the other hand, Scripture also teaches that this Messiah is more than a mere man, since he is *identified with God*. How so? Because in fulfilling God's promises, he literally inaugurates *God's* saving rule (kingdom) and shares the very throne of God—something no mere human can do—which entails that his identity is organically tied to the one true and living God.[9] This observation is further underscored by the next point, which shows how God's kingdom is established through the inauguration of the new covenant.

Salvation Typified through Covenant Heads

How does God's kingdom come in its *saving / redemptive / new creation* sense? As the Old Testament unfolds, God's saving kingdom is revealed and comes to this world, at least in anticipatory form, through the progression of the covenants and covenant heads/mediators—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Abraham's seed centered on the nation of Israel, and most significantly, David and his sons. Yet in the Old Testament, it is clear that all the covenant mediators (sons) fail and do not fulfill God's promises; all of them are not obedient sons. This is specifically evident in the Davidic kings, who are "sons" to Yahweh, the representatives of Israel, and thus "other Adams," but who fail in their task. It is only when a true, obedient son comes, a son whom God himself provides, that God's rule finally and completely is established and his promises realized. This is why, in Old Testament expectation, the arrival of God's kingdom is organically linked to the dawning of the new covenant. This is also why, when one begins to read the Gospels, one is struck by the fact that the kingdom of God is so central to Jesus's life and teaching; he cannot be understood apart from it. But note: in biblical thought, one cannot think of the inauguration of the kingdom apart from the arrival of the new covenant.

In this regard, Jeremiah 31 is probably the best-known new covenant text in the Old Testament, but as previous chapters have demonstrated, teaching on the new covenant is not limited to it. New covenant teaching is also found in the language of "everlasting covenant" and "covenant of peace" and in the anticipation of the coming of the new creation, the Spirit, and God's saving work among the nations found through all the prophets. In fact, among the prophets, who all write after the Davidic covenant, there is an expectation that the new covenant will have a purpose similar to the Mosaic covenant—namely, to bring the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant back into the present experience of Israel and the nations. Yet there is also an expectation of some important changes from the old, all of which are outlined in Jeremiah 31 and other new covenant texts. Probably what is most *new* about the new covenant is the promise of complete forgiveness of sin (Jer. 31:34). In the Old Testament, forgiveness of sin is normally granted through the priestly-sacrificial system. However, the Old Testament believer, if spiritually perceptive, knew that this was never enough, as evidenced by the *repetitive* nature of the system (Heb. 9:1–10). But now Jeremiah announces that sin will be "remembered no more" (Jer. 31:34), which certainly entails that sin will finally be dealt with in full. When other texts are considered, the Old Testament ultimately anticipates a perfect, unfettered fellowship of God's people with the Lord, a harmony restored between creation and God—a new creation and a new Jerusalem—where the dwelling of God is with men (see Ezek. 37:1–23; cf. Isa. 25:6–9; Dan. 12:2; Rev. 21:3–4). That is why it is with the arrival of the new covenant age that we also have God's saving kingdom brought to this world, which is precisely the fulfillment of the *protevangelium*.

The Progression of Covenants and the Identity of Jesus

Let us now take the Bible's basic covenantal storyline and explain how it answers the crucial question, Who is Jesus? If we step back for a moment and ask, Who is able, or what kind of person is able to fulfill all God's promises, inaugurate his saving rule in this world, and establish all that is associated with the new covenant, including the full forgiveness of sin? the answer in biblical thought is clear: it is *God alone* who can do it, and no one

else.[10] Is this not the message of the Old Testament? Is this not the message of the covenants? As the centuries trace the history of Israel, it becomes evident that Yahweh *alone* must act to accomplish his promises; he must initiate in order to save; he must *unilaterally* act if there is going to be any redemption. After all, who ultimately can achieve the forgiveness of sin other than God alone? Who can usher in the new creation, final judgment, and salvation? Certainly, none of these great realities will ever come through the previous covenant heads/mediators, for they have all, in different ways, failed. They only function as types and shadows of the one to come. Nor will it come through Israel as a nation, for her sin has brought about her exile and judgment. If there is to be salvation at all, God *himself* must come and usher in salvation and execute judgment; the arm of the Lord must be revealed (Isa. 51:9; 52:10; 53:1; 59:16–17; cf. Ezekiel 34). Just as he once led Israel through the desert, so he must come again, enacting a new exodus in order to bring salvation to his people (Isa. 40:3–5).[11]

However, as the progression of the covenants establish, starting with creation and Adam and moving to David, alongside the emphasis that God *himself* must come and accomplish these great realities, the Old Testament also stresses that Yahweh will do so *through* another David, a human figure but a human figure who is also closely identified with Yahweh himself. Isaiah pictures this well. This king to come will sit on David's throne (Isa. 9:7), but he will also bear the very titles and names of God (Isa. 9:6). This king, though another David (Isa. 11:1), is also David's Lord who shares in the divine rule (Ps. 110:1; cf. Matt. 22:41–46). He will be the mediator of a new covenant; he will perfectly obey and act like the Lord (Isa. 11:1–5); yet he will suffer for our sin in order to justify many (Isa. 53:11). It is through him that forgiveness will come, for he is "The LORD our righteousness" (Jer. 23:5–6). In this way, Old Testament expectation, which is grounded in the coming of the Lord to save, is joined together with the coming of the Messiah, one who is fully human yet also bears the divine name (Isa. 9:6–7; Ezekiel 34).

It is this basic storyline of Scripture that serves as the framework and background to the New Testament's presentation of Jesus. Who is Jesus? He

is the one who inaugurates *God's* kingdom and new covenant age. In him, the full forgiveness of sin is achieved; in him, the eschatological Spirit is poured out, the new creation dawns, and all God's promises are fulfilled. But in light of the Old Testament teaching, who can do such a thing? Only one who is both Yahweh *and* the obedient Son, which is precisely how the New Testament presents Jesus. The New Testament unambiguously teaches that this *human* Jesus is also Yahweh since he alone ushers in *God's* kingdom. He is the eternal Son in relation to his Father (see Matt. 11:1–15; 12:41–42; 13:16–17; Luke 7:18–22; 10:23–24; cf. John 1:1–3; 17:3), yet the one who has taken on our flesh and lived and died among us in order to win for us our salvation (John 1:14–18). In him, as fully human, the glory and radiance of God is completely expressed, since he is the exact image and representation of the Father (Hebrews 1–3; cf. Col. 1:15–17; 2:9). In him, all the biblical covenants have reached their fulfillment; indeed, all history is "summed up" in him (Eph. 1:9–10). By his cross work, Jesus has inaugurated the new covenant and all its entailments. But it is crucial to point out: to say that Jesus has done all this is to identify him *as God the Son incarnate*, fully God and fully man.[12]

It is for this reason that the New Testament presents Jesus in an entirely different category from any created thing. In fact, Scripture so identifies him with Yahweh in all his actions, character, and work that he is viewed, as David Wells reminds us, as "the agent, the instrument, and the personifier of God's sovereign, eternal, saving rule."[13] In Messiah Jesus, we see all God's plans and purposes fulfilled; we see the resolution of God to take on himself our guilt and sin in order to reverse the horrible effects of the fall and to satisfy his own righteous requirements, to make this world right, and to inaugurate a new covenant in his blood. In Jesus Christ, we see the perfectly obedient Son, who is also the Lord, taking the initiative to keep his covenant promises by taking on himself our human flesh, veiling his glory, and winning for us our redemption. In him we see two major Old Testament eschatological expectations unite: he is the sovereign Lord who comes to rescue and save his people and who is simultaneously David's greater Son. In this way, our Lord Jesus Christ fulfills all the types and shadows of the Old Testament and is also presented as the eternal Son,

identified with the covenant Lord and thus God—equal to the Father in every way. *Kingdom through covenant* teaches us who Jesus is, and he cannot be understood apart from it.

Kingdom through Covenant and the Work of Christ

Regarding Christ's work, there are at least two places where properly viewing the progression of the covenants helps illuminate this doctrinal area, although here we are only briefly able to discuss these important matters.

The Obedient Son: The Active Obedience of Christ

Historically and in current theological discussions, people have disputed the biblical and theological basis for Christ's active obedience.[14] In Reformed theology (but not limited to it), the debate on Christ's active obedience is part of the larger discussion of the nature of Christ's work and how his work is applied to us in salvation. Often the distinction is made between Christ's *active* and *passive* obedience.

Active obedience, as Wayne Grudem explains, means that "Christ had to live a life of perfect obedience to God in order to earn righteousness for us. He had to obey the law for his whole life on our behalf so that the positive merits of his perfect obedience would be counted for us."[15] As that active obedience is applied to us, it is viewed in terms of the *imputation* of Christ's righteousness to us, tied to the larger discussion of justification by grace through faith. In other words, our Lord, in his life and death, acts as the obedient Son in our place so that his righteousness is legally reckoned to us by faith union in him. *Passive* obedience refers to Christ, as our substitute, bearing our sin in our place and paying the penalty we rightly deserve. Together they emphasize that for our Lord Jesus to act as our Savior, his whole life and death is one act of obedience to the Father on our behalf. Salvation requires that our Lord not only had to pay for our sin as our *substitute* (passive obedience) but also had to live a life of perfect, devoted obedience before God as our *representative* (active obedience). In so doing, as the obedient Son, he fulfilled God's righteous demands for us in regard to both penal sanctions and positive demands.

Why have some disputed the biblical basis for the active obedience of Christ? A number of reasons could be given, all the way from a misunderstanding of the terms, to thinking that the doctrine can be maintained only as it is linked to a specific understanding of the "covenant of works," to a rejection of the notion that God demands perfect obedience for salvation.[16] Yet such a dismissal, or even worse, rejection, greatly affects how we think of Christ's cross and its application to us. As Greg Van Court reminds us, the active-passive distinction is not just an attempt to describe the judicial character of justification:

> It is also a means of articulating the holiness and infinite worth of God's character and the positive and negative aspect that is inherently and inseparably bound up in all true obedience to his perfect will. For example, it is not enough to have no other gods before him; if one is to be acceptable before holy God, he must love him with all his heart, mind, and soul. It is not enough to refrain from committing adultery; if a husband is to be obedient to God, he must love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave his life for her. It is not enough to put off filthiness; one must also put on righteousness. Righteousness is not merely the negative lack of what is bad but also the positive fulfillment of what is good. It is this positive aspect of Christ's obedience to the will of the Father even unto and especially unto death that Reformed theologians have termed *active*.[17]

As John Murray rightly states,

> We must not view this obedience in any artificial or mechanical sense. When we speak of Christ's obedience we must not think of it as consisting simply in formal fulfillment of the commandments of God. What the obedience of Christ involved for him is perhaps nowhere more strikingly expressed than in Hebrews 2:10–18; 5:8–10 where we are told that Jesus "learned obedience from the things which he suffered," that he was made perfect through sufferings, and that "being made perfect he became to all who obey him the author of eternal salvation." . . . It was requisite that he should have been made perfect through sufferings and become the author of salvation through this perfecting. It was not, of course, a perfecting that required the

> sanctification from sin to holiness. He was always holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. But there was the perfecting of development and growth in the course and path of his obedience—he *learned* obedience. The heart and mind and will of our Lord had been moulded—shall we not say forged?—in the furnace of temptation and suffering. And it was in virtue of what he had learned in that experience of temptation and suffering that he was able, at the climactic point fixed by the arrangements of infallible wisdom and everlasting love, to be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.[18]

Establishing the Active Obedience of Christ

Given the importance of the active obedience of Christ for understanding Christ's work and its application to us, how is it best demonstrated? As in the discussion of the identity of Christ, one must establish its biblical basis text by text. But it is also important to remember that individual texts are embedded in an overall storyline that provides the categories, structures, and framework to make sense of individual texts. In the case of the active obedience of Christ, the progression of the covenants is crucial in establishing its grounding. Let us develop this point in three steps.[19]

Unconditional versus Conditional Covenants. The active obedience of Christ is organically related to the larger question of the unconditional/unilateral–conditional/bilateral nature of the biblical covenants. As previous chapters have discussed, a common way to distinguish the biblical covenants is to employ the unconditional/unilateral (royal grant) versus conditional/bilateral (suzerain-vassal treaty) distinction. We dissent from this thinking, since elements of both are blended together throughout the covenants. In fact, we contend that it is precisely due to this blend that there is a deliberate *tension* within the covenants—a tension that is increased and heightened as the covenants progress toward their fulfillment in Christ *and* a tension that is important in grounding Christ's active obedience.

On the one hand, what the progression of the covenants reveal is the sovereign promise-making and covenant-keeping God who never fails. He

is the covenant Lord who supremely reveals himself as the God of *ḥesed* and *ʾĕmet*. As Creator and Lord, he chooses to enter into relationships with his creatures wherein he demonstrates that he is always faithful. He always remains true to himself, his own character, and his promises, and it is on this basis alone that we can hope, trust, and rest in him. It is for this reason that all the biblical covenants are unconditional or unilaterally guaranteed by God's sovereign grace and power. By starting with Adam in creation and tracking the progression of the covenants, we discover God's commitment to his image bearers and creation, tied to his promises that never fail because he never fails. God remains true to his promises across the entire canon, which reaches its most profound fulfillment in our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, all the biblical covenants also demand an obedient partner (image-son). This is evident with Adam, as God gives him commands and responsibilities with the expectation that he will respond perfectly. Furthermore, as the covenants unfold, the same emphasis appears in all of them. Complete obedience and devotion are demanded from the covenant mediators and the people; God demands and deserves nothing less. In this sense, there is a conditional/bilateral element to all the covenants. It is this emphasis on God's demand of complete obedience from his creatures that is crucial in establishing the grounding to the active obedience of Christ. This is consistent with who God is as the standard of righteousness and justice. To demand anything less than full devotion and obedience from his creatures would be a denial of himself. In addition, in creating us, our triune God made us for himself, to know him, to worship him as servant-kings, to obey him, as we fulfill our task to extend his rule to the entire creation.

Conditional Promise of Eternal Life. In the covenant of creation, it is best to think of God's initial arrangement with Adam as holding forth a conditional promise of everlasting life. Even though this point is often disputed, there are good reasons to maintain it.[20] In this regard, God's specific command and warning to Adam in Genesis 2:16–17 and the emphasis on the tree of life in Genesis 2:9 are important. Admittedly, the text itself does not explicitly mention a reward, yet in light of the entire canon, this conclusion is warranted.

First, think of the command *not* to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is best to view this command as a test of Adam's obedience to the Lord. He was created to love God and his neighbor. The specific prohibition was a test to discern whether Adam would be what he was created to be: an obedient son. Sadly, Adam disobeyed, and the consequence of his action was no private affair. As the first man and representative head of the human race, his choice brought death into this world—spiritually and physically—for the entire human race (Rom. 3:23; 5:12–21).

Second, think of the tree of life. It is best to see it as an implied promise of life, especially in light of Genesis 3:22, where God expels humanity from Eden so that they will not take of the tree and live forever.[21] The expulsion from Eden not only speaks of God's judgment on Adam (and the entire human race) but also gives a glimmer of hope that eternal life is still possible, especially set in the context of the Genesis 3:15 promise of a coming deliverer. Together the two trees present two choices in Eden: life or death. As Micah McCormick notes, "If the tree of the knowledge of good and evil loomed over Eden with the threat of death, so too did the tree of life course with the expectation of everlasting life."[22] Canonically, it is significant that the tree of life appears again in the new creation.[23] Not only are believers told that they will eat of the tree of life if they persevere until the end (Rev. 2:7), but all who dwell in the new creation are sons of God who enjoy the tree of life (Rev. 22:1–5). G. K. Beale captures the significance of this when he writes, "To 'eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God' is a picture of forgiveness and consequent experience of God's intimate presence (22:2–4). . . . The 'tree' refers to the redemptive effects of the cross, which bring about the restoration of God's presence."[24] In this light, it is legitimate to conclude that the tree of life symbolizes eternal life—held out to Adam in the beginning and won by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Putting together these pieces, especially in light of the larger Adam-Christ typological relationship (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45–49; cf. Heb. 2:5–18), we see that where Adam disobeyed and failed, Christ succeeded in obedience and in securing our eternal redemption. Death

(physical and spiritual) was the result of Adam's disobedience; eternal life (spiritual and physical) was the result of Christ's act of obedience—an obedience that characterized his entire life including the supreme act of obedience in his death (Phil. 2:8). Adam acted as our covenant head yet failed the test. God demanded from him covenant loyalty, devotion, and obedience, but he did not fulfill the purpose of his creation. As Horton rightly notes, "Adam is created in a state of integrity with the ability to render God complete obedience, thus qualifying as a suitable human partner,"[25] yet he disobeyed. Our Lord, as the second Adam, lived a life of complete love, devotion, and obedience to his heavenly Father for us—showing us what an obedient son looks like—and in the greatest act of obedience possible, he went to the cross for us to pay for our sin and to satisfy God's own righteous requirements, which we violated in our sin, rebellion, and disobedience.

THE NEED FOR AN OBEDIENT SON. Building on the previous point, it is important to observe that as we progress *through* the covenants, *tension* grows in regard to God's demand for obedient covenant partners. To be sure, Yahweh always remains the faithful covenant partner as the promise maker and keeper. By contrast, all the human covenant heads—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David and his sons—show themselves to be unfaithful, disobedient covenant breakers—some to a greater extent than others. As a result, there is no faithful, obedient son who fully obeys the demands of the covenant. Obedience *must* be rendered, given who God is, but there is no obedient son to do so. How, then, can God remain the holy and just God that he is and be present with us in covenant relationship? How can he continue in relationship with us unless our disobedience is removed and our sin is paid for in full? The only answer is this: God himself, as the covenant maker and keeper, must unilaterally act to keep his own promise *through the provision of a faithful, obedient Son*. It is only through the Son's obedience—in life and in death—that our redemption is secured, our sin is paid for, and the inauguration of an unshakable new covenant is established.

In this regard, it is important to note how much the New Testament stresses the obedience of Christ.[26] John Calvin is correct when he says,

“Now someone asks, how has Christ abolished sin, banished the separation between us and God, and acquired righteousness to render God favorably and kindly toward us? To this we can in general reply that he has achieved this for us by the whole course of his obedience.”[27] It is a “whole course” of obedience that refers not only to Christ’s obedient death on our behalf but also to his entire obedient life, lived out for us as our representative head. In the context of the covenant of creation, God’s demands on his image bearers must be perfectly met, either personally or representatively. As Horton states, “To reflect God as his image-bearer is therefore to be righteous, holy, obedient—a covenant servant, defined as such by the covenant charter (Hos. 6:7, with Isa. 24:5; Jer. 31:35–37; 33:20–22, 25–26).”[28] Christ fulfills Adam’s role, he recapitulates Adam’s testing in the garden, yet he does not disobey. In his obedient life he fulfills Adam’s role representatively, and by his obedient death he acts as our substitute, paying the debt we could never repay. And all his work as the head of the new covenant becomes ours, not by physical birth or anything in us but solely by God’s sovereign grace as the Father chooses us in him, the Spirit unites us to him by new birth, and his righteous standing becomes ours as a result.

The Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness

It is in this covenantal context that we must think of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer and how it is that his active obedience becomes ours. It is by Christ acting as our covenant head that we, by God’s grace and through repentance and faith, come under his covenant headship. As John Murray rightly states, “Christ’s obedience was vicarious in the bearing of the full judgment of God upon sin, and it was vicarious in the full discharge of the demands of righteousness. His obedience becomes the ground of the remission of sin and of actual justification.”[29] God reckons, or counts, our entire sin to be Christ’s and Christ’s entire righteousness to be ours. This great exchange provides the basis for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. In this way, as Van Court notes, Scripture speaks of three great imputations:

> The first great imputation is Adam’s entire guilt from the fall to all people (Rom. 5:12, 18a, 19a; Ps. 51:5). The second is the elect’s entire

> sin to Christ (Isa. 53:4–6; Rom. 8:3–4; 2 Cor. 5:21a; Gal. 3:13). The third is Christ's entire righteousness to his elect (Rom. 3:21–22; 5:18a, 19b; 2 Cor. 5:21b; Phil. 3:9).[30]

Viewing Christ's active obedience, imputation, and justification within the context of *kingdom through covenant* is nothing new. Yet in light of today's debates, it helps illuminate and underscore the great gospel truth of salvation by grace alone, by faith alone, and in Christ alone. In an article wrestling with the New Perspective on Paul, Kevin Vanhoozer suggests that the more biblical way of thinking is to view Christ's work and how it becomes ours in the context of Christ's covenant representation of his people and our faith union with our covenant head. When we do so, it now makes sense to say that

> God reckons Christ's "right covenantal relatedness" ours . . . [since] "Christ does everything that Israel (and Adam) was supposed to do. He suffers the covenant sanction and fulfills the covenant law, including its summary command "to love God and your neighbor as oneself." In counting us righteous, then, God both pardons us ("there is therefore now no condemnation" [Rom. 8:1]) and gives us the positive *status* of rectitude, a down payment, as it were, sealed with the Spirit, on our eventually achieving an actual righteous *state* (i.e., sanctification). . . .
>
> Christians become members of God's covenant family by receiving the Son's status: *righteous sonship*. Jesus Christ was the righteous Son the Father always wanted Israel, and Adam, to be. . . . Sons and daughters in Christ, we have Christ's righteousness [*sic*] standing before God *and* unity with one another as members of Christ's one body.[31]

Without a metanarrative in which the covenants are key, and especially the creation covenant as epitomized in the Davidic covenant, where the king represents the nation, the doctrine of imputation is difficult to properly sustain.

The Christian Life: Applying Scripture through the Lens of the New Covenant[32]

We have argued that the new covenant is the fulfillment of the previous covenants. Given this view, a question is often asked: How do we apply the Bible as our ethical standard, especially if we reject the validity of the tripartite distinction of the old covenant? This question is relevant for our interaction with covenant theology for two reasons. First, covenant theology often charges as antinomian those positions that think of the old covenant as a covenant package now fulfilled in Christ. Second, covenant theology has sought to establish the basis for moral law by following the venerable tradition of dividing the Mosaic law into three parts—moral, civil, and ceremonial—something we reject.[33] Covenant theology argues that with Christ's coming, the law's civil and ceremonial parts are now fulfilled and abrogated, yet God's eternal moral law as revealed in the Decalogue remains unchanged.[34] A direct equation is made between the Decalogue and eternal moral law,[35] and a general hermeneutical rule is followed: unless the New Testament explicitly modifies or abrogates the Mosaic law (as in the ceremonial and civil parts), it is still in force today. This rule becomes *the* principle by which moral law is established across the canon.

Since our understanding of the Bible's covenantal progression differs from the covenant view, how, then, do we draw moral conclusions from Scripture? Before we answer this question, we must first acknowledge that there is much to commend about the covenant approach, and in fact, it is crucial not to exaggerate the differences between our views. In the end, both positions will arrive at similar conclusions regarding God's moral demands today, yet the difference lies in *how* we arrive at our conclusions. Given that we view the old covenant as a covenant package that *as an entire covenant* is now fulfilled in Christ, we do not appeal to the tripartite distinction of the law as *the* principle to determine what the moral law is. So how do we apply *all* Scripture to our lives?

Our answer to this question involves five steps. Given our rejection of the tripartite distinction, what is our alternative? How do we escape the charge of being antinomian? How do we establish God's moral norms, especially in our secular and pluralistic age, as those who now live under the new covenant?

The Authority of Scripture

All Scripture is authoritative and thus provides the norm for Christian ethics. What is our standard for ethics? The simple answer: *All* Scripture is our standard, and it alone establishes moral norms. In this regard, 2 Timothy 3:15–17 is crucial. Paul describes Scripture, specifically the Old Testament, as God's breathed-out Word and thus fully authoritative for Christians. In other words, the *entire* Old Testament, including the law-covenant, functions for us as the basis for our doctrine *and* ethics. Although Christians are not "under the law" *as a covenant*, it still functions *as Scripture* and demands our complete obedience.[36]

This point is crucial to stress at the outset of our discussion. *All* Christians ought to confess that God's nature and will are the objective standard of morality, and as creatures, we know this standard by revelation. Christian ethics is not antinomian. Although Scripture is not an exhaustive revelation, it is a true and objective revelation of God's moral will. Our triune God has not left us to ourselves; Scripture is our sufficient and authoritative moral standard.

Nevertheless, though *all* Scripture is our standard, its moral instruction requires careful application depending on our covenantal location. For example, some specific commands under the old covenant such as circumcision, food laws, gleaning laws, and so on, which are all demanded by God to be obeyed and are thus moral, no longer apply to us today in exactly the same way (Gen. 17:9–14; Lev. 11; 19:9–10; cf. Mark 7:1–23; Hebrews 5–10). For this reason, it is crucial to distinguish between biblical morality and Christian ethics.[37] As Michael Hill explains, "Biblical morality has to do with the morality found in the Bible"; it describes God's moral demands in specific places in redemptive history.[38] But "Christian ethics is locating what is normative for Christians in this present age."[39] As Hill grants, "Some unreflective Christians believe that the revelation of God is exactly the same in any part of the Bible."[40] Thus the *doing* of ethics is simply to take "a moral rule, principle or virtue from any part of the Bible and without further interpretation apply it directly as moral guidance for Christians today."[41] But this ethical use of the Bible fails to do justice to the Bible's own teaching and the progression of the covenants. So *all* Scripture

is for our ethical instruction, but *not* all Scripture applies to us in exactly the same way. How do we rightly apply the entire Bible as our ethical norm?

Rejection of the Tripartite Distinction of the Law

Negatively stated, we reject the tripartite distinction of the law-covenant as the means by which Christians determine what is morally binding on us today. Historically, covenant theology has determined what is morally binding on Christians by appealing to the tripartite distinction of the Mosaic law. Although this approach is noteworthy, we reject it for at least three reasons.

First, Scripture views the law-covenant as a unit or package, and it does not appeal to the tripartite distinction as *the* principle means by which the continuity and discontinuity of moral law is established for Christians today. This is not to say that within the law-covenant no distinctions can be made (recognizing, e.g., certain principles as more important [Matt. 5:24; 9:13], the weightier matters of the law [Matt. 23:23], laws regarding sacrifices [Leviticus 1–7] versus civil matters, or even the central place of the Decalogue [Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5]). Instead, it is to say that Scripture views the law-covenant as a covenant package that serves a specific role in God's plan for the life of Israel, and as an entire covenant, it is brought to fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant.[42]

Texts such as Galatians 5:3 and James 2:8–13 point in this direction. Keeping or breaking one part of the law assumes the keeping or breaking of the whole law. Or as the author of Hebrews argues, the law-covenant is an integrated whole grounded in the priesthood (Heb. 7:11), and with a change in priesthood (Psalm 110; Hebrews 7), there is *necessarily* a change of the whole covenant, not merely parts of it (Heb. 7:12; 8:7–13). Think of how Paul views himself as a Christian: before, he was under the law-covenant as a Jew, but now he no longer is. Instead, he is under God's law by being *ennomos Christou* (1 Cor. 9:21), that is, under the new covenant. Paul views the covenants as entire packages, the old having reached its end in Christ.

Second, Scripture teaches that the law-covenant was temporary in God's plan, serving a number of purposes but ultimately pointing forward to its fulfillment in Christ (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:15–4:7; Heb. 7:11–12).[43] In order

to grasp the role of the law-covenant in God's redemptive plan, we must locate it within the progressive unfolding of the covenants. When one does so, Scripture teaches the opposite conclusion of first-century Judaism. Jewish thought believed that the old covenant was eternal and unchangeable (e.g., Wis. 18:4; Jub. 1:27; 3:31; 6:17; *Mos.* 2.14; *Ag. Ap.* 2.277); the New Testament teaches that as important as the law-covenant is in God's unfolding plan, it has now come to its end *as an entire covenant*.[44]

It is for this reason that the Mosaic law *as a covenant* is no longer directly binding on the Christian. In fact, the law's purpose of supervising God's people and directing their behavior as a *paidagōgos* (Gal. 3:24) reached its end with Christ's coming and the new covenant (Gal. 4:1–7).[45] Two important results follow. First, it is difficult to separate the law-covenant into three parts and suggest that only its moral parts apply to us today. Second, given that the law-covenant has reached its telos in Christ, we apply its ethical instruction to us only through the lens of the new covenant.

Third, and related to the previous points, the New Testament teaches that Christians are no longer "under the law" as a covenant, and thus it no longer functions as a "direct authority" for us (e.g., Rom. 6:14–15; 1 Cor. 9:20–21; Gal. 4:4–5; 5:13–18).[46] On this point, Paul's argument is thoroughly redemptive-historical: the old covenant served its purpose in God's plan, but now in Christ, it has reached its telos (end and goal) (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:15–4:7).[47] A common way to avoid this conclusion is to interpret Paul as saying that Christians are no longer "under the law" either by a legalistic misuse of it or in its ceremonial requirements.[48] Both of these interpretations fail, however, since Paul does not equate "law" (*nomos*) with a "legalistic" misunderstanding of it; instead, "law" refers to the entire law-covenant, which Christians are no longer under as a covenant unit in Christ since they are now under the new covenant.[49]

On this point, 1 Corinthians 9:20–21 is a crucial text. As a Christian, Paul no longer sees himself as "under the law," *and*, remarkably, he does not equate God's law one-for-one with the Mosaic law. Instead, Paul views himself as under God's law but with God's law now defined completely in relation to Christ (*ennomos Christou*).[50] This entails, as Moo suggests, that

> the "law" under which Christians live is continuous with the Mosaic law in that God's eternal moral norms, which never change, are clearly expressed in both. But there is discontinuity in the fact that Christians live under the "law of Christ" and *not* under the Mosaic law. Our source for determining God's eternal moral law is Christ and the apostles, not the Mosaic law or even the Ten Commandments.[51]

This fact helps make sense of why Christians do not "do" or "keep" the law; instead, in Christ, we "fulfill" the law due to Christ's work and the power of the Spirit.[52]

What do these three points teach us? Scripture does not appeal to a tripartite division in the law as *the* basis for determining the moral law today. The law-covenant is viewed as a whole. It has now reached its end in Christ. This is why the law-covenant is not *directly* binding on Christians. This is *not* to say that it has no present relevance. In fact, if we ask, What is the purpose of the law? (Gal. 3:19), diverse answers may be given.[53]

Central to the law's purpose was to reveal God's character, to show the nature of human sin by imprisoning Israel under sin, and to instruct how God would graciously redeem in priesthood and sacrifice (e.g., Rom. 3:19–20; 5:20; 7:7–12; 8:2–3; Col. 2:14; Heb. 7:11; 10:3). The law-covenant held out the promise of life (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 2:13; Gal. 3:12), but due to human sin, it could not save us, despite being "holy, righteous, and good" (Rom. 7:12).[54] In fact, the law-covenant was never intended to save, yet in its typological patterns (e.g., sacrificial system, tabernacle-temple, priesthood), it pointed forward to how God would save. In the end, God's righteousness comes apart from the old covenant (Rom. 3:21), and it is found only in the new covenant—that to which the law pointed (Rom. 3:21–31; 8:2–4; Gal. 3:13–14; 4:4–7). For a time, the Mosaic law supervised God's people (Gal. 3:24; 4:1–7), but now that Christ has come, its supervisory work is done. Yet the law-covenant still functions for us *as Scripture*, teaching us about God's glorious plan of redemption, making us wise to salvation in Christ, and instructing us how to live wisely in the world as God's new covenant people.[55]

The New Covenant as the Interpretive Lens

Positively speaking, we determine what is morally binding on us today by appealing to the entirety of Scripture viewed through the lens of the new covenant. Although Christians are not "under the law" *as a covenant*, the law still functions for us *as Scripture*. As with any biblical text, however, before we directly apply it to our lives, we must first place it in its covenantal location, *and* then we must think through how that text points forward, anticipates, and is fulfilled in Christ. It is only by doing this that we correctly apply *any* biblical text to our lives as Christians. In fact, apart from following this hermeneutical process, we will incorrectly apply Scripture.

For example, if we ask, Does the Levitical sacrificial instruction apply to us today? the answer is no, if we mean *as* God's covenant instruction to Israel. We, as Christians, live *after* Christ, who by his glorious work has brought the Old Testament sacrifices to their telos (Hebrews 5–10). Yet Leviticus *as Scripture* does apply to us in diverse ways—*as* prophecy, instruction, and wisdom—but now only in light of Christ. What is true of Leviticus is also true of the law-covenant (e.g., circumcision, food laws, civil laws, and Decalogue). No part of the law is applied to us without first placing it in its covenantal location (immediate and epochal-covenantal context) and then asking how the entire covenant is fulfilled in Christ (canonical context).

In answering the question, What is the moral law for Christians today? we must follow the same path. We first gladly confess that the *entirety* of Scripture is our standard. But we must simultaneously add that *all* Scripture's moral teaching is binding on us only *in light of its fulfillment in Christ*. Both of these points are needed to discern God's moral demands for new covenant believers, and Hill nicely emphasizes these points in his discussion of the Ten Commandments and their application to us today.

On the one hand, Hill notes that "the Law of Moses does not provide a complete and binding guide to Christian morality."[56] Moo rightly asserts that "the entire Mosaic law comes to fulfillment in Christ, and this fulfillment means that this law is no longer a *direct and immediate* source of, or judge of, the conduct of God's people. Christian behavior, rather, is now guided directly by 'the law of Christ.'"[57] For Moo, the "law of Christ"

reflects all that God has given to us under the new covenant, especially "the teaching and example of Jesus and the apostles, the central demand of love, and the guiding influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit."[58]

On the other hand, as Hill insists, the Mosaic law cannot be ignored either since it is authoritative Scripture. *As a covenant*, the law does not govern us directly, yet *as Scripture*, and applied to us in Christ, it now takes on a prophetic-wisdom function. Hill comments that in the Mosaic law "the basic shape of God's rule, and of God's just order established at creation, is confirmed and further delineated in the Law. Yet it is delineated in positive and negative ways"[59]—ways that point forward to a better covenant. Hill rightly notes that "while Christians are not under the package called the Law (a package designated as the 'Old Covenant'), the moral elements in the Law are part of a continuum that gives shape to an ideal."[60] That ideal is first given in creation, distorted in the fall, and recovered in the law-covenant, but ultimately, it is only fully restored in Christ. In this way, the law-covenant expresses God's moral demands, but it also points forward to a greater covenant. In the new covenant the previous moral instruction is not dismissed; rather, it continues *and* is transformed in light of the ideal that has begun in Christ and that will be consummated at Christ's return. The new covenant, then, not only replaces the old but also fulfills it.

The New Testament teaches both the *replacement* and *fulfillment* of the old covenant by the new.[61] On the one hand, in the new covenant, the old is *replaced* by the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:20–21). Instead of reliance on the law, we rely on Christ (Gal. 2:19–20; Phil. 3:4–14), and we discern God's will in Christ and apostolic instruction (1 Cor. 7:19; 9:21; Gal. 6:2). As Rosner contends,

> Christians are not under the Law of Moses, but under the law of Christ, the law of faith and the law of the Spirit. We have died to the law, Christ lives in us and we live by faith in the Son of God. . . . We do not keep the law, but fulfil the law in Christ and through love. We do not seek to walk according to the law, but according to the truth of the gospel, in Christ, in newness of resurrection life, by faith, in the light and in step with the Spirit.[62]

On the other hand, the new covenant *fulfills* the old. A crucial text in this regard is Matthew 5:17–20. Although debate surrounds this text, *fulfillment* is best understood in a redemptive-historical sense (see Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9). Jesus fulfills the law and the prophecies (and thus the entire Old Testament) in that they point forward to him, and Jesus is the one who brings them to their intended end. The entire Old Testament, including the previous covenants, have a *prophetic* function as they foreshadow and predict the coming of Christ.[63] Obviously, the prophetic foreshadowing varies depending on whether it is a typological pattern (e.g., exodus, sacrifices, priesthood, and temple) or whether it is the law's instruction. Yet in light of the antitheses in Matthew 5:21–48, Jesus teaches that just as he has "fulfilled OT prophecies by his person and actions, so he fulfilled OT law by his teaching."[64] As Carson notes,

> In no case does this "abolish" the OT as canon, any more than the obsolescence of the Levitical sacrificial system abolishes tabernacle ritual as canon. Instead, the OT's real and abiding authority must be understood through the person and teaching of him to whom it points and who so richly fulfills it.[65]

If this is so, it is important to see that in his *teaching*, Jesus *fulfills* the law not simply by extending, annulling, or merely intensifying it but by demonstrating "the direction in which it [OT law] points."[66] In so doing, Jesus views himself as "the eschatological goal of the OT, and thereby its sole authoritative interpreter, the one through whom alone the OT finds its valid continuity and significance."[67] From Matthew 5:17–20, Moo draws the following ethical implication: Jesus teaches us that

> the OT law is not to be abandoned. Indeed, it must continue to be taught (Matt 5:19)—but interpreted and applied in light of its fulfillment by Christ. In other words, it stands no longer as the *ultimate* standard of conduct for God's people, but must always be viewed through the lenses of Jesus' ministry and teaching.[68]

In order for Christians, then, to determine what God's moral law is, we must apply *all* Scripture in light of Christ. God's moral law is not discovered, as covenant theology teaches, in an *a priori* manner, that is, by

isolating the Decalogue from the law-covenant and then applying it directly to us. Instead, "moral law" is determined from the *entire* Bible in an *a posteriori* way, that is, by reading and applying biblical texts to us, first in their covenantal location and then in light of Christ. Carson is right to insist that

> we do not begin with a definition of moral law, civil law, and ceremonial law but observe (for example) what laws change least, across redemptive history, in the nature and details of their demands, and happily apply the category "moral" to them. This seems to me to reflect better exegesis and allows space to see the teleological, predictive, anticipatory nature of *Tanakh* as it points forward to the new covenant and beyond to the consummation.[69]

What this entails is a careful reading/application of the whole Bible in ethics. The *entire* Old Testament, including the law-covenant, is for our moral instruction. Reading Scripture by placing each covenant in its immediate, epochal, and canonical contexts is the way we determine what God's moral law is. We do not follow either the hermeneutical rule that unless the New Testament explicitly modifies or abrogates the Mosaic law (as in the ceremonial and civil parts), it is still in force today, or even the rule Moo suggests, that Christians are bound only "to that which is clearly repeated within New Testament teaching."[70] The former approach wrongly assumes the validity of a tripartite distinction of the law as *the* principle by which moral law is canonically established, *and* it fails to grasp the law-covenant's place in the progression of the covenants. The latter approach, if one is not careful, is open to the charge that since certain behaviors are not clearly repeated in the New Testament—such as bestiality (Ex. 22:19; cf. Lev. 18:23; 20:16) or the cursing of the deaf (Lev. 19:14)—then we have no New Testament warrant to say that these actions are immoral.[71] What is needed is a "whole Bible" hermeneutic, unpacking the Bible's own internal categories, placing texts in the Bible's unfolding storyline according to their covenantal location, and then thinking through their relation to Christ. Let us develop this approach briefly in the last two points.

The Bible's Intrasystematic Categories

Applying Scripture today requires a careful unpacking of the Bible's storyline and intrasystematic categories. How do we draw moral conclusions from the whole Bible? One point needs to be stressed. In using Scripture to do ethics, it is crucial to unpack the Bible's own intrasystematic categories,[72] which include both the Bible's progressive unfolding of the covenants *and* the larger biblical-theological framework of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation.[73]

Why is this important? Just as it is crucial to begin the Bible's storyline and covenantal unfolding in creation in order to grasp God's plan, it is also necessary to ground ethics in the norm of creation. As Hill rightly insists, it is the original creation with its revealed goals or purposes that "provides us with the basis for determining what is morally good."[74] This point is especially significant in ethical discussions over the nature and dignity of humans, the proper use of our sexuality, marriage, the value of labor, and so on.

For example, take the case of bestiality. Before the law forbids it (Ex. 22:19), we know from creation that there is a qualitative distinction between humans and animals and that the only valid expression of our sexuality is in heterosexual marriage (Gen. 2:18–25). Given our sin and rebellion, God reminds Israel in the law-covenant what is and is not morally acceptable, but this does not entail that we know that bestiality is wrong only from the law-covenant. Also, even if the new covenant does not explicitly forbid bestiality, this does not entail that the Mosaic law is still in force unless the New Testament explicitly modifies/abrogates it, or that we are only bound to that which is clearly repeated in the New Testament. Both of these approaches fail to do justice to a "whole Bible" reading, grounded in the Bible's own biblical-theological framework and moving across the covenants from creation to the new creation.

In order to discern God's moral will, we need to begin in creation and then think through how sin has distorted God's order, walk through the covenants, and discover how God's redemptive promise will restore and transform the created order—a reality that has now been realized in Christ. At every stage in redemptive history, the covenants reflect God's moral demands, thus explaining why we expect *and* find a continuity of moral

demand across the canon. But earlier covenants on their own do not provide a complete and binding guide for Christian morality.[75] No doubt, the earlier covenants are crucial parts of God's one redemptive plan, but now, due to Christ's work, *as covenants*, they have been fulfilled. *As Scripture*, all the covenants, including the law-covenant, are instructive for us, since as Hill observes, "The basic shape of God's rule, and God's just order established at creation, is confirmed and further delineated in the Law."[76] But applying specific ethical instruction to us must be done by a "whole Bible" reading viewed in Christ—the one in whom "all the elements of the moral ideal are realized and revealed. . . . In [Christ] we see God's just and good order."[77]

Illustrations of Ethical Conclusions

Let us think of some illustrations of how to draw ethical conclusions from the "whole Bible" and under the new covenant. Hill summarizes how Christians ought to approach Scripture and draw ethical conclusions:

> On any particular issue we will need to put together the relevant sections of Scripture so that we can know what is good in particular cases. The basic creation pattern is the starting-point for this exercise. The Law and the Prophets point to the original shape and purpose of God's good order and highlight the fractures and disorder caused by sin. Finally, the revelation in Christ gives us a glimpse of the completed and perfected order. With minds renewed by the Spirit of God through the work of Christ believers can use this information to discern what is right and good. Such discernment is the substance of wisdom.[78]

A few examples may help, but admittedly, the discussion is brief.

First, let us think about sexual ethics. Scripture teaches us that God's norm for human sexuality is in creation (Gen. 1:26–30; 2:15–25). In the creation of male and female, God designed human sexuality to function within the permanent, covenant relationship of heterosexual marriage (Matt. 19:4–9). All misuses of our sexuality, whether fornication, adultery, divorce, homosexuality, bestiality, and even polygamy, are distortions viewed against the backdrop of God's creation intent for us. Sadly, in light of the fall, all sexual distortions are introduced. In earlier stages of

redemptive history, a less than normative behavior is sometimes allowed (e.g., polygamy), but viewed against God's creation order and in light of the greater Christ-church relationship, polygamy is never viewed as normative.[79] It is for this reason that with the dawning of the new covenant, polygamy is no longer acceptable. God's creation standard is reaffirmed and lived out in the church.

Although the Mosaic law explicitly forbids specific sexual distortions (Lev. 18:1–30), it is important to see that all its prohibitions simply unpack the "one flesh" ideal of creation. In addition, given the prophetic function of the law-covenant, as the law anticipates a greater righteousness to come, the ethical demand under the new covenant is greater. Also, as the prophets anticipate the dawning of the new creation, they speak of a day when God will so transform the entire community that God's new covenant people will become covenant keepers and not breakers (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–27), which is precisely what our Lord addresses in his teaching regarding the kingdom (Matt. 5:17–48).[80] In Christ's coming and work, the new order has arrived. By the regenerating work of the Spirit, those who enter God's kingdom are united to Christ and freed from Adam and the old era. In Christ, individuals and the church are the "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:8–10, 11–21), hence the reason why we begin to live out what it means to be God's new creation even though we still live between the times. The New Testament, in calling the church to a proper use of sexuality, grounds it both in creation and in what we are in Christ. This is why God's moral demand on us today is greater—greater in restoring us to what we were created to be in the first place *and* in calling us to live now as God's new creation people.[81]

Second, let us think about various life issues. Given our creation as image bearers, human life is precious (Gen. 1:26–28; cf. 9:6). Strife, anger, murder, and our inhumane treatment of others are a result of the fall. In the law-covenant these wrong behaviors are explicitly forbidden and punished, but their prohibition is basically the outworking of who we are as created beings. Jesus is clear that God's intent from the beginning was for his image bearers to love God and their neighbors, which is precisely what the entire canon emphasizes (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:5; cf. Matt. 22:34–40). Yet in the

new age, the full intent of how we are to love as God's people is now realized in a greater way. This is why Jesus stresses that it is not merely murder, adultery, or lying that are forbidden but our very hateful, self-gratifying heart attitude toward one another (Matt. 5:21–48). What God demands of his people is love. In the old era, the law-covenant demanded it, but it also anticipated something more. Now, in Christ, what the old anticipated is here. This is why Paul can say that love *fulfills* the law (Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:14)—not an amorphic love but one governed by God's will and our renewal in Christ by the Spirit. As this understanding of humans and love is applied to ethical issues such as abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia, although each issue involves other matters,[82] a sanctity-of-life ethic is foundational to a Christian ethic and is consistent in all Scripture.

Third, how should we apply the law-covenant to us today? We do not apply it as if we are under it *as a covenant*. No doubt, prior to the coming of Christ, that is precisely how it was applied to God's people. Nevertheless, as new covenant believers, the law-covenant is no longer directly applicable to us in this way. Thus, in reading of the law's various moral demands, we do not directly apply them to our lives until we have first wrestled with how these moral demands have been brought to fulfillment in Christ. For example, in regard to such demands as not sowing two seeds in a field, not eating unclean foods, the need to circumcise our male children, the treatment of blood disorders, and so on, we do not directly obey these commands as covenantal obligation. However, *as Scripture*, the law-covenant is for our instruction. As we apply these commands, we must think through whether old covenant commands are tied to creation, whether they are tied solely to the old era, and how they are fulfilled in the New Testament. By following this procedure, we learn how to apply all Scripture to us in Christ.

In the case of the sacrificial system, for example, it no longer functions for us covenantally. Yet as Scripture, the sacrificial system instructs us about our sin, it teaches us something about God's holy demand and gracious provision, and most importantly, it reveals our need for someone greater. Or think of the food laws. Even though they no longer apply to us directly, they are instructive for us. In thinking through why God gave them

in the Old Testament *and* how they are fulfilled in Christ, we discover that their primary purpose was to separate God's people from the nations and to instruct them about their need for an internal heart transformation (Mark 7:1–23; Acts 10–11). Although these two purposes have ended in Christ, we, as new covenant believers, are still instructed by them. In fact, it was the theological and practical implications of these very issues that the Jerusalem Council had to resolve; otherwise, the entire gospel was at stake (Acts 10–11; 15; Rom. 14:1–15:13; Gal. 1:6–10).

Or think of the various capital punishments exercised in the Old Testament. Given the change from Israel to Christ *and* a church-state distinction in the new covenant, we do not directly apply the civil law of Israel to governments today, yet two points need to be made. First, given the God-ordained role of government and the sanctity of human life, the state's role is to protect life and to punish those who do not (Gen. 9:6; Rom. 13:1–7), and as such, some forms of capital punishment are consistent throughout time. Yet in other areas, there is no New Testament warrant to practice specific punishments today as they functioned for Israel under the law-covenant. Second, the church functions as a theocracy in the new covenant, and the church's exercise of church discipline picks up some of the punishments of the old covenant in a greater way. For example, think of various sexual sins. Under the law-covenant, sexual sin was punishable by death. Under the new covenant, the church does not deal with sexual sin in this way; instead, she deals with it through the exercise of church discipline (Matt. 18:15–20; 1 Corinthians 5). But, it is crucial to remember, if the guilty party does not repent, the verdict of excommunication is far greater than anything in the old since it is viewed as a verdict with eternal consequences (see Heb. 2:1–4).

What about applying the Decalogue today? It too must be applied in a similar manner, that is, by locating it in its covenantal location and then applying it to us in light of Christ. So, for example, as we read the opening preamble (Ex. 20:1–2), we are keenly aware of its covenantal location, yet it is now applied to us in light of God's unfolding plan of redemption culminated in Christ. Unlike Israel, we have not been redeemed from our bondage to Egypt, but in a far greater way, we have been redeemed from

that which the exodus (along with the prophets [Isaiah 11; 42; 53]), typologically pointed forward to, namely, our exodus-deliverance from sin in Christ's cross (Luke 9:31). Then as we apply each commandment in light of our redemption in Christ, we discover that there is a greater incentive, obligation, and demand on us to have no other gods before us (Ex. 20:3) and to honor the great name of our triune God (Ex. 20:7). In one sense, the moral demand has not changed; in another sense, it is greater in Christ.

As we approach the Sabbath command (Ex. 20:8–11), once again, we apply it in exactly the same way. In thinking through the Sabbath's covenantal location—that which looks back to the covenantal rest at creation (Gen. 2:1–3), a day to be obeyed by Israel under the law and a day that typologically pointed forward to a greater rest to come (Psalm 95; cf. Matt. 11:28–30; Heb. 3:7–5:13)—it is now applied to us in light of its fulfillment, namely, Christ, who has achieved for us salvation rest. All the other commandments (Ex. 20:12–17) are applied in the same way.

What about the commandment concerning parents and children (Ex. 20:12)? Surely, given that Paul quotes it directly in Ephesians 6:2, this demonstrates that the Decalogue has direct relevance for us today, does it not? But before we draw this conclusion, it is important to observe that even though there is moral continuity between this command and the New Testament, as there is with the other commands, there is also a major transformation. Paul no longer says that our honoring of our parents will yield long life in the land; instead, he expands the promise to the whole earth, thus further confirming that the law-covenant is applied to us today in and through Christ and his glorious new covenant work.[83]

How, then, do we apply the entire Bible as our ethical standard, given our view of progressive covenantalism? We have offered a brief answer to that question. Most Christians, regardless of their commitment to covenant or dispensational theology, will arrive at similar conclusions. But as noted above, the important difference lies in *how* we get there. In the end, our aim is to achieve two results simultaneously: first, to employ a consistent hermeneutic that properly puts together the biblical covenants on the Bible's own terms, and, second, to learn anew to obey all that Scripture teaches.

In this chapter, we have investigated how our view of kingdom through covenant has direct implications for Christology and the Christian life. In the last chapter, we will develop further implications of progressive covenantalism for systematic theology by turning to two other theological loci, namely, ecclesiology and eschatology.

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1. Parts of chap. 18 are adapted from Stephen J. Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," chap. 4 in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H, 2006); Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016); Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics," chap. 8 in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H, 2016). Used by permission of B&H, Crossway, and B&H, respectively.

2. Historically, systematic theology as a discipline has been arranged in terms of various loci (plural of Latin *locus*, for "place" or "location"). After an initial discussion of "first things" (prolegomena), discussion then moves to various topics and doctrinal areas: bibliology (doctrine of Scripture), theology proper (doctrine of God), theological anthropology (doctrine of humans and sin), Christology (doctrine of the person and work of Christ), soteriology (doctrine of salvation), pneumatology (doctrine of the person and work of the Holy Spirit), ecclesiology (doctrine of the church), and eschatology (doctrine of last things).

3. The term *person* can be misleading because it is used in two ways in theology. The first way is in a more technical sense vis-à-vis the Trinitarian relations (three *persons* who share in one nature) and the Chalcedonian Christological formulation, which wrestles with the "who" or the "subject" of the incarnation. On this use of person, see Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016). Regarding the second way, which we are using in this context, *person* refers to one's "identity," i.e., who an individual is and his significance for us. For the latter use of the term, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: "God Crucified" and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

4. See Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 147–249; cf. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *The Deity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); Robert M. Bowman Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007); Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Robert L. Reymond, *Jesus, Divine Messiah: The New and Old Testament Witness* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2003); Murray J. Harris, *Three Crucial Questions about Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994); Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of* Theos *in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992).

5. In this chapter we will not address the historical-critical issue of whether messianism is prevalent or even exists in the Old Testament; we assume that it does, given our theological and hermeneutical commitments. On this issue, see Stanley Porter, ed., *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, MNTS 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); James H. Charlesworth et al., eds., *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, SOTBT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995); Reymond, *Jesus, Divine Messiah*.

6. For a further discussion of these points, see Stephen J. Wellum, *Christ Alone*: *The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior; What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters*, Five Solas Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 31–53.

7. God's plan is an eternal plan and not one that originates in time. Stating it as we have done merely seeks to reflect the drama of the story; it is not meant to deny that God's plan is from before the foundations of the world. See, e.g., Ps. 139:16; Prov. 16:4; 19:21; Isa. 14:24–27; 22:11; 37:26; 46:10–11; Acts 2:23 (cf. 4:27–28); 17:26; Rom. 8:28–29; 9–11; Gal. 4:4–5; Eph. 1:4, 11–12; 2:10.

8. For a development of these points, see the previous chapters. Cf. Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

9. For a development of these points, see David F. Wells, *The Person of Christ: A Biblical and Historical Analysis of the Incarnation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1984), 21–81; Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*. Some specific texts we have in mind include Psalms 2; 45; 110; Isa. 7:14; 9:6–7; Ezekiel 34; Daniel 7; and so on.

10. Bauckham argues this point, labeling this Old Testament teaching "eschatological monotheism." By this expression he stresses not only God's unique lordship but also the expectation that "in the future when YHWH fulfills his promises to his people Israel, YHWH will also demonstrate his deity to the nations, establishing his universal kingdom, making his name known

universally, becoming known to all as the God Israel has known." *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 184. On this same point, N. T. Wright describes three features of first-century Judaism as follows: "a. belief in the one creator God who had entered into covenant with Israel; b. hope that this God would step into history to establish his covenant by vindicating Israel against her enemies . . . ; c. the determination to hasten this day by remaining loyal to the covenantal obligations enshrined in the law (Torah)." "Jesus," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 349.

11. See R. E. Watts, "Exodus," in *NDBT*, 478–87.

12. Wells captures this point well when he unpacks the significance of Jesus inaugurating the kingdom and the new covenant age, which, in biblical thought, *only God can do*. He writes, "This 'age,' we have seen was supernatural, could only be established by God himself, would bring blessings and benefits which only God could give, would achieve the overthrow of sin, death, and the Devil (which only God could accomplish), and was identified so closely with God himself that no human effort could bring it about and no human resistance turn it back. If Jesus saw himself as the one in whom this kind of Kingdom was being inaugurated, then such a perception is a Christological claim which would be fraudulent and deceptive if Jesus was ignorant of his Godness." *Person of Christ*, 38. For a similar view, see Reymond, *Jesus, Divine Messiah*, 239–41; G. E. Ladd, "Kingdom of Christ, God, Heaven," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 609.

13. Wells, *Person of Christ*, 172. Gerald Bray makes the same point when he writes, "The NT claims that Jesus, the son of David and inheritor of the kingly tradition of Israel, became the high priest and victim of the atoning sacrifice, made once for all upon the cross in order to save men from their sins. Only God had the authority to overturn the established order of Israelite society in this way, and establish a 'new way.' That this took place is consistent with the first Christians' claim that Jesus was God in human flesh, and this is in fact implicit in the frequent discussions of his authority which occur in the gospels." "Christology," in Ferguson, Wright, and Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, 137.

14. For example, see Robert Gundry, "Why I Didn't Endorse 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration' . . . Even though I Wasn't Asked To," *Books and Culture* 7, no. 1 (2001): 6–9; cf. the various essays, both pro and con, in Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, eds., *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005); J. R. Daniel Kirk, "The Sufficiency of the Cross (I): The Crucifixion as Jesus' Act of Obedience," *SBET* 24, no. 1 (2006): 36–64; Kirk, "The Sufficiency of the Cross (II): The Law, the Cross, and Justification," *SBET* 24, no. 2 (2006): 133–54.

15. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 270. See also Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 2:445–55; Herman Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 394–95.

16. For an extensive and excellent discussion of reasons why the doctrine of the active obedience of Christ is disputed or rejected, see Micah J. McCormick, "The Active Obedience of Jesus Christ" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 1–93. See also Brian Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).

17. Gregory A. Van Court, *The Obedience of Christ: A Response to Steve Lehrer and Geoff Volker* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2005), 6.

18. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 22–23.

19. This point is further developed in Wellum, *Christ Alone*, 31–53, 83–123.

20. For a detailed defense of this view, see McCormick, "Active Obedience of Jesus Christ," 108–18.

21. Gordon J. Wenham argues that "trees as a symbol of life are well-known in the Bible. . . . In Scripture, trees, because they remain green throughout summer drought, are seen as symbolic of the life of God (e.g., Ps 1:3; Jer 17:8). . . . Furthermore, it seems likely that the golden candlestick kept in the tabernacle was a stylized tree of life; the falling of its light on the twelve loaves of the presence symbolized God's life sustaining the twelve tribes of Israel (Exod 25:31–35; Lev 24:1–9)." *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 62.

22. McCormick, "Active Obedience of Jesus Christ," 112.

23. There are many intertextual links throughout the canon to the tree of life as well. See Prov. 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4; Ezek. 47:12; and so forth.

24. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 234–35.

25. Michael S. Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 89.

26. The New Testament explicitly speaks of the obedience of Christ in three texts (Rom. 5:19; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8–9; cf. 2:5–18). In addition, the concept or theme of obedience is found in numerous places. For example, the servant theme underscores Christ's obedience (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:7; cf. Isa. 42:1; 52:13–53:12); the purpose of Jesus's coming is to do his Father's will as the Son (John 5:19–30; 8:28–29; 10:18; 12:49; 14:31; Heb. 10:5–10); Jesus submits to the law (Matt. 3:15; Gal. 4:1–4); and he is perfected through suffering (Heb. 2:10–18; 5:8–10; 7:28).

27. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2.16.5.

28. Horton, *God of Promise*, 93.

29. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 22.

30. Van Court, *Obedience of Christ*, 15.

31. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Wrighting the Wrongs of the Reformation? The State of the Union with Christ in St. Paul and Protestant Soteriology," in *Jesus, Paul, and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright*, ed. Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 251, 256.

32. For a longer discussion, see Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 215–33.

33. See, e.g., Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian: Five Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 93–173; John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 203–36; Philip S. Ross, *From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010).

34. Within covenant theology there is debate over how theonomy applies civil law to the state. Also, regarding the application of the moral law, covenant theologians distinguish between general moral precepts as represented by the Decalogue and specific applications of those precepts, i.e., case laws. Today, Christians are to obey the former and not necessarily the latter.

35. Douglas J. Moo makes this point in "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian*, 170–71.

36. On this point, see Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, NSBT 31 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

37. See Michael Hill, *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2002), 43–54; John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 40–49.

38. Hill, *How and Why of Love*, 43.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., 44.

41. Ibid.

42. See D. A. Carson, "The Tripartite Division of the Law: A Review of Philip Ross, *From the Finger of God*," in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis; Essays in Honor of G. K. Beale*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 226–28; Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, 26–44; Hill, *How and Why of Love*, 74–75; Moo, "Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 336–37.

43. On this point, see Moo, "Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 321–24; Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2010), 67–71.

44. See D. A. Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul's Understanding of the Old and New," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2, *The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 412.

45. On this point, see Moo, "Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 338. Also see Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 192–247.

46. Douglas J. Moo, "Response to Greg L. Bahnsen," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian*, 166; Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, 45–81; Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 73–76.

47. On Rom. 10:4, see Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 636–43; Moo, "The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments; Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 206–8.

48. See, e.g., Bahnsen, "Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel," 96–108; cf. Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 35–64, 73–76.

49. See Moo, "Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 328–33; Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, 45–81; cf. Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 297–340.

50. On this point, see Carson, "Tripartite Division of the Law," 235.

51. Douglas J. Moo, "Response to Willem A. VanGemeren," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian*, 89.

52. See the discussion of this point in Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, 83–109.

53. See Moo, "Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 324–43; Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 81–84.

54. See Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, 45–81.

55. Rosner speaks of the law *as Scripture* still functioning for Christians as *prophecy* (i.e., unfolding God's redemptive plan and pointing forward to Christ [Matt. 11:13]) and *wisdom* (i.e., giving us instruction on how to live even though the old covenant is not directly binding on Christians *as a covenant*). Ibid., 135–205.

56. Hill, *How and Why of Love*, 74.

57. Moo, "Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 343.

58. Ibid.; cf. Moo, *Galatians*, 376–78.

59. Hill, *How and Why of Love*, 74.

60. Ibid.

61. See Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, 111–34.
62. Ibid., 134.
63. See Moo, "Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 347–76; Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 161–69; D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *Matthew and Mark*, vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 171–80.
64. Carson, *Matthew*, 175.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Moo, "Law of Moses or the Law of Christ," 206.
69. Carson, "Tripartite Division of the Law," 236.
70. Moo, "Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 376.
71. Bahnsen levels this charge against Moo in "Response to Doug Moo," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian*, 386–87.
72. For this term, see Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 1–19.
73. Hill unpacks the Bible's larger biblical-theological framework of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation for ethics in *How and Why of Love*, 65–78, 121–35.
74. Ibid., 66.
75. See ibid., 74.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid., 75.
78. Ibid., 78. Also see Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, 207–22.
79. On this point, see R. C. Ortlund Jr., "Man and Woman" and "Marriage," in *NDBT*, 650–57.
80. See Carson, *Matthew*, 140–61.
81. See Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, 121–34, 196–205; Hill, *How and Why of Love*, 139–205.
82. The other matters I am thinking of are various exceptions and complications. For example, the taking of human life is wrong except in areas of ectopic pregnancy, self-defense, war, and so forth. Or in the case of euthanasia, we still have to wrestle with caring for the terminally ill using ordinary versus extraordinary means. On these points, see Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 684–745.
83. See Moo, "Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 370.

19

Kingdom through Covenant

Some Theological Implications: Ecclesiology and Eschatology

As discussed in part 1, a crucial difference between dispensational and covenant theology centers on the Israel-church relationship, which has direct implications for ecclesiology and eschatology.[1] We now turn to these doctrinal areas to further discuss where progressive covenantalism differs from these two dominant biblical-theological systems and how our understanding of the progression of the covenants affects our understanding of these theological loci.

Ecclesiology

A major difference between dispensational and covenant theology involves their view of the nature of the church. This difference in turn is rooted in each system's conception of the Israel-church relationship, which is tied to their respective understanding of the biblical covenants. How does our view of the progression of the covenants shed light on some of these old debates and respond to some of the challenges of dispensational and covenant theology against our view? We will answer this question by focusing on where our view differs from these two other views before turning to a discussion of how our view of the covenants impacts the age-old divide between credo- and paedobaptism.

Kingdom through Covenant and What the Church Is

Dispensational theology has a distinct view of the Israel-church relationship, which we described in part 1, chapter 2. In this system, Israel refers to a national, ethnic people with a specific genealogical heritage and distinct privileges and promises that continue into the millennium and consummated state. The church, on the other hand, is *not* the continuation of Israel in God's plan of salvation or the new, renewed eschatological Israel. Instead, depending on the variety of dispensationalism, the church is a uniquely *new* people (ontologically) in God's redemptive purposes. She finds her origin in Christ and specifically in the regenerative and indwelling work of the Spirit that Christ has bestowed equally on the entire church at Pentecost as something new in contrast to Israel. In this sense, the church is currently a *spiritual* people composed of an international community and not tied to ethnicity or national origin. In fact, the church, as indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is a *present* epochal-dispensational illustration of what Israel and the Gentile nations will be like in the future. In the future, national Israel and Gentile nations will have the same salvation blessings in Christ, yet they will also receive "distinct" prerogatives and blessings tied to their national identity. This is especially true of national Israel since she was given specific promises (tied to the land promise) in the Abrahamic covenant that still await their fulfillment according to her distinct national identity. Given dispensationalists' view of the Israel-church relationship, they see much more *discontinuity* between Israel and the church. One major difference is that Israel was a mixed people while the church is a regenerate people by the Spirit, hence the reason why the church is a present illustration of what the *nations* will be like in the future. Israel under the old covenant was constituted by believers and unbelievers within the community, while the church is composed of all those who have been born of the Spirit, united to Christ, and who profess this to be so. Most dispensationalists affirm credobaptism (versus paedobaptism), although there have been some rare exceptions. The covenant sign of baptism, then, is for the church, and it is to be applied to those who have been born of the Spirit and profess faith in Christ.

Covenant theology operates with a different Israel-church distinction, which we described in part 1, chapter 2. Although there are administrative

differences between the two communities, they are substantially/essentially the same in the following ways: they are together the one people of God; they experience the same salvation experience, including regeneration and the indwelling of the Spirit; their covenant signs (circumcision and baptism), though different, signify the same truths; and by nature they are a mixed versus a regenerate community, so that the locus of the covenant community and the locus of the elect are distinct. This latter emphasis has led to the "visible" versus "invisible" distinction, with the former referring to the mixed nature of Israel and the church and the latter referring to the elect throughout all ages. It has also led to the distinction of a person being "in" the covenant (visible) but not necessarily being "of" the covenant (invisible). Given this view of the church, it is not accidental that covenant theology strongly embraces (paedo)baptism, since it signifies the same gospel truth as circumcision did under the previous covenants.

Where does our analysis differ? Regarding the Israel-church relationship, we argue two points. First, God has *one* people (elect) across time, yet there is an Israel-church distinction due to their respective covenants. The church is *new* in a redemptive-historical sense precisely because she is the community of the *new* covenant and thus *different* from Israel in her structure and nature. Second, we must think of the Israel-church relationship *through Christ*. Or better, we must think of the Israel-church relationship by working through the Bible's covenantal progression. When we do so, we first start with Adam, who establishes the role of image-priest-sons and who brings God's "kingdom through covenant" to the world. Then we must think of Israel as a nation through Abraham as the corporate people who are to live in covenant relationship with God and each other and to function as a kingdom of priests, displaying to the world what it means to be God's image-sons. After Israel we must then move to the Davidic king who is "true" Israel in himself as he represents the nation and fulfills the role of Adam in the world. Then in light of the typological function of the previous covenant heads and their failure/disobedience, we move to Christ, who fulfills all the previous covenants in himself as David's greater Son, the true Israel, Abraham's true seed, and the last Adam, who brings all God's promises to pass and then makes *his* people, the church, the recipient

of all those promises. This entails, then, that we do not view the church as *directly* the "new Israel," but rather, in Christ the church is God's new creation, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, who as the church receive *all* God's promises equally and fully.

This way of viewing the Israel-Christ-church relationship differs from dispensational and covenant theology in at least two areas. First, against dispensationalism, Jesus is the antitypical fulfillment of Israel and Adam, and in him, *all* God's promises are fulfilled for his people, the church, including the land promise, fully realized and consummated in the new creation (Rom. 4:13; Eph. 6:3; Heb. 11:10, 16; cf. Matt. 5:5). The church is *not* a parenthesis in God's plan or merely a *present* illustration of what Israel as a nation and the Gentile nations will be like in the future. The church is God's *new* covenant people that lasts forever. Second, against covenant theology, Jesus's *new* covenant people are different from Israel under the old covenant. Under the old covenant, Israel, in its nature and structure, was a *mixed* community of believers and unbelievers (Rom. 9:6). Yet the church is constituted by people who are united to Christ by faith and partakers now of the blessings of the new covenant, which minimally includes the forgiveness of sin, the gift of the Spirit, and heart circumcision for the *entire* community. Thus, in contrast to Israel, the church, as God's new covenant–new creation people, is constituted now as a believing, regenerate people, although we await the fullness of what Christ inaugurated at his glorious return. For this reason, baptism, the sign of the new covenant, is applied only to those who profess faith and give credible evidence that they are no longer in Adam but in Christ, and circumcision and baptism do *not* signify the same realities due to their respective covenantal differences.

In part 2, and as summarized in part 3, chapters 16–17, we have sought to give the biblical and theological grounding for these claims regarding the Israel-Christ-church relationship as unfolded through the progression of the covenants. Not surprisingly, both dispensational and covenant theology reject our view but at different points of analysis. For dispensational theology, we share many points of agreement regarding what the church is by nature and structure, but they reject our conclusion that Jesus is the

antitypical fulfillment of Israel and that in Christ *all* God's promises are fulfilled for his people, the church, including the land promise, which will be fully realized and consummated in the new creation. They still maintain that Israel *as a nation* is to receive "distinct" privileges and promises in the future, different from believing Gentile nations, and their strongest evidence for this assertion is found in Romans 9–11, which they argue teaches national Israel's future restoration. For covenant theology, we share many points of agreement as well, but they reject our conclusion that the church, as God's *new* covenant people, is constituted as a regenerate, believing people in contrast to the *mixed* community of Israel. Probably the strongest evidence for their view is their appeal to the warning passages of the New Testament, which they argue are proof that the church *at present* is a mixed people, awaiting the *not yet* when the church will no longer be constituted as a mixed body but a regenerate, believing people. Let us briefly respond to these two objections by looking at each in turn.

Dispensationalism's View of Israel's National Restoration

In chapter 17, we sought to establish the positive case that the church is God's *new* creation, eschatological people who remain *forever*, consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles, who, in Christ, equally and fully receive *all* God's promises. We deny that God is finished with ethnic Israel, yet we affirm that their future is found not in receiving "distinct" future blessings and privileges different from believing Gentiles but in receiving *all* God's promises in Christ and thus becoming part of his church, the one *new man* of the new creation. Our argument involved three points.

First, the Bible's progression of the covenants leads us to the conclusion that in Christ *all* God's promises are fulfilled. Israel as a nation must be understood in terms of its role in God's plan, but its role cannot be understood apart from locating it in God's covenantal plan, starting with Adam and moving to Christ. This is why Jesus is presented as the true Israel and last Adam, who in himself is the faithful covenant partner and brings about all God's redemptive plan.

Second, the church, as Messiah's new covenant people, is not merely a parenthesis in God's plan or a present illustration of what God will do for

nations. The church is God's *new* creation/humanity that remains *forever*, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, who, in Christ, equally and fully receive all God's promises. This is taught in Ephesians 2:11–21. Gentiles, who were once covenantally outside Israel (2:11–12), now *in Messiah Jesus* are recipients of *all* God's promises. By Christ's work, the law-covenant, which purposely separated Jews and Gentiles, is fulfilled and torn down. The result? *Both* Jews and Gentiles are now reconciled to God *and* each other by entering a new covenant and becoming God's new creation/humanity (2:14–18), who together inherit the same promises. Paul is forthright: the church is not merely the extension of Israel or an amalgam of Jews and Gentiles; the church is *new*—a third entity that is Christian (see 1 Cor. 9:19–23). The church transcends the old entities, although unbelieving Israel and disobedient Gentiles continue to exist. The church is not one phase in God's plan to end in the future when God returns to his previous plan for Israel and the nations. God's eternal plan *always* anticipated the creation of *the church* as his end-time people (Eph. 3:8–13) in and through Christ Jesus.

Third, further evidence that the church receives *all* God's promises is how Old Testament restoration promises for Israel are applied to the church *in Christ*, which we discussed in terms of Acts 1:6–8. When the disciples ask, "When are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6), Jesus answers *not* by redirecting their attention to the church age, "implicitly postponing a restoration of Israel to the future"[2] when she will finally receive promises "distinct" from believing Gentile nations. Instead, Jesus answers their question by saying that Israel's restoration is about to occur at Pentecost (Acts 2) and in Jesus's reign, starting in Jerusalem with Jewish believers and extending to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8, thus a reconstituted Israel) *and* to the nations (Acts 10–11), thus creating a *new humanity* in Christ. Jesus responds to his disciples with language ("when the Holy Spirit comes on you," "you will be my witnesses," and "to the ends of the earth") drawn from Isaiah (Isa. 32:15; 43:12; 49:6), which anticipates the day when God will save *through his servant*, bring about Israel's restoration, and incorporate Gentiles into that restoration program. Jesus heralds that what the prophets anticipated is now occurring in him and

the church, and the sequence of restoration is significant—first to Israel, then to the nations (cf. Acts 3:26)—which is precisely how the risen and exalted Christ builds his church.[3] Thus, in Christ *and* the church, *all* God's promises are now being fulfilled. Moreover, as the Old Testament anticipated and the New Testament teaches, God's people include believing Jews and Gentiles, who fulfill what Israel, indeed, Adam, only typified: a transformed people who function as a royal priesthood and holy nation (Ex. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9–10). Together they are the restored Israel as Abraham's children (Rom. 4:9–22; Gal. 3:6–9); true Jews because of their heart circumcision (Rom. 2:25–29; Phil. 3:3); the *one* new man (Eph. 2:11–21); from the same olive tree (Rom. 11:17–24); and part of the 144,000, which symbolically refers to the entire church (Rev. 7:1–8; 14:3). Captured in Scripture's final vision, the church is Christ's bride, the heavenly Jerusalem, whose foundation is the twelve tribes of Israel *and* the twelve apostles (Rev. 21:9–14), an international people (Rev. 5:9–10) who inherit the new creation as God's covenant people (Revelation 21–22).

But what about Romans 11? For dispensationalists, this is the key text that establishes their view that there is not only a future salvation for ethnic Jews but also a future restoration of national Israel.[4] The latter point is crucial. Many nondispensationalists believe that Romans 11 teaches a future salvation for ethnic Jews as they are brought to saving faith in Christ and incorporated into the church.[5] The issue is whether this passage teaches Israel's restoration as a nation. Michael Vlach states it this way: "The concept of 'restoration' certainly includes the idea of salvation, but it goes beyond that. 'Restoration' involves the idea of Israel being reinstalled as a nation, in her land, with a specific identity and role of service to the nations."[6] We affirm that Romans 11 teaches a future hope for Jews coming to faith in Christ, but the problem is that there is nothing in this text that teaches a national restoration for Israel.[7]

Romans 9–11, specifically 11:1–32, does speak to the issue of a future Jewish salvation. God is not finished with Israel. In fact, Paul wrestles with why many of his "kindred" (9:3) have not believed. The nation of Israel in God's plan was privileged indeed (9:4–5), but with Christ's coming, only a remnant has believed. Paul is emphatic that God's word has not failed (9:6).

By God's sovereign election and by bringing a present Jewish remnant to faith in Christ, which Paul himself includes in this group (11:1–10), God has not failed in his promises. In God's plan, not only did the larger Jewish rejection of Christ allow for God's elect among the Gentiles to believe, but God is also using it to provoke jealousy among the Jewish people (11:11–16). Gentiles, as "wild olive shoots," must not become arrogant since God is able to graft back in Israelites ("natural branches") who come to faith in Christ (11:17–24). In fact, the partial hardening of Israel is *until* the full number of Gentiles has come in, which will result in "all Israel being saved" (11:25–27). God is not finished with Israel (11:28–32). But what does "all Israel will be saved" mean, and when will this occur?

A minority view argues that "all Israel" refers to all the elect, Jew and Gentile, and that "all Israel" is coming to salvation now as the gospel is preached to the nations. The majority dispensational view argues that "all Israel" refers to national Israel, yet within this view, some argue that elect Jews have been converted throughout church history, while others see a mass conversion of the Jewish people at the end of history.[8] Many fine arguments can be given for these options, but what is important to note is that the text says nothing about national Israel receiving outstanding promises in the millennium or consummated state *distinct* or *different* from those made to believing Gentiles. Nothing in Romans 9–11 speaks of the "restoration" of Israel as a nation, in her land, with a specific identity and role of service to the nations. This text can serve as "evidence" for the dispensational view only if the entire view is assumed, which is precisely what is at debate. Instead, the Bible's storyline teaches that *all* God's promises are fulfilled in Christ and *his* people, the church. Douglas Moo nicely captures this point as he reflects on Paul's understanding of the Israel-church relationship in Romans 11. We quote him at length:

> The relationship between Israel and the church in Paul's perspective is much more historically oriented and continuous than [the "Israel equals church" model] might suggest. As his olive tree analogy in Romans 11 makes clear, Paul views Gentiles who are experiencing the messianic salvation as belonging not to a new body discontinuous with Israel but to Israel itself. True, this is not simply national Israel—for

> unbelieving Jews can be, and are, cut off from it. But it is the spiritual Israel within Israel that, according to Romans 9, has always been in existence and, according to [Romans] 11:16, grows from the seed of God's promises to the patriarchs. If we follow the logic of this analogy, then, the church is not so much a replacement for Israel or even a "new" Israel; it is the continuation of "Israel" in the era of fulfillment. As has always been the case, believing Jews, the remnant, are part of this spiritual Israel. And Paul's "to the Jew first" makes clear that the Jewish presence in the new Israel is both fitting and necessary. Now, however, in the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham and in line with the prophetic expectation of the universal extent of God's kingdom, Gentiles are becoming part of Israel. And in the eschatological consummation, as I understand Romans 11, many more Jews will be added to spiritual Israel.[9]

However, dispensationalists will often find Israel's "restoration" in Romans 11 by assuming that the Old Testament teaches that national Israel will be restored in the new covenant *and* that the new covenant is fulfilled in the New Testament first *spiritually* in the church and then *literally* in national Israel in the future.[10] The problem is that this view assumes that Israel's restoration has not already begun in the church, for which we have given evidence in chapter 17. In addition, it fails to understand how inaugurated eschatology works. The New Testament teaches that *all* new covenant promises and blessings as an entire package (including spiritual and material) are *now* here in Christ *and* applied to the church *in principle*. No doubt, we await the *fullness* of those same blessings at Christ's return, but the covenant privileges are here now. For this reason, it is difficult to divide up various *spiritual* blessings of the new covenant from its future *material* blessings for the nation of Israel. This not only assumes the dispensational view of the Israel-church distinction, which we have sought to demonstrate cannot be substantiated, but it also fails to recognize that both the material/physical *and* spiritual blessings of the new covenant are now here in Christ *and* applied to the church, although we await the fullness of both.[11]

Covenant Theology's Mixed View of the Church

In chapter 17, we also sought to establish the positive case that the church is not only part of the *one* people of God across time but also covenantally *new* in the sense that the church *at present* is constituted as a transformed, regenerate people and not a mixed community like Israel under the old covenant. Our argument involved five points.

First, the Bible's progression of the covenants leads us to the conclusion that in Christ and the new covenant *all* the previous covenants have been fulfilled, and this entails some important changes in the structure and nature of the covenant people due to Christ's greater fulfillment work. It also anticipates a change in the way that Christ, as the head of the covenant, relates to his people. In the previous covenants, the relationship of covenant mediator to his seed was more biological-natural (e.g., Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David), but now in Christ, the relationship is *spiritual*, namely, born of the Spirit. One is in the church, then, not by natural-biological birth but by spiritual rebirth and faith.

Second, within the Old Testament, the prophets anticipated that the new covenant would be "new" by changing the *structure* and *nature* of God's people. Regarding the former, under the old covenant God dealt with his people primarily in a mediated way, whereby God related to his people through specially called mediators—prophets, priests, and kings—who had the Spirit poured out on them. But the prophets anticipate that in the new covenant people, *all* God's people in the covenant will know him and become prophets, priests, and servant-kings, which in turn will result in them *keeping* the covenant (Jer. 31:29–34). Regarding the latter, the prophets anticipate that the new covenant people will keep the covenant because they will all know God, will have the law written on their hearts, and will experience the full forgiveness of their sins (Jer. 31:32–34; cf. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25; Ezek. 11:19–20; 36:25–27). What this signals is that *all* members of the new covenant will stand justified before God and know the transforming work of the Spirit in their lives, which assumes a believing, transformed people.

Third, what the Old Testament anticipated, the New Testament says is now here. Although we still await our glorification, to be at present united

to Christ and in the new covenant entails that one has been born of the Spirit and forgiven of his or her sin. There is no evidence that the church is a transformed people only in the *not yet*, since *already* we have been transferred from Adam to Christ, individually and corporately, and have become participants of the "age to come." On the basis of Christ's work, we have now entered God's saving reign and have become *his* people. In Christ, *his* new covenant people are here; the Spirit has been poured out on the entire community (Acts 2); *all* those in the church know God in an immediate way (Eph. 2:18; Heb. 10:19–25); and *all* are declared just before God (Rom. 8:1). We wait for the consummation, but *at present* we enjoy what it means to be God's *new* people.

Fourth, the truth that the church is a transformed people is further taught by the New Testament's description of the church as an eschatological and "gathered" (*ekklēsia*) community—identified with the "age to come"—which has arrived in Christ and is consummated at his return. Her identity is not with "this present age" but with the saving reign of Christ, which is now here. Those who have placed their faith in Christ are now citizens of the new/heavenly Jerusalem, transferred from being "in Adam" to being "in Christ" with all the benefits of that union (Heb. 12:18–29). As the church, we begin to enjoy by faith the privileges of that city still to come (Heb. 13:14). Yet to participate in these realities *now* is another way of saying that the church is, by definition, part of the new creation, consisting of people who are raised and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph. 2:5–6; Col. 2:12–13; 3:3). In biblical terms, this is true only of regenerate people.

Fifth, the truth that the church is a transformed, regenerate people is also underscored by the New Testament's description of the church as God's *new temple* (1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:5). As God's temple, we now have direct access to the Father by the Spirit (Eph. 2:18; Heb. 10:19–22), something different from Israel. To be God's temple assumes a regenerate people, given that it presupposes the transforming work of the Spirit (Rom. 8:28–39; Eph. 1:13–14).

How do covenant theologians respond to this analysis, since they continue to affirm the mixed nature of both Israel and the church? Probably the most significant response is an appeal to the warning/apostasy passages

of Scripture to demonstrate that the *visible* church is a mixed community, just like Israel of old (see, e.g., Heb. 6:4–6; 10:26–39). These texts seem to demonstrate that it is possible for some people to be members of the new covenant community ("in" it) but then, sadly, to depart from the faith, thus demonstrating that they were never regenerate, believing people (not "of" it).[12] There are five problems with this response.[13]

First, the "mixed community" interpretation of the warning passages assumes that the nature of Israel and the church is substantially and covenantally the same, but this is precisely what is at dispute. In order for covenant theology's argument to carry weight at this point, proponents must first prove that the nature of the covenant communities is essentially the same, but we have already given reasons to doubt that this is so. As one thinks through the progression of the covenants, it is difficult to sustain that Israel and the church are the same in structure and nature. This assumption does not do justice to what each covenant is in its context and in light of Christ's fulfillment of the covenants.

Second, this interpretation contradicts what the Old Testament anticipates about the new covenant community and what the New Testament confirms. It is common to find the assertion that, since the New Testament speaks of the possibility of apostasy and, sadly, we witness it in our daily experience, this demonstrates that the church is a mixed community like Israel. The problem is that this goes against the kind of data we have discussed about what the church is. One must carefully distinguish between the *fact* of apostasy taking place and the *status* of the one who commits it. No one disputes the *fact* that apostasy takes place in the new covenant age. What is at dispute is the *status* of those apostates. Should they be viewed as "new covenant breakers" (assuming they were once full covenant members) or as those who *professed* faith, who identified with the church, but who, by their rejection of the gospel, demonstrated that *they were never one with us* (see 1 John 2:19)? Given our overall argument of how the covenants fit together, we are convinced that the New Testament teaches the latter. When apostasy takes place, we reevaluate the person's former profession and thus his or her covenant status. However, this situation is unlike that of unbelievers in the

old covenant. The old covenant by its very nature allowed for a mixed group. R. Fowler White hits the mark when he asserts,

> Unlike apostates from the Mosaic covenant (Heb. 3:7–11, 16–19) who had heard God say of them that he had (fore)known them in their mediatorial forebears (cf. Deut. 4:37; 7:6–8; 10:15), apostates from the Messianic covenant will hear the Lord of the covenant say to them, "I never knew you" (see Matt 7:23; cf. 2 Tim 2:17–19).[14]

Other than a few exceptions, one was under the old covenant due to natural-biological relationships that did not assume regeneration and saving faith. But new covenant members are those who have come to faith in Christ, which entails that they have been born of the Spirit, they know God, they have been declared just before God, and they thus are no longer "in Adam" but "in Christ."

In addition, often the charge brought against a *regenerate* view of the church is that it would require us to have infallible knowledge regarding someone's regeneration.[15] This is not correct. No doubt, the church has made many mistakes in this regard. However, we receive people into the church *on the basis of their profession that they have come to faith in Christ*. This is quite different from the situation under the old covenant, where many within that covenant did not profess faith toward God. The truth of the matter is this: trying to discern true saving faith is merely a human epistemological problem, and we do our best to discern whether one's *profession* of faith is genuine. But this is a far cry from thinking that people who do *not* profess faith, particularly infants who are baptized, are full new covenant members in faith union with Christ.

Third, the appeal to inaugurated eschatology to justify that the Old Testament anticipation of a transformed, regenerate new covenant people is only "partially fulfilled" not only assumes the covenant view but also applies inaugurated eschatology inconsistently. Regarding the former, Chris Cowan describes the covenant theology argument that those in the church who sadly show themselves to be unbelievers prove that the new covenant blessings are only partially fulfilled, yet he concludes that this line of reasoning is a non sequitur. Cowan writes, "Only by assuming such persons

are *covenant members* can [Richard] Pratt conclude the new covenant is partially fulfilled. But nothing makes such an individual a covenant member other than his affiliation with the covenant community."[16] But as we have noted from Jeremiah, and Cowan goes on to emphasize,

> Jeremiah . . . distinguishes features that make one a new covenant member: they will have God's law written on their hearts, God will acknowledge that they are his people, all of them will know the Lord, and their sins will be forgiven (Heb 8:8–12). While one might argue for an inaugurated fulfillment of these promises in the lives of *believers*, none of these blessings is true of *unbelievers*, not even in a *partial* sense.[17]

Regarding the latter, as we argued in chapter 17, this view does not consistently see that *all* new covenant blessings are *now* here in Christ *and* applied to the church *in principle*. It is illegitimate to argue, for example, as G. K. Beale argues, that Christ's new covenant work has resulted in our justification being inaugurated but then not make this true of the new covenant blessings tied to the anticipation of a transformed, regenerate people.[18]

Fourth, the "mixed community" interpretation of the warning passages does not do justice to Hebrews 8:9. As Cowan notes, Hebrews explains why God made the new covenant, namely, because the old covenant had been broken. But the new covenant is not broken. Cowan writes,

> According to Jeremiah, this is exactly the kind of faithless heart the new covenant will rectify: God will write his laws on the hearts of his people (Heb 8:10). *All* his people will know him (8:11). But, if the new covenant is intended to remedy apostate covenant members (8:9), how can it be possible for new covenant members to apostatize—according to covenant theologians? How can the new covenant be "not like" the old (8:9) if new covenant members can fail to "continue" in it?[19]

Fifth, even though the "mixed community" interpretation of these texts is a *possible* reading of these texts, in light of the progression of the covenants and what this entails for the new covenant, the nature of the church, and what it means for someone to be in union with Christ at this place in

redemptive history, there are other legitimate ways of reading these texts that, in our view, do better justice to *all* the scriptural data. We believe that the best way of understanding the warning passages within a transformed, regenerate view of the church is to view the warnings as a means of salvation.[20] Ultimately, in the end, this is the true test for anyone's theology: Does it do justice to *all* the data? At point after point, we have sought to give reasons why the church is best viewed as a transformed, regenerate people.

Kingdom through Covenant and the Baptismal Divide[21]

The perennial debate over the meaning and subjects of baptism is best viewed in light of the larger polemics regarding the relationships between the biblical covenants. Different views on baptism reflect different ways of putting together Scripture in regard to covenants. Covenant theologians and their defense of paedobaptism have certainly acknowledged this point. They have repeatedly argued that their view is an implication drawn from their overall understanding of *the* "covenant of grace," as we highlighted in chapter 2. In truth, all other arguments for infant baptism are secondary to this overall line of reasoning. In their thinking, if one establishes the basic continuity of the covenant of grace across the canon, then their view has been demonstrated.[22] It does not concern them that in the New Testament there is no express command to baptize infants and no record of any clear case of infant baptism.[23] Rather, as John Murray admits, "The evidence for infant baptism falls into the category of good and necessary inference,"[24] and this inference is rooted and grounded in a specific covenantal argument. Covenant theology, then, according to the paedobaptist, *requires* infant baptism. To make headway in the debate, then, one has to wrestle with the relationships between the biblical covenants, especially in regard to the nature of the covenant communities and the covenant signs and how the progression of the covenants comes to fulfillment in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In chapter 2, we described the basic argument for infant baptism. Given the unity of the covenant of grace (allowing for administrative changes), the continuity of the covenant communities and the covenant signs, plus the

fact that the genealogical principle of the Abrahamic covenant remains unchanged across time, baptism is to be applied to infants in the church. In chapter 3, we discussed the hermeneutic at work. Paedobaptists appeal to the unconditional/unilateral nature of the Abrahamic covenant and its genealogical principle, so that it remains unchanged across time. Unless God specifically abrogates it, it is still in force even though there is not one New Testament example of baptizing an infant or the command to do so.[25]

Why do we reject the covenantal argument for infant baptism? Five points will summarize our overall problem with their view, given their understanding of the covenants.

Reading the New Covenant Too Quickly into the Old

Our *overall* criticism is that covenant theology reads new covenant realities back into the Old Testament *too quickly* without first unpacking the Bible's progression of the covenants, the differences between Israel and the church, and the significance of the covenantal signs in their own redemptive-historical/covenantal contexts and then thinking carefully through the issues of continuity and discontinuity now that Christ has come.

Flattening the Abrahamic Covenant to Spiritual Realities

An excellent illustration of this criticism is how covenant theologians treat the Abrahamic covenant. Essentially, they view it in direct continuity with the new covenant other than a few explicit changes. By doing so, they "flatten" the Abrahamic covenant by reducing it primarily to *spiritual* realities while neglecting its national and typological aspects.[26] This is why the genealogical principle, operative in the unconditional/unilateral Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:7), is applied in exactly the same way across the canon without transformation as Christ comes and fulfills the previous covenants and brings with him change in the new covenant. This is also why they argue that baptism is the replacement for circumcision and that the covenant sign, regardless of one's covenantal location, is for "you and your seed" (i.e., natural-biological children).

As previous chapters have demonstrated, we disagree with how covenant theology understands the relationship between the Abrahamic and new

covenants. As we have argued, in the Bible's storyline the Abrahamic covenant is crucial in God's plan. Abraham and his seed are the means God has chosen to bring blessing to all the nations and to fulfill God's promises to the entire creation in light of his covenant with Adam/creation. Abraham and his seed are the answer to the plight of the human race; they are to help bring about the recovery of the divine goal for creation and humanity and the establishment of God's kingdom through a redeemed society. However, to understand the Abrahamic covenant fully, we must also do justice to the multifaceted and diverse nature of that covenant in its immediate context before we bring it too quickly into the new covenant. In fact, we must read all the biblical covenants in terms of their immediate, epochal-covenantal, and canonical contexts, before we begin to apply them to our lives.

This point is best illustrated in reference to the seed of Abraham and the genealogical principle (which has direct implications for the baptismal debate). The covenantal argument for infant baptism requires us to view the genealogical principle of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:7) in natural-biological terms as it is applied in the church. However, there are two problems with this approach.

First, it fails to distinguish the different senses of the "seed of Abraham" both within the Abrahamic covenant and throughout the canon.[27] So, for example, Abraham's seed is certainly biological (e.g., Ishmael, Isaac, sons of Keturah), but it is also biological-special (e.g., Isaac, Israel), typological (e.g., Christ, Gal. 3:16), and, as applied to all believers, spiritual (Gal. 3:26–29). In the first two cases, all Abraham's seed was marked by the covenant sign of circumcision, but it did not necessarily signify the reality to which it was supposed to point, namely, that they were to be priests in God's service and holy unto Yahweh.[28] In the first two cases, it usually signified nothing more than that they were biologically related to Abraham, hence the basis for the mixed community of Israel. For some in this category lived as believers, while many did not. In the Old Testament era, Israel was both a nation *and* God's people; they had a special covenant relationship to God; they were a redeemed people but not necessarily in the same way that the church (*spiritual* seed of Abraham) is redeemed (since not all of them were redeemed salvifically). As the covenants unfold, the typological nature of

Abraham's seed reaches its fulfillment in Christ, which brings with it significant changes in how we understand the relationship between Christ and his people. Christ's people are viewed as Abraham's *spiritual* seed, yet this does not depend on circumcision, Torah, or even national, ethnic lineage but rather comes through regeneration and faith in Christ. All this is to say that we must not equate the Abrahamic covenant too quickly with the new covenant without noting its diverse aspects in its immediate context and how those aspects find their fulfillment in Christ.

Second, the covenantal argument for infant baptism also fails to see that the genealogical principle is *transformed* across the covenants; it does not remain unchanged. Under the previous covenants the relationship between the covenant mediator/head and his seed was primarily *natural-biological* (e.g., Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, David). But now, in Christ, under his mediation, the relationship between Christ and his seed is no longer natural-biological but *spiritual*—that is, it is brought about by the Spirit's work of new birth, which entails that the covenant sign must be applied only to those who in fact profess that they are the *spiritual* seed of Abraham. Given the significant progression in the covenants across redemptive history, particularly in terms of the relationship between the covenant mediator and his seed, covenant theology fails to discern correctly how the genealogical principle has changed from Abraham to Christ—and therefore it ultimately fails to understand the newness of the new covenant. The emphasis on the continuity of the covenant of grace has led covenant theologians to flatten the covenantal differences and thus misconstrue the nature of the new covenant community.

It is important to underscore this last point by two further observations. First, as Jason DeRouchie notes, even within the Abrahamic covenant there is a hint that as redemptive history unfolds, it will be fulfilled, first, *nationally* (Gen. 17:7–8), "with a genealogical principle as its guide and circumcision as its sign (17:9–13),"[29] and, second, *internationally*, with Abraham's fatherhood "being established by spiritual adoption and no longer by biology, ethnicity, or the distinguishing mark of circumcision (17:4–6)."[30] As DeRouchie then explains, thinking in terms of the Bible's

covenantal progression, the national stage would find fulfillment only in the international

> when an obedient king, *the* "seed" of the woman and of Abraham from the line of Judah, would rise, overcoming all enemy hostility and blessing all the nations of the earth (Gen. 3:15; 22:17b–18 with 26:3–4 and 49:8–10). Christ's arrival inaugurates the age of fulfillment, thus shifting the covenant community's makeup away from the genealogical principle to one of corporate identity, established through spiritual adoption by faith.[31]

This means that in Christ, the genealogical principle is transformed since spiritual adoption, not natural descent, becomes the mark of the new covenant community.

Second, in the coming of Christ as the *last* Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) and the head of the *new* creation (2 Cor. 5:17), who mediates a *new* covenant (Heb. 8, 10), *his* people are those who are identified with him in the heavenly realms (Eph. 2:5–6; Col. 2:12–13; 3:3), who are born of the Spirit, and who are forgiven of their sins. The way that one is identified with Christ in the new covenant is not through the old genealogical principle but by spiritual rebirth and adoption. Christ's seed are those who have believed (Gal. 3:28–29), which once again explains why there is transformation in the genealogical principle as one reaches the fulfillment won by Christ.

Reducing Covenantal Differences

As discussed above, this tendency to reduce the covenantal differences, especially in relationship to Israel and the church, is another problem within covenant theology. The new covenant community (the church) in its *structure* and *nature* is different from Israel. Many things characterize that new community, but as a people identified with the new creation and the "age to come" (Eph. 2:11–22), born of the Spirit, "in Christ" instead of "in Adam," the church must be viewed as a *regenerate*, *believing* community and not a mixed group. Now that Christ has come and inaugurated the new covenant, the New Testament knows nothing of one who is "in Christ" yet is not effectually called by the Father, born of the Spirit, justified, holy, and awaiting glorification. All these blessings of the new covenant are ours,

given our relationship to our covenantal head, our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why the New Testament does not apply baptism, the sign of the new covenant, to those who have not professed faith in Christ and testified that they have repented of their sins and believed in Christ.

Recognizing the Fundamental Meaning of Baptism

The most fundamental *meaning* of baptism is that it signifies a believer's union with Christ, by grace through faith, and all the benefits that are entailed by that union. It testifies that one has entered into the realities of the new covenant and, as such, has experienced regeneration, the gift and down payment of the Spirit, and the forgiveness of sin. It signifies that a believer is now a member of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:22–25). It is our defining mark of belonging, as well as a demarcation from the world (cf. Acts 2:40–41). It is an entry into the eschatological order of the new creation—that which our Lord has ushered in. Through baptism, we are united with Jesus Christ, by faith, and sealed with the Spirit for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30).[32] Interestingly, J. I. Packer, a paedobaptist, captures the significance of baptism well:

> Christian baptism . . . is a sign from God that signifies inward cleansing and remission of sins (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:25–27), Spirit-wrought regeneration and new life (Titus 3:5), and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit as God's seal testifying and guaranteeing that one will be kept safe in Christ forever (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 1:13–14). Baptism carries these meanings because first and fundamentally it signifies union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:3–7; Col 2:11–12); and this union with Christ is the source of every element in our salvation (1 John 5:11–12). Receiving the sign in faith assures the persons baptized that God's gift of new life in Christ is freely given to them.[33]

In fact, so close is the association between baptism and new covenant blessings in Christ that many have argued that in the New Testament, baptism "functions as shorthand for the conversion experience as a whole."[34] Evidence for this is quite apparent. For example, in Galatians 3:26–27, Paul can say, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ

Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ." The language of being "clothed" with Christ most certainly refers to the fact of our union with him.[35] But what is interesting about Paul's statement is how Paul can ascribe union with Christ both to faith (3:26) and to baptism (3:27). How can Paul do this? Does he have in mind an *ex opere operato* view of baptism? No. Paul is not referring to those who have been baptized but have not believed; that would go against the clear statement of 3:26. Rather, he is referring to those who have been converted: all such have clothed themselves with Christ and have been united with him through faith. Thus, baptism, by metonymy, can stand for conversion and can signify, as an outward sign, that a believer has entered into the realities of the new covenant as a result of his union with Christ through faith.[36]

We find something similar in Romans 6:1–4, where Paul sees the initiation rite of baptism as uniting the believer to Jesus Christ in his redemptive acts—his death, burial, and resurrection. No doubt, in this text Paul is not primarily giving a theological explanation of the nature of baptism but rather is unpacking its meaning for life. Paul is deeply concerned to rebut the charge that the believer should "remain in sin" in order to underscore grace. Accordingly, he uses the language of "realm transfer"[37] to show how inconceivable this suggestion really is. We Christians, Paul affirms, have "died to sin" (6:2b). We have been transferred from the realm of Adam (sin) to the realm of Christ (life, resurrection, grace), and as such, it is quite impossible for us to still live in sin; its power in us has been decisively broken due to our union with Christ in his death. When did this realm transfer, this "death to sin," take place? It is interesting that in 6:3–4, Paul connects "death to sin" with our baptism—when we were "baptized into Christ Jesus," we were "baptized into his death" (6:3). We have died to sin because we have become one with the Lord, who died and rose for the conquest of sin and death. Furthermore, "we were buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead . . . we too may live a new life" (6:4). In this sense, then, baptism serves as the instrument by which we are united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.[38] Once again, it is important to stress that it is *not* Paul's point to say that the very practice of baptism unites us to

Christ. Rather, as in Galatians 3:26–27, baptism functions as shorthand for the whole conversion experience. Thus, Douglas Moo is right in concluding that "just as faith is always assumed to lead to baptism, so baptism always assumes faith for its validity. In [Romans 6:]3–4, then, we can assume that baptism stands for the whole conversion-initiation experience, presupposing faith and the gift of the Spirit."[39] In truth, if we understand Paul's argument, it is *not* baptism that is the primary focus at all; rather, it is the redemptive events themselves that Paul is stressing. Baptism is introduced *only* to demonstrate that we were united with Christ in his redemptive work, and now all the new covenant blessings that our Lord has secured for us are ours by virtue of our relationship with him.

Other texts could be multiplied to make this same point,[40] but suffice it to say that in the New Testament, baptism is organically linked with the gospel itself, and all the realities of the new covenant age and the benefits that come to us are because of our faith union in Christ. Who, then, should receive the covenant sign of baptism? Only those who profess to have experienced the realities it actually signifies—people who have repented of their sins and believed in Christ and him alone.

Revisiting the Relationship between Circumcision and Baptism

Circumcision, as the covenant sign of the Abrahamic covenant, does *not* carry essentially the same meaning as baptism does in the new covenant era. The argument of covenant theology is that circumcision and baptism carry essentially the same *spiritual* meaning, and that is why baptism is the *replacement* of circumcision in the new covenant. What is that meaning? Basically, the covenant signs are objective entry markers signifying that one is part of the covenant community, at least in the external sense, and they promise and anticipate the gospel—pointing forward to the need for a "circumcision of the heart," testifying to God's promise that righteousness will be given by faith, and somehow signifying union with Christ and all the blessings related to that union without necessarily implying that one is a regenerate person in the full salvation sense of the word.[41]

The problem with this view is that it fails to do justice to the covenant signs in their covenantal contexts. No doubt they are parallel in a number of

ways, but circumcision is an Old Testament ordinance established in a specific redemptive-historical context, and the same is true of baptism in the New Testament. It is not correct to equate the two in a one-to-one fashion.[42] In fact, circumcision in light of the entire canon ought to be viewed as signifying at least two truths. First, it marks out a national people to set them apart as those who are a "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). It calls the nation to be "devoted to Yahweh and his rule and reign."[43] Yet this is where a tension arises. As Meade explains,

> In actual practice, however, the sign of circumcision led to tensions, which anticipated a better circumcision to come. Genesis 17:23–27 reports that Abraham circumcised himself, Ishmael, and all the males of his household. And herein lies the tension created by the external sign of circumcision: the sign of devotion and consecration is applied to all of the biological children of Abraham, even those not chosen to continue the family of Abraham such as Ishmael and later Esau (cf. Mal 1:2–3). Furthermore, even the true biological seed of Abraham, who underwent circumcision . . . would become rebellious and would be no more devoted to Yahweh and his rule than the rest of the nations (e.g., Jer 7:24; 9:25–26). The external sign of devotion to Yahweh was not indicative of the internal reality of the people's wicked, stubborn hearts (e.g., Jer 7:24). Yet this external sign of circumcision foreshadowed the internal circumcision of the heart that Deuteronomy employs.[44]

Second, building on the tension that the sign was supposed to mark the people as a holy priesthood completely devoted to Yahweh but in most cases did not, later in Deuteronomy and the Prophets (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 11:16–21; 18:30–32; 36:22–36; 44:6–9), circumcision began to point forward to the need for an *internal* circumcision of the heart.[45] In this way, through the progression of the covenants, circumcision served as a type that anticipated new covenant realities in two ways.

First, circumcision is a type in that it anticipates Christ. As noted above, the "seed of Abraham" has a number of nuances including its reference to Christ as Abraham's singular seed (Gal. 3:16). Every male offspring of Abraham—specifically through the line of Isaac, Judah, and David—was a

type of Christ and thus anticipated his ultimate coming. The male line was marked as a sign of the ultimate seed to come. In this regard, Luke 2:21 is important. Jesus's circumcision is not a minor event; it marks the fulfillment of circumcision in its purpose of preserving a line of descent from Abraham to Christ and marking out the one in whom all the promises of God have reached their fulfillment. In Christ, Abraham's true seed is now here, and as such, circumcision is no longer necessary—indeed, even at Jesus's circumcision, it was soon to be abrogated. In this sense, Jesus's circumcision is the last significant covenantal circumcision recorded in Scripture. All other circumcisions, such as Timothy's (Acts 16:3), were done only for principled pragmatic concerns in order to win Jews to the gospel.[46]

Second, circumcision is a type that points forward to a community that will experience a "circumcision of the heart," thus enabling them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation that is completely devoted to Yahweh, which is precisely what the new covenant promises. Thus, in the new covenant, what circumcision was supposed to signify is now the case because *all* those in the covenant community have experienced the internal circumcision of heart by the Spirit, thus making us true children of Abraham and people of faith in Christ Jesus (Rom. 2:25–29; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11–12). That is why true believers, regardless of whether they have received the external sign of circumcision, are called "the true circumcision." Due to Christ's cross work and the Spirit's work within us, we have now received a circumcision without hands that gives us our new covenant status as God's people and thus makes us heirs and coheirs with Christ.

In fact, this is the point of Colossians 2:11–13, the only text in the New Testament that brings together circumcision and baptism. But as it has been repeatedly shown, the connection in these verses is *not* between circumcision of the flesh and baptism, as if the latter replaces the former, but *circumcision of the heart*, which is tied to our union with Christ, and *baptism*.[47] As Paul reminds these believers, they are complete in Christ not because they were circumcised in the flesh but because they were circumcised in "the circumcision of Christ"—which refers either to "a

Christian circumcision of the heart”[48] or to Christ’s death on the cross, which entails that the only circumcision believers need is that which has been done by our being united into Christ’s death on the cross.[49] Either way, circumcision finds its fulfillment in being joined to Christ and experiencing the promises associated with the inauguration of the new covenant age. But note how the text says even more: verse 12 makes it clear that we participate by baptism in the burial of Christ, and through it we have experienced the death of the old life for new life in Christ. Thus, as Meade notes, “Baptism through faith elaborates or works out the inner circumcision of the heart.”[50] It is clear that Paul does not view baptism in an *ex opere operato* fashion, for he clearly stresses the instrumentality of faith. But he does argue that, in baptism, the objective realities of having died to sin and being made alive in Christ have actually taken place—something that cannot be applied to infants unless one affirms some kind of baptismal regeneration.

All this is to say that circumcision, as a type, *pointed to* the need for a circumcision of the heart and anticipated the promise of new and better covenant realities, rooted and grounded in the work of Christ, our covenant head/mediator. Baptism, in contrast to circumcision, is a new covenant sign, commanded by our Lord (Matt. 28:18–20), which communicates the grace of God *to those who have faith*, something that could not be said of the circumcision of the flesh. Baptism is a public testimony that one has entered into faith union with Christ, and it marks and defines the children of God, those who believe in Messiah Jesus. That is why we baptize only those who have confessed Jesus as Lord, who have experienced his power, who are, by faith and spiritual rebirth, Abraham’s true spiritual seed. Baptism is a *new* rite for the *new* covenant people of God; it is not the replacement of circumcision. To argue in a contrary fashion is fundamentally to misunderstand the relations between the biblical covenants and to confuse promise with fulfillment and type with antitype.

Eschatology

How does our understanding of the progression of the covenants affect eschatology? Given that the subject of eschatology encompasses many

topics that we cannot even begin to adequately address here, our answer to this question will focus on only one area: the land promise to national Israel and how that promise is fulfilled in the inauguration of the new covenant era.

In biblical and theological studies, few doubt that the theme of *land* is important. Walter Brueggemann may be too strong in his contention that land is one of *the* central themes of biblical faith,[51] but J. G. Millar is certainly on track when he affirms that the land theme is *a* crucial biblical topic and thus functions as "an important theological category in the Bible."[52] Furthermore, as noted in chapters 2–3, the issue of land is also a major dividing point between dispensational and covenant theology. At the heart of dispensationalism is the Israel-church distinction, and organically related to this distinction is the conviction that Israel, as a nation, still awaits the "literal" fulfillment of the land promise in the future millennial or consummated age. A significant amount of discussion in eschatology centers on this issue, and much of the rationale for dispensational premillennialism is centered on how one thinks of the role of national Israel in God's plan. And tied to the restoration of national Israel in the future is the land, first promised to Abraham and then to Israel. The question is, How is this promise brought to fulfillment in Christ? In fact, how one answers this question has implications for how Christians think through present geopolitical discussions, particularly the role of the current state of Israel in the world, her right to the land of Israel, and other pressing matters that are daily in the news and that fuel much eschatological speculation.

Before we discuss how *kingdom through covenant* affects the important land question, let us summarize the basic argument of dispensational theology in order to provide a larger context in which our discussion will proceed. There are at least three interlocking convictions that undergird the dispensational argument.[53] First, dispensationalists believe that the land promise to national Israel still awaits its fulfillment in the millennial or consummated age because God promised it *unconditionally* to Israel in the Abrahamic covenant. Since God cannot go back on his promise and since the promise has not yet been fully realized in Christ as the Davidic king who must rule in the land over Israel and the nations, it still awaits its

fulfillment in the future.[54] Second, and building on the first conviction, is a hermeneutical point: unless the New Testament explicitly or implicitly overturns Old Testament teaching, then it is still in force, even if the New Testament does not repeat the promise.[55] This is especially the case given the unconditional nature of the promise. The third conviction is often not argued but assumed. For dispensational theology, the land must *not* be viewed as a typological pattern of something greater, as we contend that it is, or if it is viewed as a type, typology is usually (re)defined in terms of an analogy. Instead, it is a straightforward ("literal") promise that reaches its fulfillment only with Christ ruling and reigning in the millennium or consummated state in the land of Israel. Dispensationalists deny that the land can be viewed as a divinely given pattern/type that God intends to be fulfilled in a greater way than simply in one location. For the most part, they reject the notion that the land looks back to Eden/creation and then is realized in Israel's land but also typologically looks forward to its fulfillment in a new heavens and new earth, where Christ's people, the church, exist as a kingdom of priests and holy nation and inherit *all* God's promises, including the land, in the new creation.[56]

How, then, does our view differ from the dispensational view?[57] The only way to answer this question is to trace carefully the land theme through the biblical covenants. As already noted in our discussion of theology proper, Christology, and ecclesiology, our construal of the relationships between the biblical covenants does impact how we put together these important doctrinal issues. Let us briefly summarize in five steps our understanding of how the land promise is progressively developed across the canon as the covenants reach their fulfillment in Christ.

The Nature of the Abrahamic Covenant

An appeal to the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic covenant does not settle the issue. Dispensational theology argues strongly that the land promise is irrevocable. It is unconditionally given, and as such, to deny that it is fulfilled to national Israel in the future is to say either that God has failed or that he has gone back on his promises, both of which, of course, are impossibilities. The problem is that appealing to the unconditional

nature of the promise as given in the Abrahamic covenant does not settle the issue, for at least two reasons.

The first reason is due to the fact that it is *not* accurate to distinguish the biblical covenants into the either-or categories of unconditional (royal grant) or conditional (suzerain-vassal treaty). Instead, the covenants exhibit a blend of unconditional/unilateral and conditional/bilateral elements. In terms of the former, it is only because of God, as the covenant-making and keeping Lord, that the promises of the covenants are unilaterally guaranteed. God's commitment first to himself, his creation, and his image bearers is what grounds our confidence that the covenant relationship will not fail. Yet in terms of the latter, God demands an obedient, devoted covenant partner. This is why, as one progresses through the covenants, a deliberate *tension* is created, since God is always the faithful one, and the various covenant mediators are not. It is only in the provision of our Lord Jesus Christ, God's own obedient, devoted Son, who does not fail, that the new covenant is established on better—indeed, unbreakable—grounds. To simply distinguish the covenants in the way dispensational theology (as well as other views) does misses the overall storyline of the biblical covenants and their central Christological focus.

There is a sense in which we agree with Michael Horton that Israel forfeited the promise of the land due to her disobedience, hence the reason for the exile.[58] But it is a bit more complicated than this. As often in the covenantal unfolding, the loss of land in exile and subsequent return to the land create an expectation for something greater. This is especially the case if Israel's land is also situated in terms of creation, so that in the land promise, it looks back to creation, is realized in the old covenant, is lost in exile, is regained in the return, but is ultimately looking for something greater tied to the coming of a new covenant and a new creation. Thus, through the Bible's unfolding of the covenants, it becomes clear that God must provide a greater than Israel, an obedient Son, who will keep the provisions of the covenant, who will not fail, and who will bring all God's promises to pass, *including the land promise*, but in a greater way.

This last observation brings us to the second reason why appealing to the Abrahamic covenant alone does not settle the issue. Dispensational

theology assumes that the land promised in the Abrahamic covenant refers only to a specific location with well-defined geographical borders that remain unchanged across the canon. They reject the view that the land functions as a microcosm, a pattern, or a type of something greater, namely, creation, and that as one walks through the covenants there are clues that Abraham and others would have expected something greater. Walter Kaiser is a good example of this approach. He contends that the land promise must possess a meaning that is "plain or natural"[59]—hence the conclusion that it must be fulfilled in the future in terms of the specific land of Israel with well-defined borders. To argue otherwise is to find a "deeper meaning" not discovered by grammatical-historical exegesis and thus not to interpret the biblical authors (including God as the divine author) according to their intention.[60]

We reject this conclusion. Instead, exegetical clues in the immediate context *and* in the interbiblical development through the progression of the covenants lead us to conclude that the land was never intended by the biblical authors *simply* to be understood within the limited confines of specific geographical boundaries. In other words, land, when placed within the unfolding covenants beginning in Eden and moving to Christ, was intended by God to function as a type of the dawning of the new creation. In the remaining four points, we list some of the reasons for viewing land in this way through the progression of the covenants.[61]

The Land Promise in the Abrahamic Covenant as a Type

Land, as first understood within the immediate context of the Abrahamic covenant, provides textual clues that it is functioning as a type of something greater. No doubt, the land promise is very important in the Abrahamic covenant and its continuation in the law-covenant (see, e.g., Gen. 12:1–3; 13:14–16; 15:18–21; 17:8; 26:3, 4, 24; 28:3–4, 13–15; 35:9–12). Not many dispute that the land in question refers to a specific land with well-defined geographical boundaries, namely, the land of Canaan. However, the more important question is this: Are there textual clues that the land within the immediate context of the Abrahamic covenant is *merely* referring to a specific location with limited geographical boundaries, or is it pointing to

something greater? Two pieces of evidence lead us to affirm the latter conclusion.

First, few dispute that the Abrahamic covenant has national *and* international implications.[62] The Abrahamic covenant has diverse dimensions to it, as illustrated by our discussion of Abraham's "seed." In its national sense tied to Isaac and then eventually to the nation of Israel, the land takes on a specific territorial promise of a comparatively small geographical area whose borders are explicitly delimited. Yet one cannot forget the international purpose of the covenant. In fact, in terms of the latter, the main reason for the covenant is that through Abraham's "seed," blessing will come to the nations (Gen. 12:1–3; cf. 17:5–8; 22:15–19). The climax of God's plan through Abraham is not merely the establishment of the nation of Israel but rather that, through Israel, the nations will be blessed, which ultimately is fulfilled in Christ (Gal. 3:16). In light of Christ's work, then, blessing now comes to the nations—that is, to Abraham's *spiritual* seed by new birth and faith union with Christ, seed who then in turn, whether Jew or Gentile, inherit the promises (Eph. 2:11–22).

However, if this is so, there are important implications for how we view the land promise, even in its immediate context. As Paul Williamson notes,

> The promise of land must be understood within this broader context of God's programmatic agenda, an agenda that culminates in the blessing of all the nations of the world through Abraham's seed (cf. Gal. 3:6ff.; Rev. 7:9). Since the latter aspect of the divine plan is patently non-territorial (in the sense that it is not restricted to any one geographical location), the national dimension of the territorial promise should probably be understood as a transitional stage in the outworking of God's ultimate plan.[63]

In other words, when the international focus on the Abrahamic covenant is considered, it is not enough to say that it is only Abraham's "seed" as equated with the nation of Israel that will inherit the promise. Rather, the ultimate inheritors of the patriarchal promises are an international community. Thus understood, as Williamson rightly contends,

> It is certainly difficult to envisage the necessity of a strictly localized fulfillment of the territorial promise *after* the climactic element in the programmatic agenda has begun to materialize. Surely Abraham's multitudinous and international descendants require a much larger, indeed a global, inheritance.[64]

Jason DeRouchie argues a similar point. Within the Abrahamic narrative, there is a hint that the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant will occur in two stages: first, in the nation of Israel, which will live in the Promised Land and serve as a kingdom of priests under the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 19:4–6; Deut. 4:5–8); second, in Christ, Abraham's royal, singular seed who will bless *all* nations (Gen. 17:4–6; cf. 22:17b–18; 49:8, 10; Isa. 9:6). Even in Genesis, Abraham's "fatherhood" is expanded "beyond ethnic Israelites to include the nations."[65] This seems to entail not only the promise of a global inheritance but also an expansion of the Promised Land "to include the planet and its numerous people (Gen 1:28; Matt 5:5; Rom 4:13; cf. Eph 6:2–3; Heb 11:13–16)."[66] As DeRouchie notes, "This kind of expansion is suggested in Gen 22:17b–18 where we are told that the unique, male deliverer will not only bless 'all the nations of the earth' but will also possess 'the gate of his enemies,' claiming once-enemy territory, his kingdom expanding to fill the earth (cf. Gen 24:60)."[67] This makes perfect sense since, in covenantal progression, the Abrahamic covenant is the means by which God will fulfill his promises for humanity (Gen. 3:15). This point is reinforced in the New Testament by Paul's reference to the *promises* made to Abraham and his offspring (Gal. 3:16). Paul had in mind *multiple* promises in Genesis, which certainly include the land. Paul is linking together the "seed" and "land" promise and arguing that they ultimately find their fulfillment in Christ *and* the church, which receives the "inheritance" (Gal. 3:18), a bequest that from an Old Testament perspective is tied to the land. In this way, the New Testament is picking up hints in the Abrahamic covenant that suggest, as DeRouchie notes, that "the inheritance of Canaan always anticipated the expansion of the kingdom to include the world."[68]

Second, it is also important to note that in the immediate context, even the specific texts that lay out the geographical borders of the land are *not*

consistent and precise (Gen. 15:18–21; Ex. 23:31; Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Josh. 1:2–4). The extent of the Land of Promise is not identical in each. What are we to make of this disparity? Some scholars have interpreted this variance as evidence of redaction, but as Williamson notes, "The fact that no steps were taken to impose uniformity suggests an element of flexibility difficult to harmonize with rigidly defined territorial borders."[69] He offers a better explanation: within the Abrahamic covenant these are textual clues that the Promised Land "was never seen as permanently fixed, but was subject to at least some degree of expansion and redefinition."[70] In other words, this textual ambiguity regarding the land provides clues that the land promise cannot be reduced *merely* to a particular piece of land but rather that it hints at a more ideal land that will be far greater and that this promise will not be fulfilled until Abraham's seed fills and occupies the world. If this is the case, it provides a partial basis for Paul's statement regarding Abraham in Romans 4:13a: "For the promise to Abraham and his offspring *that he would be heir of the world . . .*" Paul seems to be saying that Abraham did *not* understand the land promise as referring only to a specific geographical location; rather, he viewed the promise as that which ultimately would encompass the entire created order.[71] On the basis of this evidence, Williamson is warranted in asserting that, within the Abrahamic covenant, "Canaan was simply the preliminary stage in the ultimate unfolding of God's programmatic agenda—an agenda which not only involves all peoples of the earth but also encompasses all regions of the earth."[72] Within the immediate context there are textual clues to suggest that the promise of land points forward to something greater.

The Abrahamic Covenant Viewed in Light of the Covenant of Creation

The land promise of the Abrahamic covenant must also be understood in terms of what preceded it, namely, the covenant of creation. When this is done, there is further biblical warrant to view the land as a type or pattern of the entire creation.[73] As argued in previous chapters, one cannot adequately understand any biblical covenant without thinking through *before* and *after* in God's progressive revelation. The same is true of the land embedded in the biblical covenants. If we place the Abrahamic

covenant (and the land promise) in light of what *preceded* it, namely, the covenant of creation, land must be linked to Eden and thus the created order. In other words, land did *not* become theologically significant first with Abraham. Instead, Abraham's hope of possessing a land arose out of the concept of restoration to the original state from which Adam had fallen—in truth, an outworking of the *protevangelium*.[74] J. G. Millar is correct to note that in this way, "The promise of land guarantees the restoration of intimacy with God in terms which recall the description of Eden."[75] This is significant, as Millar observes, since "the theology of land in the early part of the OT anticipates the final chapters of the Bible, where the apostle John describes the new heaven and earth in language taken from Genesis 1–3."[76]

Furthermore, once we place land in the larger context of the covenant of creation, at least two other interrelated truths arise that are all intimately associated with land throughout Scripture: (1) the theme of God's rest and (2) Eden as a temple sanctuary, with the mandate for God's priest-kings and image bearers to expand the borders of Eden to the uttermost parts of the world.

First, think of the theme of God's rest. It serves as the climax of the creation week, where God rests on the seventh day after he declares everything "very good" (Gen. 1:31). This speaks of God's entering into covenantal enjoyment of his creation and of our enjoyment of God as we carry out our creation mandate as his servant-kings. It also establishes a pattern that runs through the entire canon, grounding the Sabbath law in the time of Moses (Ex. 20:8–11) and ultimately pointing forward to a greater "rest" to come (Heb. 3:7–4:13), which is associated with the great salvation rest of the new covenant era inaugurated by Jesus himself. But what is also crucial to note is how the theme of *rest* is organically associated with *land*.[77] This is evident later in Scripture when the Land of Promise is clearly associated with rest (Deut. 3:20; 12:9–10; 25:19; cf. Josh. 1:13–15; 21:43–44; 22:4; cf. Psalm 95; Heb. 3:7–4:13). Linked together, this entails that securing possession of the land typifies entering God's eternal rest, of which the land of Canaan is only a type or pattern. As Williamson notes,

> God intended humankind to share such a rest with him from the beginning (as reflected in the Edenic Paradise described in Gen. 2).

> The territorial promise thus anticipated the full restoration of the Edenic conditions that had been lost initially and jeopardized persistently through human disobedience. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that anything less than a permanent restoration of the conditions that pertained in Eden stops short of a comprehensive fulfillment of the territorial promise.[78]

Second, think of the theme of Eden as a temple sanctuary.[79] The most extensive development of this rich biblical theme to date is G. K. Beale's excellent work on the temple.[80] Beale convincingly demonstrates that the land of Eden is presented as the archetypal temple, the place where God uniquely dwelt with Adam and Eve as they served as God's priest-kings and sons in obedient devotion and worship of God.[81] Adam and Eve's task was to subdue and rule over the entire earth, which suggests that they were "to extend the geographical boundaries of the garden until Eden covered the whole earth,"[82] which, as Psalm 8 makes clear, was a role that the entire human race was to carry out. Adam, however, failed in his task, and because of his disobedience, instead of extending the divine presence of Eden, he was expelled from it. Yet what is significant for our purposes is the close connection between land and temple and how Eden serves as the archetype that both the land of Israel and the later tabernacle-temple are patterned after.

When we combine all these points and set the land promise in the context of creation, we have the biblical warrant to view the land as a type and pattern of creation. In this reading, the archetype is the land of Eden, whose borders are to be extended to the entire creation. With the fall of Adam and the removal from the land (Eden), God's promise is to restore what was lost and to reverse the disastrous effects of sin and death. Through the "seed of the woman" (Gen. 3:15), as worked out through the biblical covenants (Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David and his sons), God's rest and covenantal presence in the tabernacle-temple—all associated with the land—are restored in type and shadow but not in ultimate reality. Israel as God's son is to function like another Adam and experience God's presence in the land, but the people of Israel fail. They were to act as God's priest-kings, as a holy nation, in order to bring God's blessing to the nations. Their land, then,

becomes a pattern or a microcosm of the entire world. Through them the nations are to see what God intends for the entire world as they live as God's holy people. Just as "Adam and Eve had known God's blessing in Eden, so God would bless his people in a new land."[83] But, sadly, they fail to do what God intended for them to do. In order for God's purposes to be finally realized, God will have to provide his Son, who is not only the true Israel but also the last Adam, who in himself replaces the temple, inaugurates a new covenant by his blood, and begins to usher in the new creation.

The Old Testament Vision of the New Creation and New Covenant

Within the Old Testament and especially in prophetic anticipation, the land of Israel is identified with the new creation associated with the inauguration of the new covenant age. Is there any textual warrant to think that, as we work through the biblical covenants, the land is not merely viewed as a specific piece of property associated with the land of Canaan but that its borders are expanded to encompass the entire creation? We believe the answer is yes. As the biblical covenants unfold, there are two main fulfillments of the land promise. It is fulfilled, first, in the days of Joshua (Josh. 21:43–45) and, second, in the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 4:20–21), but in each case, the fulfillment of the land promise falls short due to the failure of the nation and the Davidic kings.[84] In addition, the idea of *multiple* fulfillments is also instructive. As Williamson notes, "The fact that the promise of land was fulfilled more than once leaves open the possibility of multiple fulfillments and also raises the question of its ultimate fulfillment."[85] We take this as evidence that in some sense the rest of Eden is partially restored but not in its ultimate, consummated form. Given the failure of Israel and the Davidic kings, it should not surprise us that, in the Old Testament, the land promise is fulfilled in Israel's history in some sense, but "it nowhere suggests that this dimension of the divine plan has been fulfilled in its most comprehensive sense."[86]

As the prophets anticipate the exile, which is traumatic, to say the least, given the theological significance of the land, they also hold out hope for a return from exile to the land.[87] Yet the prophets are clear that a return to the

land will include incredible realities; literally, it will result in the dawning of a new creation. The prophets paint a picture of land restoration so glorious that it cannot be contained within the boundaries of the old covenant forms. The historic city of Jerusalem takes on overtones of a city that is larger than life and ultimately identified with the people of God. It will be one without walls, where God's glory will dwell (Hag. 2:9; Zech. 2:1–5) and into which the Gentile nations will stream, fulfilling the Abrahamic promises (Isa. 56:3–7; Ezek. 47:22). In addition, this new Jerusalem will take on the very borders of the entire creation (Isa. 65:1–66:21). In other words, the prophets anticipate a future day when the land will be God's temple sanctuary and when its borders, like the rule of the king, will extend to the entire creation (Ps. 72:8–11, 17–19). It is this Old Testament prophetic vision that is picked up in Revelation 21–22 in light of the coming of Christ.

Fulfillment in Jesus Christ

The New Testament announces that the inheritance of the land is fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ, who brings to completion all the previous covenants (along with their types and shadows), and who in his cross work inaugurates the new creation. It is often remarked that there are not many explicit references to the land in the New Testament.[88] However, for a couple of reasons, it is a mistake to think that the New Testament does not say anything about the land.

First, as argued in part 2, the order in producing the new creation is reversed from that in producing the old creation. In the old creation, God first made the place where we live, and then he made the creatures to live there. In the new creation, however, God will first make his new people and then make the home where they will live. The priority of the New Testament is on how God is making a new people, and the land theme is secondary, even though it is clearly taught, especially in Revelation 21–22.

Second, once the subject of land is placed within the larger discussion of the covenants, the New Testament has much more to say about the land than some think. As discussed above, our Lord is presented as the antitype of both Adam (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–28) and Israel (Matt. 2:13–15;

4:1–11; John 15:1–17). As such, he is the one who brings God's rest to this world through his work (Matt. 11:28–30) and who also receives the land promise and fulfills it by his inauguration of a new creation. By his obedient life and death, he fulfills Adam's role, including the role of all the covenant mediators. In him God's unique presence is found, as the true temple (John 1:1, 14–18; 2:13–22), and by virtue of our faith union in him, we now are temples that God is building by his Spirit both individually and corporately (1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 2:19–22). In Christ, we now receive the promised *inheritance* as Abraham's spiritual seed (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7; Eph. 1:14). In fact, as many have noted, Paul develops the Old Testament emphasis on the land in terms of our *inheritance* (Col. 1:13–14) and our adoption, viewed salvifically and cosmically.[89] As Millar notes,

> It was as God's sons that the people of Israel received their inheritance. The link is most explicit in Romans 8:14–25, which also links the theology of the land with the theology of creation. Both the creation mandate to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28), and the theology of the land in the OT find their ultimate fulfillment in the new creation brought together under Christ.[90]

It is important to note that in this entire discussion of what Christ has accomplished in his new covenant work, there is little evidence that the land promise finds its Christological fulfillment in terms of a specific piece of land given to national Israel. The storyline of Scripture simply does not move back in this direction.[91] Rather, the entire New Testament announces that in Jesus, the last Adam and true Israel, our inheritance is nothing less than the new creation, which has already arrived in the dawning of the new covenant in individual Christians (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:8–10) and in the church (Eph. 2:11–21) and will yet be consummated when Christ returns and ushers in the new creation in its fullness (Revelation 21–22). This makes perfect sense if we place the entire land discussion in the flow of redemptive history as viewed through the biblical covenants. Christ, who is Lord over the whole world, inherits as a result of his work the entire world. "He is the Messiah of Israel, but his rule also extends far beyond the

borders of the original promised land (e.g., Phil. 2:10; cf. 1 Cor. 3:22–23; Eph. 1:10).”[92]

This way of thinking of the fulfillment of the land promise in Christ is confirmed by other important New Testament texts (Rom. 4:13; Eph. 6:3; Heb. 3:1–4:13; 11:8–22). For example, in Romans 4:13, Paul is clear that Abraham did not view the land promise as referring merely to a small piece of Palestinian territory but ultimately saw it as a type and pattern of the entire world. Or in Ephesians 6:3, Paul can quote the Decalogue (which clearly pertains to the land of Canaan in its Old Testament context) and now expand it to the entire earth. As Walker states, “God’s rule over the promised land is now extended through Christ to the whole world, and his true ‘people’ are a worldwide community, not an ethnic group associated with a particular land.”[93] The author of Hebrews makes the same point. In Hebrews 3:1–4:13, on the basis of Psalm 95:11, he argues that the divine rest (associated with Gen. 2:1–3) was not exhausted in the Old Testament by entrance into the Promised Land. Instead, what happened under Joshua pointed forward to a greater rest to come, which has now dawned in Christ and the new covenant age. We now enter God’s rest by entering into salvation rest in Christ and enjoying what he has accomplished on our behalf. We enter the land, so to speak, but now enjoying what the land pointed forward to: participating in new creation realities as the people of God. Later in Hebrews, the author also develops the themes of Christ as the fulfillment of the tabernacle-temple and Christ as the one who brings with him the new Jerusalem, identified with the people of God. All these themes are intimately associated with the land, and all of them are viewed as fulfilled typologically in Christ. Another crucial text that also makes this same point, similar to what Paul says in Romans 4:13, is Hebrews 11:8–22. There the author contends that Abraham’s inheritance was ultimately not the land of Canaan but a heavenly inheritance linked to the new Jerusalem and the new creation.[94]

Given how the biblical covenants unpack the theme of *land*, it should not surprise us how the entire storyline ends in Revelation 21–22. In the final chapters of Scripture, the consummated state is pictured as rest in terms that recall Eden of old, yet far greater. In this new creation, we have the

geographical boundaries of Eden ("the land") expanded to the entire creation, which is also beautifully described in the dimensions of the Most Holy Place, signifying God's unique covenantal presence throughout the entire creation, not just in the limited dimensions of the Old Testament tabernacle-temple. In this vision of the new heavens and new earth, God's people take up residence in God's presence, a residence described as the antitypical fulfillment of the Old Testament land. In fact, in this final vision we discover our final inheritance—what Abraham is said to have looked for—namely, a city whose builder and Maker is God and a creation that is full of God's glory. And most important, at the center of this new creation is our covenant Lord, whose presence does not require a temple since the Lord and the Lamb are the temple. In his presence we will dwell for all eternity, not on the clouds of heaven but in a gloriously renewed universe where we will carry out our calling as God's sons for his glory and honor. In this final vision, as the curtain closes, we now see what the eschatological goal of God's creation was in the first place. Eden as the temple sanctuary now reaches its telos in the new creation. The land, which functioned as a type of this greater reality, now reaches its terminus. And the covenant relationship that God created us for in the first place is now realized in its fullness as we enjoy the presence of our great and glorious triune, covenant God, and serve him in worship, adoration, devotion, and obedience forevermore.[95]

Summary Reflection

We have only scratched the surface in terms of the theological implications of *kingdom through covenant* and our overall view of progressive covenantalism. Much more needs to be said at every point and even in areas not discussed. We continue to flesh out some of these areas as we attempt to demonstrate how a slightly different way of putting together the biblical covenants should inform and even transform our theological conclusions. We stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us; we learn from those who have read and applied Scripture well; but we also desire to follow the Reformation principle of *semper reformanda* ("always reforming") in light of God's most holy Word so that we learn afresh "to

think God's thoughts after him" and "to bring every thought captive to Christ." May it also be said of us that we desire above all else not merely to be hearers of God's Word but doers. May we begin to live out what it means to know, enjoy, and glorify our Creator–covenant God as his covenant people. May our triune God receive all glory, honor, and praise as we await the return of our Lord and enjoy in fullness the wonderful, gracious, and earth-shaking realities of all that Jesus our Lord has won as our new covenant head.

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1. Parts of chap. 19 are adapted from Stephen J. Wellum, "Beyond Mere Ecclesiology," in *The Community of Jesus: A Theology of the Church*, ed. Christopher Morgan and Kendell Easley (Nashville: B&H, 2013); Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," chap. 4 in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H, 2006). Used by permission of B&H.

2. Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*, NSBT 27 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 105.

3. See the data given in G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 651–749; Thompson, *Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 71–143.

4. See Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 160–81; Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 250–63; Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1993), 267–83.

5. See, e.g., Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 217–21; Cornelis P. Venema, *The Promise of the Future* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000), 127–39; Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1979), 87–88.

6. Michael Vlach, "What Is Dispensationalism?," in *Christ's Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer*, ed. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 33.

7. See, e.g., Richard J. Lucas, "The Dispensational Appeal to Romans 11 and the Nature of Israel's Future Salvation," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 235–53; Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2013), 303–34; David Starling, "The Yes to All God's Promises: Jesus, Israel and the Promises of God in Paul's Letters," *RTR* 71, no. 3 (2012): 185–204; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 670–744; Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 421–59; Ben L. Merkle, "Romans 11 and the Future of Ethnic Israel," *JETS* 43, no. 4 (2000): 709–21.

8. For a discussion of all the options, see Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 448–51; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 611–30.

9. Douglas J. Moo, "Paul's Universalizing Hermeneutic in Romans," *SBJT* 11, no. 3 (2007): 77.

10. See, e.g., Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 162; Bruce A. Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 94–95.

11. For this argument, see Lucas, "Dispensational Appeal," 237–42.

12. This response to viewing the church as currently a regenerate community is fairly common. See, e.g., Douglas Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations: Infant Baptism—Covenant Mercy for the People of God* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 1996), 34; Gregg Strawbridge, "Introduction," in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 4–5; Strawbridge, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants: A Review," Paedobaptism, accessed October 17, 2017, http://www.paedobaptism.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/StrawbridgeReviewofWellum.pdf, 1–7; David Gibson, "'Fathers of Faith, My Fathers Now!': On Abraham, Covenant, and the Theology of Paedobaptism," *Themelios* 40, no. 1 (2015): 14–34; Jonathan M. Brack and Jared S. Oliphint, "Questioning the Progress in Progressive Covenantalism: A Review of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom through Covenant*," *WTJ* 76, no. 1 (2014): 189–217; J. V. Fesko, *Word, Water, and Spirit: A Reformed Perspective on Baptism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 351–56.

13. For a more detailed response, see Christopher W. Cowan, "The Warning Passages of Hebrews and the New Covenant Community," in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 189–213.

14. R. Fowler White, “The Last Adam and His Seed: An Exercise in Theological Preemption,” *TJ*, n.s., 6, no. 1 (1985): 72n19.

15. See Strawbridge, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants: A Review,” 1–7.

16. Cowan, “Warning Passages of Hebrews,” 196.

17. Ibid.

18. Against Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 735.

19. Cowan, “Warning Passages of Hebrews,” 197. On this same point, see James R. White, “The Newness of the New Covenant (Part 2),” in *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology*, ed. Richard C. Barcellos (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2014), 374–81.

20. In our view, for the best treatment of the warnings passages in Scripture and how they function in the Christian life that does *not* conclude that the church is a “mixed community,” see Thomas R. Schreiner and A. B. Caneday, *The Race Set before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); cf. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize: Perseverance in the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); Cowan, “Warning Passages of Hebrews,” 198–213.

21. For a more detailed discussion of this point, which can only be summarized here, see Stephen J. Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 97–161.

22. See, e.g., Gibson, “‘Fathers of Faith, My Fathers Now!,’” 14–34.

23. Most paedobaptists acknowledge this point. See, e.g., John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 69; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1941; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 632; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 936.

24. Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 69.

25. Bill Smith charges me with the “explicit references” fallacy. He thinks that since I argue in terms of the New Testament pattern of baptism (repentance, faith, and baptism) and the lack of any specific New Testament command to baptize infants, I have dismissed paedobaptism by assuming that unless the New Testament *explicitly* commands it, then it is not justified. He then maintains that such a hermeneutic would undermine allowing women to participate in the Lord’s Supper and would undermine the rejection of bestiality, since both of these are not explicitly mentioned in the New Testament. “Infant Baptism, the New Man, and the New Creation: A Response to Stephen J. Wellum’s ‘Baptism and the Relationship Between the Covenants,’ in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*,” 28–29, Community Presbyterian Church, accessed October 18, 2017, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/52ed7849e4b00e157ba533f7/t/54241aafe4b0d11990ee68fd/1411652271328/infant-baptism-new-man-new-creation1.pdf. This is incorrect. My point is that the hermeneutic of covenant theology assumes that *the genealogical principle* is unchanging due to their understanding of the continuity of the covenant of grace. My overall argument against this view is more detailed than this point. I seek to show not only that their understanding of the relationships between the covenants is flawed but also that their assumption that the covenant communities remain the same over time is wrong, that the covenant signs do not signify different realities related to their respective covenants, *and* that the New Testament meaning of baptism is not what they think it is.

26. Bill Smith fundamentally misunderstands what I mean by *spiritual* in that he thinks that I am pitting *physical* against *spiritual*. “Infant Baptism, the New Man, and the New Creation,” 4–6. By *physical*, I am referring to the biological link between covenant mediators and those they represent. In Adam, Noah, Abraham, and David, there is a *physical* relationship in that they represent those who genetically descend from them, while in Christ, the relationship between Christ and his people is *spiritual*—i.e., it is brought about by the sovereign work of the Spirit in new birth (not physical birth), and it is by faith and not national origin or privilege, as in the previous covenants. This does not deny that there were true believers in the previous covenants, hence *spiritual* relationships, but it is to affirm that the mediation of the covenant head has changed in the new covenant from the previous covenants. But Gibson also makes a similar mistake by attributing credobaptists with an unbiblical anthropology. “‘Fathers of Faith, My Fathers Now!,’” 21–29. It is hard to take this argument seriously.

27. On this point, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “Father of a Multitude of Nations: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective,” in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 7–38.

28. On the significance of circumcision, see John D. Meade, “Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart: The Typology of the Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant,” in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 127–58.

29. DeRouchie, “Father of a Multitude of Nations,” 34.

30. Ibid., 35.

31. Ibid.

32. For a theological summary of Christian baptism, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 263–305.

33. J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1993), 212.

34. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 355. Moo picks up the suggestion of James Dunn that the early church conceived of faith, the gift of the Spirit, and water baptism as components of one unified experience, what Dunn calls “conversion-initiation.” This is an important observation, and it is crucial to maintain against the *ex opere operato* view of Roman Catholicism. Baptism does not effect regeneration, but it is assumed that faith leads to baptism and that baptism always assumes faith for its validity. This observation underscores the importance the New Testament places on baptism without denying the priority of salvation by grace

through faith. See James Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM, 1970), 139–46; Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 366.

35. See Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 170–75; Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 146–51; Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 280.

36. See Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 173–74; Beasley-Murray, "Baptism," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 62; cf. Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 154–56.

37. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 354.

38. Ibid., 353–67.

39. Ibid., 366.

40. See, e.g., 1 Pet. 3:21. On this text, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC 37 (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 193–97; Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, TNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 164–65.

41. There seems to be an equivocation of terms in the covenant position. What does it mean for one to be united to Christ apart from faith, or to affirm that one has entered into new covenant realities apart from faith, regeneration, and forgiveness of sin? In fact, what does infant baptism effect apart from faith? Covenant theology is not clear at this point, even though proponents attempt to provide some kind of explanation. See the helpful discussion of this problem in David F. Wright, "Recovering Baptism for a New Age of Mission," in *Doing Theology for the People of God: Studies in Honor of J. I. Packer*, ed. Donald Lewis and Alister McGrath (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 51–66. For an example of a confusing use of the word *regeneration* as it relates to what infant baptism effects, see Rich Lusk, "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?," Trinity Presbyterian Church, accessed October 18, 2017, http://trinity-pres.net/essays/do-I-believe-in-baptismal-regeneration.pdf.

42. For a development of this argument in greater detail, see Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," 153–60.

43. Meade, "Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart," 131.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., 131–45.

46. In the New Testament there is no covenantal significance in circumcision after the cross work of Christ, contra Doug Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations*, 59–80. The fact that Paul circumcised Timothy or that other Jewish believers circumcised their children (Acts 21:21–26) does not mean that circumcision continued to have covenantal efficacy. Paul circumcised Timothy only for mission purposes, what I have called "principled pragmatic concerns." For a helpful treatment of this issue, see D. A. Carson, "Pauline Inconsistency: Reflections on 1 Corinthians 9.19–23 and Galatians 2.11–14," *Churchman* 100, no. 1 (1986): 6–45.

47. See Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard de Witt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 404–5n38. See also Martin Salter, "Does Baptism Replace Circumcision? An Examination of the Relationship between Circumcision and Baptism in Colossians 2:11–12," *Themelios* 35, no. 1 (2010): 15–29; Meade, "Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart," 148–51.

48. See Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, EGGNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 101–5.

49. See ibid., 102–3.

50. Meade, "Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart," 151; cf. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 152–60.

51. Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (London: SPCK, 1978), 3.

52. J. G. Millar, "Land," in *NDBT*, 623. For some helpful discussions of *land* in biblical and systematic theology, see Philip Johnston and Peter W. L. Walker, eds., *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 512–87; Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994); Moshe Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land: The Inheritance of the Land of Canaan by the Israelites* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); T. Desmond Alexander and Simon Gathercole, eds., *Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004); Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God's Redemptive Plan*, NSBT 34 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

53. See, e.g., John S. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments; Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 73–83; H. Wayne House, ed., *Israel: The Land and the People; An Evangelical Affirmation of God's Promises* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), esp. 80–83; Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser, eds., *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel: Israel and the Jewish People in the Plan of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014); MacArthur and Mayhue, *Christ's Prophetic Plans*.

54. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. stresses this point. Kaiser contends that if we think that the church, not national Israel, inherits the land promise, two options are available to us, both of which he rejects. Either we view the Abrahamic covenant as conditional, or we

conclude that the land promise possesses a meaning that is "not the plain or natural meaning of what is said." In terms of the former, he admits that there are conditional elements in the covenants with Abraham and David but contends that God's overall promise makes the covenants irrevocable. In regard to the latter, Kaiser thinks that the promise has to be fulfilled in a "literal" or direct manner, hence its future fulfillment. In addition, Kaiser argues that "God never made a covenant with the Church as such!" since it was made with the "house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31b). No doubt the church shares in the new covenant, but that is only by virtue of its relation to Israel. Kaiser does not seem to view the new covenant first in relation to Christ, the last Adam and true Israel, but only in terms of national Israel, which then has spillover effects for the church, a kind of *spiritual* fulfillment to the church and a *literal* fulfillment to national Israel. He also does not view the land as a type that looks back to creation and forward to its ultimate fulfillment in a new creation. Kaiser, "Israel and Its Land in Biblical Perspective," in *The Old Testament in the Life of God's People: Essays in Honor of Elmer A. Martens*, ed. Jon Isaak (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 249–50, 252.

55. As noted above, ironically, this is the same hermeneutical point that covenant theology adopts in its argument for the continuation of the unchanging genealogical principle across the covenants. Our response to both systems is to unpack the genealogical principle and land promise according to the three horizons (i.e., textual, epochal, and canonical) and in light of the covenantal progression before we conclude whether they are still in force in exactly the same way as they were in previous eras.

56. Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," 92–96, is a fine example of a progressive dispensationalist who does not view the land promise typologically, at least in the way we defined typology in chap. 3. Instead, he bifurcates the spiritual aspects of the new covenant from the territorial-political and appeals to the already–not yet tension of inaugurated eschatology to argue that the spiritual aspects of the new covenant are now applied to the church, while the territorial-political aspects await future fulfillment to national Israel. This argument works only if you understand inaugurated eschatology a certain way and interpret the land promise as nontypological of the new creation. For a similar treatment of the land, see Blaising, "The Fulfillment of the Biblical Covenants through Jesus Christ," in Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 174–211.

57. Our view of *land* is much more in line with more recent covenant theology, even though our reasons may differ at points. See, e.g., Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 274–87; Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 97–129; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), 3–31; Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 750–72; and the essays in Johnston and Walker, *Land of Promise*, particularly 15–50, 81–141.

58. Michael S. Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 47.

59. Kaiser, "Israel and Its Land in Biblical Perspective," 249.

60. Ibid.

61. The reader will remember that our argument here is similar to our argument against covenant theology's understanding of the genealogical principle. In contrast to both dispensational and covenant theology, we contend that the land *and* the genealogical principle must be carefully unpacked through the covenants as they reach their fulfillment in Christ. As they are, they both become a typological pattern that reaches antitypical fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant. Here are two examples of how *kingdom through covenant* differs from the two dominant biblical-theological systems and provides a *via media*.

62. See DeRouchie, "Father of a Multitude of Nations," 7–38.

63. Paul R. Williamson, "Promise and Fulfilment: The Territorial Inheritance," in Johnston and Walker, *Land of Promise*, 18.

64. Ibid.

65. Jason S. DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective," *JETS* 58, no. 3 (2015): 460.

66. Ibid., 461.

67. Ibid.

68. DeRouchie, "Father of a Multitude of Nations," 33.

69. Williamson, "Promise and Fulfilment," 20–21.

70. Ibid., 21. He further strengthens his point by appealing to texts that seem to indicate the possibility of an expansion of the land beyond the geographical parameters indicated elsewhere (i.e., Gen. 26:3–4; Ex. 34:24; Num. 24:17–18; Deut. 19:8–9).

71. See Schreiner, *Romans*, 227–28; Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 274.

72. Williamson, "Promise and Fulfilment," 22.

73. See Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 750–72.

74. See Robertson, *Israel of God*, 4. Paul R. Williamson rightly contends that the juxtaposition of Genesis 1–11 and Genesis 12 suggests that the land promise is a reversal of the pattern of expulsion that dominates Genesis 3–11. "Promise and Fulfilment," 25. In addition, God's promise to make Abraham numerous not only continues the creation mandate (Gen. 1:28; 9:1) but is also God's answer to humanity's plight. This is why one must understand land in light of creation if one places the Abrahamic covenant in the context of what preceded it. This also provides the exegetical basis for the author of Hebrews to claim that Abraham was anticipating something more permanent than a temporary piece of land (see Heb. 11:8–16).

75. Millar, "Land," 623.

76. Ibid.

77. See, e.g., T. Desmond Alexander, "Beyond Borders: The Wider Dimensions of Land," in Johnston and Walker, *Land of Promise*, 36–39. For a further development of this point, see Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: Exploring God's Plan*

for Life on Earth (Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008).

78. Williamson, "Promise and Fulfilment," 27. Alexander draws the same conclusion: rest in the land "represents a return to the idyllic conditions which existed prior to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden." "Beyond Borders," 39.

79. This point is well recognized today, as developed in the previous chapters. Also see Alexander, "Beyond Borders," 39–41; William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1984), 119–23.

80. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

81. Ibid., 66–80.

82. Ibid., 81–82.

83. Robertson, *Israel of God*, 7.

84. For a discussion of this point, see Williamson, "Promise and Fulfilment," 28–32.

85. Ibid., 28.

86. Ibid., 31.

87. Millar comments that the exile involved more than being reduced to a homeless status; it raised the idea of being disinherited and questioned God's relationship to his people. The Father-son (Yahweh-Israel) relationship established by God with his people seemed inviolable, but the exile brought this assumption into question. It also brought into question God's ultimate salvation purposes for the entire world, since if Israel failed, then how would the Abrahamic blessing be brought to pass? "Land," 626.

88. Peter W. L. Walker, "The Land in the Apostles' Writings," in Johnston and Walker, *Land of Promise*, 82–83. In the New Testament there are fewer than fifty references to land and only a small number of these that refer to the land of Israel rather than the world in general.

89. It is difficult to think of Paul's understanding of inheritance apart from the Old Testament background of land. For a discussion of these important issues, see James D. Hester, *Paul's Concept of Inheritance: A Contribution to the Understanding of Heilsgeschichte*, SJTOP 14 (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1968), 77–78.

90. Millar, "Land," 627.

91. This is an important point. The flow of redemptive history as traced through the biblical covenants reaches its telos in Christ. What our Lord has inaugurated does *not* go back to the types and patterns of old; it transforms and fulfills them. This is especially crucial to note in regard to the land. When it comes to the future, dispensational theology, at least on the land issue, tends to go backward in redemptive history instead of forward. But as Robertson states well, in the new creation "the old covenant's promise of land finds its new covenant realization." *Israel of God*, 26. On this point, see also Beale, *Temple and the Church's Mission*, 372–75.

92. Walker, "Land in the Apostles' Writings," 87.

93. Ibid.

94. On these points, see William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, WBC 47A (Dallas: Word, 1991), 70–105; Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, WBC 47B (Dallas: Word, 1991), 347–66; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 350–74.

95. See Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 171–87; Beale, *Temple and the Church's Mission*, 313–34.

Appendix

LEXICAL ANALYSIS OF *BĚRÎT* (בְּרִית)

Resources

BibleWorks 6.0, LLC. Norfolk, VA: BibleWorks, 2008.

Clines, David J. A., ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Vol. 2: ב–ו. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

Even-Shoshan, Abraham. *A New Concordance to the Old Testament*. Jerusalem: Sivan, 1982.

Lisowsky, Gerhard. *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament*. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1958.

Weinfeld, Moshe. "בְּרִית, *berîth*." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, 2:253–79. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003.

Williamson, Paul R. *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*. NSBT 23. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007.

Number of Occurrences

Concordances and studies vary concerning the number of times בְּרִית occurs in the Old Testament: 283 times (Even-Shoshan), 284 times (Bible Works 6.0), 285 times (*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*), 286 times (Williamson, p. 36), and 287 times (Lisowsky). This analysis lists 288 instances.

Legend

Only references counting as instances of בְּרִית employ a colon; elsewhere a period (.) is used in duplicated references instead of a colon. (NB: ** denotes a relative clause.)

Hebrew Bible

The biblical references in this appendix follow the versification in the Hebrew Bible, not the English Bible, and the biblical books are ordered in accordance with the Hebrew canon, not the English canon.

Expressions with ברית as Object of the Verb

1. כרת ברית

Genesis 15:18

ביום ההוא כרת יהוה את־אברם ברית לאמר
לזרעך נתתי את־הארץ הזאת
מנהר מצרים עד־הנהר הגדל נהר־פרת

Comment: Yahweh makes a covenant with Abraham.

Genesis 21:27

ויקח אברהם צאן ובקר ויתן לאבימלך
ויכרתו שׁניהם ברית

Comment: Abraham and Abimelech make a treaty.

Genesis 21:32

על־כן קרא למקום ההוא באר שׁבע כי שׁם נשׁבעו שׁניהם
ויכרתו ברית בבאר שׁבע
ויקם אבימלך ופיכל שׂר־צבאו וישׁבו אל־ארץ פלשׁתים

Comment: Abraham and Abimelech make a treaty.

Genesis 26:28

ויאמרו ראו ראינו כי־היה יהוה עמך
ונאמר תהי נא אלה בינותינו בינינו ובינך ונכרתה ברית עמך

Comment: Isaac and Abimelech make a treaty.

Genesis 31:44

ועתה לכה נכרתה ברית אני ואתה
והיה לעד ביני ובינך

Comment: Laban and Jacob make an agreement as a witness between them.

Exodus 23:32

וׂשתי את־גבלך מים־סוף ועד־ים פלׂשתים וממדבר עד־הנהר
כי אתן בידכם את יׂשבי הארץ וגרׁשתמו מפניך
לא־תכרת להם ולאלהיהם ברית

Comment: God commands the Israelites not to make treaties with the Canaanites.

Exodus 24.8**

ויקח מׂשה את־הדם ויזרק על־העם
ויאמר הנה דם־הברית אׂשר כרת יהוה עמכם על כל־הדברים האלה

Comment: A relative clause modifies “covenant” in the verbless clause “Here is the blood of the covenant.” The relative clause indicates that the covenant was made (“cut”) on the basis of the words (i.e., the Ten Words and the Judgments) given at Sinai.

Exodus 34:10

ויאמר הנה אנכי כרת ברית נגד כל־עמך
אעׂשה נפלאת אׂשר לא־נבראו בכל־הארץ ובכל־הגוים
וראה כל־העם אׂשר־אתה בקרבו את־מעׂשה יהוה
כי־נורא הוא אׂשר אני עׂשה עמך

Comment: Yahweh is in the midst of making a covenant with Israel (NB the participle). This is the Sinai covenant continued by Yahweh on the basis of forgiveness when it was violated by Israel.

Exodus 34:12

הׂשמר לך פן־תכרת ברית ליוׂשב הארץ אׂשר
אתה בא עליה פן־יהיה למוקׂש בקרבך

Comment: God commands the Israelites not to make treaties with the Canaanites.

Exodus 34:15

פן־תכרת ברית ליושׁב הארץ
וזנו אחרי אלהיהם וזבחו לאלהיהם וקרא לך ואכלת מזבחו

Comment: God commands the Israelites not to make treaties with the Canaanites.

Exodus 34:27

ויאמר יהוה אל־משׁה כתב־לך את־הדברים האלה
כי על־פי הדברים האלה כרתי אתך ברית ואת־ישׂראל

Comment: Yahweh commands Moses to write “these Words” (i.e., the Ten Words) because on the basis of these Words he has made a covenant with Israel. See note on Exodus 34.10.

Deuteronomy 4.23**

השׁמרו לכם פן־תשׁכחו את־ברית יהוה אלהיכם אשׁר כרת עמכם
ועשׂיתם לכם פסל תמונת כל אשׁר צוך יהוה אלהיך

Comment: Israel is called to be on guard lest they forget the covenant that God made with them and make an idol. This is a reference to the covenant made at Sinai.

Deuteronomy 5:2

יהוה אלהינו כרת עמנו ברית בחרב

Comment: Yahweh made a covenant with Israel. This is the Sinai covenant.

Deuteronomy 5:3

לא את־אבתינו כרת יהוה את־הברית הזאת
כי אתנו אנחנו אלה פה היום כלנו חיים

Comment: Yahweh made a covenant with Israel. This is the Sinai covenant.

Deuteronomy 7:2

ונתנם יהוה אלהיך לפניך והכיתם
החרם תחרים אתם לא־תכרת להם ברית ולא תחנם

Comment: God commands the Israelites not to make treaties with the Canaanites.

Deuteronomy 9.9

בעלתי ההרה לקחת לוחת האבנים לוחת הברית
אשׁר־כרת יהוה עמכם
ואשׁב בהר ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה
לחם לא אכלתי ומים לא שׁתיתי

Comment: Reference is made to “the tablets of the covenant that Yahweh cut with you.” This indicates the Ten Words written on the two stone tablets, that is, the Sinai covenant.

Deuteronomy 28:69

אלה דברי הברית אשׁר־צוה יהוה את־משׁה
לכרת את־בני ישׂראל בארץ מואב מלבד הברית אשׁר־כרת אתם בחרב

Comment: The book of Deuteronomy is a covenant that Yahweh made with his people Israel in Moab, as an addendum or codicil to the covenant made at Sinai.

Deuteronomy 29.11**

לעברך בברית יהוה אלהיך ובאלתו
אשׁר יהוה אלהיך כרת עמך היום

Comment: Those hearing Moses’s *tôrâ* are entering into the covenant, that is, the agreement between God and Israel defined by the book of Deuteronomy through speech acts, as in a wedding.

Deuteronomy 29:13

ולא אתכם לבדכם אנכי כרת את־הברית הזאת ואת־האלה הזאת

Comment: The book of Deuteronomy is an addition to the Sinai covenant.

Deuteronomy 29:24

ואמרו על אשׁר עזבו את־ברית יהוה אלהי אבתם
אשׁר כרת עמם בהוציאו אתם מארץ מצרים

Comment: Nations will observe the calamities that befall Israel and conclude that the curses in "this book of the *tôrâ*"(i.e., in the book of Deuteronomy) have come on Israel because they have violated the covenant made between God and Israel when he brought them out of Egypt. The book of Deuteronomy is an expansion and renewal of the Sinai covenant (see chap. 10).

Deuteronomy 31.16**

ויאמר יהוה אל־משׁה הנך שׁכב עם־אבתיך
וקם העם הזה וזנה אחרי אלהי נכר־הארץ אשׁר הוא בא־שׁמה בקרבו
ועזבני והפר את־בריתי אשׁר כרתי אתו

Comment: The people will violate the covenant (i.e., Deuteronomy) that God made with them.

Joshua 9:6

וילכו אל־יהושׁע אל־המחנה הגלגל ויאמרו אליו
ואל־איש ישׂראל מארץ רחוקה באנו ועתה כרתו־לנו ברית

Comment: The Israelites make a treaty with the Gibeonites.

Joshua 9:7

*ויאמר איש־ישׂראל אל־החוי ויאמרו
*אכרת־לך ברית אולי בקרבי אתה יושׁב ואיך אכרות

Comment: The Israelites make a treaty with the Gibeonites.

Joshua 9:11

ויאמרו אלינו זקינינו וכל־ישׁבי ארצנו לאמר
קחו בידכם צידה לדרך ולכו לקראתם ואמרתם אליהם
עבדיכם אנחנו ועתה כרתו־לנו ברית

Comment: The Israelites make a treaty with the Gibeonites.

Joshua 9:15

ויעשׂ להם יהושׁע שׁלום ויכרת להם
ברית לחיותם וישׁבעו להם נשׂיאי העדה

Comment: The Israelites make a treaty with the Gibeonites. NB עשׂה שׁלום as a parallel to כרת ברית.

Joshua 9:16

ויהי מקצה שׁלשׁת ימים אחרי אשׁר־כרתו להם ברית
וישׁמעו כי־קרבים הם אליו ובקרבו הם ישׁבים

Comment: The Israelites make a treaty with the Gibeonites.

Joshua 24:25

ויכרת יהושׁע ברית לעם ביום ההוא וישׂם לו חק ומשׁפט בשׁכם

Comment: Joshua makes a covenant with the people of Israel at Shechem. This covenant is a commitment to serve Yahweh and obey him.

Judges 2:2

ואתם לא־תכרתו ברית ליושׁבי הארץ הזאת מזבחותיהם
תתצון ולא־שׁמעתם בקלי מה־זאת עשׂיתם

Comment: God commands the Israelites not to make treaties with the Canaanites.

1 Samuel 11:1

ויעל נחשׁ העמוני ויחן על־יבשׁ גלעד
ויאמרו כל־אנשׁי יבישׁ אל־נחשׁ כרת־לנו ברית ונעבדך

Comment: The men of Jabesh Gilead ask the Ammonite king to make a treaty with them in which they would be a vassal kingdom or a client kingdom of the Ammonites.

1 Samuel 18:3

ויכרת יהונתן ודוד ברית באהבתו אתו כנפשׁו

Comment: Jonathan and David make a covenant.

1 Samuel 23:18

ויכרתו שׁניהם ברית לפני יהוה
וישׁב דוד בחרשׁה ויהונתן הלך לביתו

Comment: Jonathan and David make a covenant (second time).

2 Samuel 3:12

*תחתיו לאמר למי־ארץ וישׁלח אבנר מלאכים אל־דוד תחתו
לאמר כרתה בריתך אתי והנה ידי עמך להסב אליך את־כל־ישׂראל

Comment: Abner invites David to make an agreement with him so that he can bring all Israel under David's rule.

2 Samuel 3:13

ויאמר טוב אני אכרת אתך ברית
אך דבר אחד אנכי שׁאל מאתך לאמר
לא־תראה את־פני כי אם־לפני הביאך
את מיכל בת־שׁאול בבאך לראות את־פני

Comment: Abner invites David to make an agreement with him so that he can bring all Israel under David's rule.

2 Samuel 3:21

ויאמר אבנר אל־דוד אקומה ואלכה ואקבצה אל־אדני המלך
את־כל־ישׂראל ויכרתו אתך ברית ומלכת בכל אשׁר־תאוה נפשׁך
וישׁלח דוד את־אבנר וילך בשׁלום

Comment: David and Israel make a covenant so that he may rule over them.

2 Samuel 5:3

ויבאו כל־זקני ישׂראל אל־המלך חברונה
ויכרת להם המלך דוד ברית בחברון לפני יהוה
וימשׁחו את־דוד למלך על־ישׂראל

Comment: David and Israel make a covenant so that he may rule over them.

1 Kings 5:26

ויהוה נתן חכמה לשלמה כאשר דבר־לו
ויהי שלם בין חירם ובין שלמה ויכרתו ברית שניהם

Comment: Hiram and Solomon make a treaty (for commerce and trade).

1 Kings 8.21
1 Kings 20:34

ויאמר אליו הערים אשר־לקח־אבי מאת אביך אשיב[20.34]
וחוצות תשים לך בדמשק כאשר־שם אבי בשמרון
ואני בברית אשלחך ויכרת־לו ברית וישלחהו

Comment: Ahab of Samaria and Ben-Hadad of Damascus make a treaty.

2 Kings 11:4

ובשנה השביעית שלח יהוידע
*המאות לכרי ולרצים ויקח את־שרי המאיות
ויבא אתם אליו בית יהוה
ויכרת להם ברית וישבע אתם בבית יהוה
וירא אתם את־בן־המלך

Comment: Jehoiada makes an agreement with certain military units to make Joash king.

2 Kings 11:17

ויכרת יהוידע את־הברית בין יהוה ובין
המלך ובין העם להיות לעם ליהוה ובין המלך ובין העם

Comment: Jehoiada makes a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people and (a covenant) between the king and the people.

2 Kings 17.15
2 Kings 17:35

ויכרת יהוה אתם ברית ויצום לאמר לא תיראו אלהים
אחרים ולא־תשתחוו להם ולא תעבדום ולא תזבחו להם

Comment: A back reference to the covenant made at Sinai.

2 Kings 17:38

והברית אשׁר־כרתי אתכם לא תשׁכחו
ולא תיראו אלהים אחרים

Comment: A back reference to the covenant made at Sinai.

2 Kings 23:3

ויעמד המלך על־העמוד ויכרת את־הברית לפני יהוה ללכת
אחר יהוה ולשׁמר מצותיו ואת־עדותיו ואת־חקתיו בכל־לב
ובכל־נפשׁ להקים את־דברי הברית הזאת הכתבים על־הספר הזה
ויעמד כל־העם בברית

Comment: Josiah makes a covenant in order to keep the Sinai-Deuteronomic covenant. This is an example of כרת ברית used in a situation of covenant renewal. It always involves making a covenant in order to keep an earlier covenant. There are no examples of הקים ברית used in this way.

Isaiah 28:15

כי אמרתם כרתנו ברית את־מות
ועם־שׁאול עשׂינו חזה
*יעבר לא יבואנו *שׁוט שׁוטף כי־עבר שׂיט
כי שׂמנו כזב מחסנו ובשׁקר נסתרנו

Comment: Scoffers boast they have made a covenant with death. Here Isaiah is mocking idolaters. See Isaiah 28.18.

Isaiah 55:3

הטו אזנכם ולכו אלי שׁמעו ותחי נפשׁכם
ואכרתה לכם ברית עולם חסדי דוד הנאמנים

Comment: Isaiah announces that God will initiate a new covenant, called here an everlasting covenant.

Isaiah 61:8

כי אני יהוה אהב מִשפט שֹנא גזל בעולה
ונתתי פעלתם באמת וברית עולם אכרות להם

Comment: God will make a new covenant with his people, called here an everlasting covenant.

Jeremiah 31:31

הנה ימים באים נאם־יהוה
וכרתי את־בית ישׂראל ואת־בית יהודה ברית חדשׁה

Comment: Jeremiah announces that God will initiate a new covenant.

Jeremiah 31:32

לא כברית אשׁר כרתי את־אבותם ביום
החזיקי בידם להוציאם מארץ מצרים
אשׁר־המה הפרו את־בריתי
ואנכי בעלתי בם נאם־יהוה

Comment: A back reference to the covenant made at Sinai.

Jeremiah 31:33

כי זאת הברית אשׁר אכרת את־בית ישׂראל
אחרי הימים ההם נאם־יהוה נתתי את־תורתי בקרבם
ועל־לבם אכתבנה והייתי להם לאלהים והמה יהיו־לי לעם

Comment: Jeremiah announces that God will initiate a new covenant.

Jeremiah 32:40

וכרתי להם ברית עולם אשׁר לא־אשׁוב מאחריהם להיטיבי אותם
ואת־יראתי אתן בלבבם לבלתי סור מעלי

Comment: Jeremiah announces that God will initiate a new covenant, called here an everlasting covenant.

Jeremiah 34:8

הדבר אשׁר־היה אל־ירמיהו מאת יהוה אחרי כרת המלך
צדקיהו ברית את־כל־העם אשׁר בירושׁלם לקרא להם דרור

Comment: King Zedekiah made a covenant with all the people to proclaim freedom for the slaves.

Jeremiah 34:13

כה־אמר יהוה אלהי ישׂראל אנכי כרתי ברית
את־אבותיכם ביום הוצאי אותם מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים לאמר

Comment: A back reference to the covenant made at Sinai.

Jeremiah 34:15

ותשׁבו אתם היום ותעשׂו את־הישׁר בעיני לקרא דרור איש
לרעהו ותכרתו ברית לפני בבית אשׁר־נקרא שׁמי עליו

Comment: King Zedekiah made a covenant with all the people to proclaim freedom for the slaves.

Ezekiel 17:13

ויקח מזרע המלוכה ויכרת אתו ברית
ויבא אתו באלה ואת־אילי הארץ לקח

Comment: The king of Babylon made a covenant with a member of the royal family of Judah. NB the parallel expression “to bring him into the oath.”

Ezekiel 34:25

וכרתי להם ברית שׁלום והשׁבתי חיה־רעה מן־הארץ
וישׁבו במדבר לבטח וישׁנו ביערים

Comment: Ezekiel announces a new covenant, called here a covenant of peace.

Ezekiel 37:26

וכרתי להם ברית שׁלום ברית עולם יהיה אותם
ונתתים והרביתי אותם ונתתי את־מקדשׁי בתוכם לעולם

Comment: Ezekiel announces a new covenant, called here a covenant of peace.

Hosea 2:20

וכרתי להם ברית ביום ההוא
עם־חית השׂדה ועם־עוף השׁמים ורמשׂ האדמה
וקשׁת וחרב ומלחמה אשׁבור מן־הארץ והשׁכבתים לבטח

Comment: Hosea lived and served in the middle of the eighth century BC. He announces a covenant that Yahweh will make in the future with the animals so that they will no longer be instruments of destruction. There will be safety and security in the land. Further, see Hosea 6.7 and 8.1. This is a reference to the new creation resulting from the new covenant.

Hosea 10:4

דברו דברים אלות שׁוא כרת ברית
ופרח כראשׁ משׁפט על תלמי שׂדי

Comment: Hosea here speaks of false treaties initiated by the last monarchs of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Hosea 12:2

אפרים רעה רוח ורדף קדים כל־היום כזב ושׁד ירבה
וברית עם־אשׁור יכרתו ושׁמן למצרים יובל

Comment: Hosea here speaks of false treaties initiated by the last monarchs of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Psalm 50:5

אספו־לי חסידי כרתי בריתי עלי־זבח

Comment: A reference to the Sinai covenant (see Ex. 24.4–8). The passage refers to those in the covenant community as חסידים (i.e., “covenant partners”) and speaks of a covenant made on the basis of a sacrifice.

Psalm 83:6

כי נועצו לב יחדו עליך ברית יכרתו

Comment: Asaph describes a covenant or alliance formed by a large number of nations against Israel.

Psalm 89:4

כרתי ברית לבחירי נשבעתי לדוד עבדי

Comment: A reference to the Davidic covenant (see 2 Samuel 7).

Job 31:1

ברית כרתי לעיני ומה אתבונן על־בתולה

Comment: Job's declaration of innocence—he had made a covenant with his eyes not to look lustfully on a young woman.

Job 40:28

היכרת ברית עמך תקחנו לעבד עולם

Comment: In Yahweh's speech, he challenges Job to control Leviathan. Can Job make an agreement with the monster so that he is Job's slave forever? Cf. Hosea 2.20.

Ezra 10:3

ועתה נכרת־ברית לאלהינו להוציא כל־נשים והנולד
מהם בעצת אדני והחרדים במצות אלהינו וכתורה יעשה

Comment: Ezra advises the people to make a covenant with God to divorce their non-Jewish wives.

Nehemiah 9:8

ומצאת את־לבבו נאמן לפניך וכרות עמו הברית
לתת את־ארץ הכנעני החתי האמרי
והפרזי והיבוסי והגרגשי לתת לזרעו
ותקם את־דבריך כי צדיק אתה

Comment: A reference to the covenant with Abraham (particularly to Gen. 15.18–21). Note that הקים is employed here of God fulfilling his words, that is, bringing to pass the promises in the covenant initiated previously.

1 Chronicles 11:3

ויבאו כל־זקני ישׂראל אל־המלך חברונה
ויכרת להם דויד ברית בחברון לפני יהוה
וימשׁחו את־דויד למלך על־ישׂראל כדבר יהוה ביד־שׁמואל

Comment: Parallel to 2 Samuel 5.3.

2 Chronicles 21:7

ולא־אבה יהוה להשׁחית את־בית דויד למען הברית אשׁר כרת לדויד
וכאשׁר אמר לתת לו ניר ולבניו כל־הימים

Comment: A reference to the covenant Yahweh had made with David. Jehoram was an evil king, but Yahweh did not destroy him because of his covenant with David.

2 Chronicles 23:3

ויכרת כל־הקהל ברית בבית האלהים עם־המלך
ויאמר להם הנה בן־המלך ימלך כאשׁר דבר יהוה על־בני דויד

Comment: Parallel to 2 Kings 11.4.

2 Chronicles 23:16

ויכרת יהוידע ברית בינו ובין
כל־העם ובין המלך להיות לעם ליהוה

Comment: Parallel to 2 Kings 11.17.

2 Chronicles 29:10

עתה עם־לבבי לכרות ברית ליהוה
אלהי ישׂראל וישׁב ממנו חרון אפו

Comment: Hezekiah announces his intentions to make a covenant with Yahweh so that the anger of God will be turned away from the people. He calls the Levites together so that they may purify the temple.

2 Chronicles 34:31

ויעמד המלך על־עמדו ויכרת את־הברית לפני יהוה
ללכת אחרי יהוה ולשמור את־מצותיו ועדותיו וחקיו בכל־לבבו
ובכל־נפשו לעשות את־דברי הברית הכתובים על־הספר הזה

Comment: Parallel to 2 Kings 23.3.

2. הקים ברית

Genesis 6:18

ואני הנני מביא את־המבול מים על־הארץ
לשחת כל־בשר אשר־בו רוח חיים מתחת השמים
כל אשר־בארץ יגוע
והקמתי את־בריתי אתך
ובאת אל־התבה אתה ובניך ואשתך ונשי־בניך אתך

Comment: A reference to the covenant with Noah.

Genesis 9:9

ואני הנני מקים את־בריתי אתכם ואת־זרעכם אחריכם

Comment: A reference to the covenant with Noah.

Genesis 9:11

והקמתי את־בריתי אתכם
ולא־יכרת כל־בשר עוד ממי המבול
ולא־יהיה עוד מבול לשחת הארץ

Comment: A reference to the covenant with Noah.

Genesis 9.17**

ויאמר אלהים אל־נח
זאת אות־הברית אשר הקמתי ביני ובין כל־בשר אשר על־הארץ

Comment: The bow in the clouds is the sign of the covenant between God and every living being.

Genesis 17:7

והפרתי אתך במאד מאד ונתתיך לגוים
ומלכים ממך יצאו
והקמתי את־בריתי ביני ובינך ובין זרעך אחריך לדרתם
לברית עולם להיות לך לאלהים ולזרעך אחריך

Comment: A reference to the covenant with Abraham.

Genesis 17:19

ויאמר אלהים אבל שׂרה אשׁתך ילדת לך בן וקראת את־שׁמו
יצחק והקמתי את־בריתי אתו לברית עולם לזרעו אחריו

Comment: A reference to the covenant with Abraham.

Genesis 17:21

ולישׁמעאל שׁמעתיך הנה ברכתי אתו והפריתי אתו
והרביתי אתו במאד מאד שׁנים־עשׂר נשׂיאם יוליד ונתתיו לגוי גדול
ואת־בריתי אקים את־יצחק
אשׁר תלד לך שׂרה למועד הזה בשׁנה האחרת

Comment: A reference to the covenant with Abraham.

Exodus 6:4

וארא אל־אברהם אל־יצחק ואל־יעקב באל שׁדי
ושׁמי יהוה לא נודעתי להם
וגם הקמתי את־בריתי אתם לתת להם את־ארץ כנען
את ארץ מגריהם אשׁר־גרו בה

Comment: Is this a case where הקים ברית means “to establish” or “to institute” rather than “to affirm”? Not necessarily so, for Yahweh says he has affirmed the covenant to give the land to them. So once again, to confirm or establish a covenant is not to make a relationship formal by means of an oath or vow but to affirm the validity of a commitment. In the narrative, the covenant was not made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but was made with Abraham and then affirmed to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob. Williamson’s critique (in *JESOT* 2, no. 2 [2013]: 215–52) is invalid.

Leviticus 26:9

ופניתי אליכם והפריתי אתכם והרביתי אתכם
והקימתי את־בריתי אתכם

Comment: This is a section promising blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. If they obey, Yahweh will "keep" his covenant with them, that is, bring the blessings he promised.

Deuteronomy 8:18

וזכרת את־יהוה אלהיך כי הוא הנתן לך כח לעשות חיל
למען הקים את־בריתו אשר־נשבע לאבתיך כיום הזה

Comment: To remember Yahweh is to love him by obeying the covenant stipulations. When they do this, Yahweh will bring the blessings he promised (i.e., wealth) and thus "establish" or "keep" his covenant.

2 Kings 23:3

ויעמד המלך על־העמוד ויכרת את־הברית לפני יהוה ללכת
אחר יהוה ולשמר מצותיו ואת־עדותיו ואת־חקתיו בכל־לב
ובכל־נפש להקים את־דברי הברית הזאת הכתבים על־הספר הזה
ויעמד כל־העם בברית

Comment: Here Josiah concludes a covenant to follow the Lord and keep his commands. Thus he will "fulfill" or "keep" the "words" (i.e., terms) of the covenant.

Jeremiah 34:18

ונתתי את־האנשים העברים את־ברתי
אשר לא־הקימו את־דברי הברית אשר כרתו לפני
העגל אשר כרתו לשנים ויעברו בין בתריו

Comment: The expression "to establish the words of the covenant" refers to fulfilling the obligations of the covenant made ("cut") previously in 34.8.

Ezekiel 16:60
Ezekiel 16:62

וזכרתי אני את־בריתי אותך

בימי נעוריך והקמותי לך ברית עולם
וזכרת את־דרכיך ונכלמת בקחתך את־אחותיך הגדלות
ממך אל־הקטנות ממך ונתתי אתהן לך לבנות ולא מבריתך
והקימותי אני את־בריתי אתך וידעת כי־אני יהוה

Comment: God will deal with Jerusalem as she deserves. Nonetheless, he will remember his covenant with her and affirm a permanent covenant with her. Yahweh is saying to Israel that both Samaria and Sodom will be given to Jerusalem as daughters, not on the basis of the Mosaic covenant but rather on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant. "Being given as daughters" means that the neighboring nations (Samaritans and Sodomites) are now *family*. God will uphold his promises to Abraham that through him the nations will be blessed even though the nations were not blessed through the Mosaic covenant, since Israel as a nation failed to be a light to the nations.

3. הגביר בברית

Daniel 9:27

והגביר ברית לרבים שׁבוע אחד
וחצי השׁבוע ישׁבית זבח ומנחה
ועל כנף שׁקוצים משׁמם
ועד־כלה ונחרצה תתך על־שׁמם

Comment: Interpretation of this verse is hotly debated and disputed. A central issue is identification of the subject of the verb. Williamson has argued in his study *Sealed with an Oath* that Daniel 9.26 and 27 follow an identical pattern in which the first half of the verse speaks of the coming king and the second speaks of the destroyer. According to this approach, it is the Messiah who will make a strong covenant with the many and bring an end to sacrifice. The expression is unique.

4. נתן ברית

Genesis 9.12
Genesis 17:2

ואתנה בריתי ביני וביניך[17.2]
וארבה אותך במאד מאד

Comment: God commands Abram, "Walk before me and be perfect, so that I may give/grant my covenant between me and you and multiply you" (Gen. 17.1–2). The only occurrences of this collocation are found in contexts that employ the expression הקים ברית. The verb נתן is higher up the hierarchy and functions as a stylistic substitute for הקים.

Numbers 25:12

לכן אמר הנני נתן לו את־בריתי שׁלום

5. צִוָּה ברית

Joshua 7.11
Joshua 23.16
Judges 2.20
Psalm 111:9

פדות שׁלח לעמו צוה־לעולם בריתו[111.9]
קדוֹשׁ ונורא שׁמו

Comment: God's provision of redemption for his people is equivalent to appointing or commanding his covenant forever. This is likely the Abrahamic covenant.

6. הגד ברית

Deuteronomy 4:13

ויגד לכם את־בריתו אשׁר צוה אתכם לעשׂות עשׂרת הדברים
ויכתבם על־שׁני לחות אבנים

Comment: Moses recounts how at Sinai, "God declared his covenant to you, that is, the Ten Words." This refers to the Mosaic covenant.

7. שׂים ברית

2 Samuel 23:5

כי־לא־כן ביתי עם־אל
כי ברית עולם שׂם לי ערוכה בכל ושׁמרה
כי־כל־ישׁעי וכל־חפץ כי־לא יצמיח

Comment: David says, "Yahweh placed/set a covenant for me [or with me]." The expression is perhaps equivalent to נתן ברית. Note also that the text implies the expressions ערך ברית and שׁמר ברית (see point 14 below). The expressions נתן ברית and ערך ברית indicate instituting a covenant while שׁמר ברית indicates fulfilling it.

Jeremiah 33:25

כה אמר יהוה אם־לא בריתי יומם ולילה

חקות שמים וארץ לא־שמתי

Comment: If God has not ordained his covenant with creation, then he will reject the descendants of Abraham and not have one of them rule over Abraham's descendants.

8. העמיד ברית

Psalm 105:10

זכר לעולם בריתו
דבר צוה לאלף דור
אשר כרת את־אברהם
ושבועתו לישחק
ויעמידה ליעקב לחק
לישראל ברית עולם

Comment: The context clearly identifies the covenant as the covenant with Abraham. This covenant is a "word" to a thousand generations and also an "oath" to Isaac. It was caused to stand as a "statute" for Jacob and an "everlasting covenant" for Israel. The third-person feminine singular suffix on ויעמידה has ברית as referent. The covenant with Abraham was confirmed to Jacob. Thus this expression is similar to הקים ברית.

1 Chronicles 16:17

ויעמידה ליעקב לחק לישראל ברית עולם

Comment: David moves the ark to Jerusalem, sets up the tent there, and appoints and arranges men to lead the worship. Then there is a psalm of thanksgiving in which the people are called to remember the everlasting covenant, "the word directed to a thousand generations" (1 Chron. 16.15). The next verse identifies this as the Abrahamic covenant, and the language is reminiscent of Psalm 105.10. First Chronicles 16.17 explains that Yahweh caused the oath to stand either as a statute for Jacob or as an everlasting covenant for Israel.

9. עמד בברית

2 Kings 23:3

ויעמד המלך על־העמוד ויכרת את־הברית לפני יהוה ללכת
אחר יהוה ולשמר מצותיו ואת־עדותיו ואת־חקתיו בכל־לב
ובכל־נפש להקים את־דברי הברית הזאת הכתבים על־הספר הזה
ויעמד כל־העם בברית

Comment: Josiah makes a covenant to keep the Sinai-Deuteronomic covenant (cf. 2 Kings 22.8).

2 Chronicles 34:32

ויעמד את כל־הנמצא בירושלם ובנימן
ויעשׂו יושבי ירושלם כברית אלהים אלהי אבותיהם

Comment: The noun phrase "covenant of God" is a clear reference to the Sinai covenant. Josiah, the king, is bringing his people back to the covenant stipulations and back to the God worshiped by their forefathers.

10. בוא בברית

1 Samuel 20:8

ועשׂית חסד על־עבדך כי בברית יהוה הבאת את־עבדך עמך
ואם־יש־בי עון המיתני אתה ועד־אביך למה־זה תביאני

Comment: Jonathan brought David into a "covenant of Yahweh" with him. Probably the thought is that the covenant between David and Jonathan was an oath sworn before the Lord. This is clear in 1 Samuel 23.18, though not in 18.3.

Jeremiah 34:10

וישׁמעו כל־השׂרים וכל־העם אשׁר־באו בברית
לשׁלח איׁש את־עבדו ואיׁש את־שׁפחתו חפשׁים
לבלתי עבד־בם עוד וישׁמעו וישׁלחו

Comment: This instance proves that the expression בוא בברית is equivalent to the expression כרת ברית; cf. Jeremiah 34.8 and 34.10.

Ezekiel 16:8

ואעבר עליך ואראך והנה עתך עת דדים
ואפרשׂ כנפי עליך ואכסה ערותך
ואשׁבע לך ואבוא בברית אתך נאם אדני יהוה ותהיי לי

Comment: The note in the *NIV Study Bible* is as follows: "*spread the corner of my garment*. Symbolic of entering a marriage relationship (see notes on Deut. 22.30; Ruth 3.9). Since the maiden symbolizes Jerusalem, this does not refer to the Sinai covenant but to marriage as a covenant (see Mal. 2.14)." This explanation discards the baby with the bathwater. In

Ezekiel 16.8, the maiden symbolizes the people of God, and the covenant of marriage symbolizes the Sinai covenant. In fact, Exodus 24 pictures the covenant between Yahweh and his people as a marriage covenant/relationship.

Ezekiel 20:37

והעברתי אתכם תחת השׁבט
והבאתי אתכם במסרת הברית

Comment: In a kind of new exodus, Yahweh will collect the exiles, bring them into the desert of the nations, judge them, and bring them into the bond of the covenant. In the context of Ezekiel, this must refer to the new covenant, which in some senses is a renewal of the broken Mosaic covenant.

2 Chronicles 15:12

ויבאו בברית לדרושׁ את־יהוה אלהי אבותיהם
בכל־לבבם ובכל־נפשׁם

Comment: Judah's reform under Asa entailed assembling the people and offering sacrifices. Then they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord. This is a renewal of commitment to follow Yahweh, similar to the one at the end of Joshua.

2 Chronicles 23:1

ובשׁנה השׁבעית התחזק יהוידע ויקח את־שׂרי המאות
לעזריהו בן־ירחם ולישׁמעאל בן־יהוחנן ולעזריהו בן־עובד
ואת־מעשׂיהו בן־עדיהו ואת־אלישׁפט בן־זכרי עמו בברית

Comment: Cf. 2 Chronicles 23.3. The wording here is likely an abbreviated form of the expression בוא בברית (i.e., with the verb בוא omitted).

11. עבד בברית

Deuteronomy 29:11

לעברך בברית יהוה אלהיך ובאלתו
אשׁר יהוה אלהיך כרת עמך היום

Comment: Those hearing Moses's *tôrâ* are entering into the covenant, that is, the agreement between God and Israel defined by the book of Deuteronomy through speech acts, as in a wedding.

12. זכר ברית

Genesis 9:15

וזכרתי את־בריתי אשׁר ביני וביניכם ובין כל־נפשׁ חיה בכל־בשׂר
ולא־יהיה עוד המים למבול לשׁחת כל־בשׂר

Comment: When God sees the bow, he will “remember” his covenant with all living things.

Genesis 9:16

והיתה הקשׁת בענן וראיתיה לזכר ברית עולם
בין אלהים ובין כל־נפשׁ חיה בכל־בשׂר אשׁר על־הארץ

Comment: When God sees the bow, he will “remember” his covenant with all living things.

Exodus 2:24

וישׁמע אלהים את־נאקתם
ויזכר אלהים את־בריתו את־אברהם את־יצחק ואת־יעקב

Comment: God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and acted to deliver his people from oppression in Egypt.

Exodus 6:5

וגם אני שׁמעתי את־נאקת בני ישׂראל אשׁר מצרים מעבדים אתם
ואזכר את־בריתי

Comment: God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and acted to deliver his people from oppression in Egypt.

Leviticus 26:42
Leviticus 26:42
Leviticus 26:42

וזכרתי את־בריתי יעקוב
ואף את־בריתי יצחק ואף את־בריתי אברהם אזכר והארץ אזכר

Comment: If the exiled people confess their sins, God will remember his covenant with them, that is, he will act upon his commitments.

Leviticus 26:45

וזכרתי להם ברית ראשנים אשר הוצאתי־אתם מארץ מצרים
לעיני הגוים להית להם לאלהים אני יהוה

Comment: If Israel is disobedient, they will be duly punished. Yet they will not be completely destroyed. The bound phrase “covenant of former persons” (i.e., ancestors) clearly refers to the Abrahamic covenant, as Leviticus 26.42 shows. Yahweh will not completely destroy his disobedient people, because of his commitment to those he brought out of Egypt on the basis of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Ezekiel 16:60

וזכרתי אני את־בריתי אותך
בימי נעוריך והקמותי לך ברית עולם

Comment: God will deal with Jerusalem as she deserves. Nonetheless, he will remember his covenant with her and “establish” or “affirm” a permanent covenant with her.

Amos 1:9

כה אמר יהוה על־שלשה פשעי־צר ועל־ארבעה לא אשיבנו
על־הסגירם גלות שלמה לאדום ולא זכרו ברית אחים

Comment: The Phoenicians and Israelites had good international relations in the time of King David. They concluded an international treaty in the time of King Solomon and also King Ahab (1 Kings 5.15, 26; 16.30–31). Amos denounces actions that disregarded this “treaty of brotherhood.”

Psalm 105:8
Psalm 105:10

זכר לעולם בריתו
דבר צוה לאלף דור
אשר כרת את־אברהם
ושבועתו לישחק
ויעמידה ליעקב לחק
לישראל ברית עולם

Comment: The context clearly identifies the covenant as the covenant with Abraham. This covenant is a “word” to a thousand generations and also an “oath” to Isaac. It was caused to stand as a

"statute" for Jacob and an "everlasting covenant" for Israel.

Psalm 106:45

ויזכר להם בריתו
*חסדיו וינחם כרב חסדו

Comment: The context refers to the fact that Yahweh handed his people to foreign nations to be subjugated by them as punishment for persistent rebellion. Nonetheless, many times he delivered them because he "remembered his covenant." The covenant is otherwise unspecified; one might argue for the Abrahamic or Mosaic covenant, although the former is probable. Psalm 111.9 also connects the redemption of Yahweh's people with establishing his covenant forever.

Psalm 111:5

טרף נתן ליראיו
יזכר לעולם בריתו

Comment: God's provision of food to those who fear him is attributed to his fulfilling his covenant obligations. Is this the covenant with creation or with Abraham? It seems similar to Psalm 105.8, which speaks of the covenant with Abraham.

1 Chronicles 16:15

זכרו לעולם בריתו דבר צוה לאלף דור
אשׁר כרת את־אברהם ושׁבועתו ליצחק

Comment: David moves the ark to Jerusalem, sets up the tent there, and appoints and arranges men to lead the worship. Then there is a psalm of thanksgiving in which the people are called to remember the everlasting covenant, "the word directed to a thousand generations" (1 Chron. 16.15). The next verse identifies this as the Abrahamic covenant, and the language is reminiscent of Psalm 105.10.

13. נבט לברית

Psalm 74:20

הבט לברית
כי מלאו מחשׁכי־ארץ נאות חמס

Comment: The author appeals to God as his king and asks him to bring deliverance because of his covenant. This is probably an appeal to the Mosaic covenant and also to the Abrahamic covenant, which stands behind it.

14. שׁמר ברית

Genesis 17:9

ויאמר אלהים אל־אברהם ואתה את־בריתי תשׁמר
אתה וזרעך אחריך לדרתם

Comment: Abraham is commanded to observe the covenant, both he and his descendants.

Genesis 17:10

זאת בריתי אשׁר תשׁמרו ביני וביניכם ובין זרעך אחריך
המול לכם כל־זכר

Comment: Abraham is commanded to observe the covenant, both he and his descendants.

Exodus 19:5

ועתה אם־שׁמוע תשׁמעו בקלי ושׁמרתם את־בריתי
והייתם לי סגלה מכל־העמים כי־לי כל־הארץ

Comment: This sentence is conditional, and the apodosis refers to “keeping” the Sinai covenant.

Deuteronomy 7:9

וידעת כי־יהוה אלהיך הוא האלהים האל הנאמן
*מצותיו לאלף דור שׁמר הברית והחסד לאהביו ולשׁמרי מצותו

Comment: Moses refers to God keeping his covenant. This is both a general statement and a reference to the book of Deuteronomy since Moses refers to commands “that he is giving today.”

Deuteronomy 7:12

והיה עקב תשׁמעון את המשׁפטים האלה ושׁמרתם ועשׂיתם אתם
ושׁמר יהוה אלהיך לך את־הברית ואת־החסד אשׁר נשׁבע לאבתיך

Comment: Moses refers to God keeping his covenant. This is conditioned upon the people hearing the Judgments and keeping and practicing them.

1 Kings 8:23

ויאמר יהוה אלהי ישׂראל
אין־כמוך אלהים בשׁמים ממעל ועל־הארץ מתחת
שׁמר הברית והחסד לעבדיך ההלכים לפניך בכל־לבם

Comment: This is another reference to the Sinai covenant or even the Abrahamic covenant behind it.

2 Chronicles 6:14

ויאמר יהוה אלהי ישׂראל אין־כמוך אלהים בשׁמים ובארץ
שׁמר הברית והחסד לעבדיך ההלכים לפניך בכל־לבם

Comment: Solomon opens his prayer of dedication by acknowledging the God of Israel as the "one who keeps covenant and חסד to those who walk before him in complete commitment." This pattern of prayer is followed by Daniel (Dan. 9.4) and also Nehemiah (Neh. 1.5; 9.32).

1 Kings 11:11

ויאמר יהוה לשׁלמה יען אשׁר היתה־זאת עמך
ולא שׁמרת בריתי וחקתי אשׁר צויתי עליך
קרע אקרע את־הממלכה מעליך ונתתיה לעבדך

Comment: God announces to Solomon that the kingdom will be torn from him because he did not keep the covenant of the Lord, further specified in terms of the decrees commanded him.

Ezekiel 17:14

להיות ממלכה שׁפלה לבלתי התנשׂא
לשׁמר את־בריתו לעמדה

Comment: The king of Babylon defeated Judah and forced her royal offspring into a treaty to maintain loyalty to himself. This passage explains that the purpose of the treaty is to keep the kingdom of Judah as an ineffective power able to survive only in dependence upon Babylon (cf. Ezek. 17.13, 15, 16, 18).

Psalm 78:10

לא שׁמרו ברית אלהים
ובתורתו מאנו ללכת

Comment: The noun phrase “covenant of God” (Ps. 78.10a) is a clear reference to the Sinai covenant, as the parallel line (78.10b) shows.

Psalm 103:18

לשׁמרי בריתו
ולזכרי פקדיו לעשׂותם

Comment: The חסד and צדקה of Yahweh (Ps. 103.17) are for those who keep his covenant and remember to practice his statutes. This no doubt refers to the Mosaic covenant.

Psalm 132:12

אם־ישׁמרו בניך בריתי ועדתי זו אלמדם
גם־בניהם עדי־עד ישׁבו לכסא־לך

Comment: The context is referring to the covenant with David. David’s descendants will sit on his throne if they keep the covenant. Parallel to “my covenant” is “my testimonies that I teach them.” Could this refer to the Mosaic covenant in the manner of Deuteronomy 17—that is, if they keep the Mosaic covenant, God will maintain them on the throne?

Daniel 9:4

ואתפללה ליהוה אלהי ואתודה
ואמרה אנא אדני האל הגדול והנורא
שׁמר הברית והחסד לאהביו ולשׁמרי מצותיו

Comment: Daniel is beginning his famous prayer asking the Lord to bring the exile to an end. After addressing God, his first acknowledgement of the character of God is as one keeping “covenant and *ḥesed*” (cf. Neh. 1.5).

Nehemiah 1:5

ואמר אנא יהוה אלהי השׁמים האל הגדול והנורא
שׁמר הברית וחסד לאהביו ולשׁמרי מצותיו

Comment: Nehemiah is beginning his famous prayer beseeching the Lord concerning the *physical* state of Jerusalem. After addressing God, his first acknowledgement of the character of God is as one keeping "covenant and *ḥesed*." This pattern is identical to Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9.4.

Nehemiah 9:32

ועתה אלהינו האל הגדול הגבור והנורא
שׁומר הברית והחסד
אל־ימעט לפניך את כל־התלאה
אשׁר־מצאתנו למלכינו לשׂרינו ולכהנינו
ולנביאנו ולאבתינו ולכל־עמך

Comment: Nehemiah is beginning his famous prayer beseeching the Lord concerning the *spiritual* state of Jerusalem. After addressing God, his first acknowledgement of the character of God is as one keeping "covenant and *ḥesed*." This pattern is identical to Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9.4.

15. נצר ברית

Deuteronomy 33:9

האמר לאביו ולאמו לא ראיתיו ואת־אחיו לא הכיר
*בניו לא ידע ואת־בנו
כי שׁמרו אמרתך ובריתך ינצרו

Comment: The Levites guarded the word of God and protected his covenant. This may refer to the fact that they were in charge of caring for and protecting the tabernacle where the covenant was kept. Therefore "covenant" refers to the Mosaic covenant.

Psalm 25:10

כל־ארחות יהוה חסד ואמת
לנצרי בריתו ועדתיו

Comment: The Lord is characterized by חסד and אמת, covenantal terms showing faithfulness and loyalty in the relationship. Those who keep his covenant and warnings are the ones experiencing his faithfulness and loyal love.

16. נאמן בברית

Psalm 78:37

ולבם לא־נכון עמו
ולא נאמנו בבריתו

Comment: Asaph notes how frequently the people have not been faithful and loyal to the covenant. This must refer to the Mosaic covenant.

17. החזיק בברית

Isaiah 56:4

כי־כה אמר יהוה לסריסים אשר ישמרו את־שבתותי
ובחרו באשר חפצתי ומחזיקים בבריתי

Comment: Isaiah's vision depicts a future time in which foreigners are joined to the Lord. They are Sabbath keepers and are firmly grasping and laying hold of the covenant, unlike those originally born into the covenant community, who were covenant breakers and Sabbath breakers.

Isaiah 56:6

ובני הנכר הנלוים על־יהוה
לשרתו ולאהבה את־שם יהוה להיות לו לעבדים
כל־שמר שבת מחללו ומחזיקים בבריתי

Comment: Isaiah's vision depicts a future time in which foreigners are joined to the Lord. They are Sabbath keepers and are firmly grasping and laying hold of the covenant, unlike those originally born into the covenant community, who were covenant breakers and Sabbath breakers.

18. עזב ברית

Deuteronomy 29:24

ואמרו על אשר עזבו את־ברית יהוה אלהי אבתם
אשר כרת עמם בהוציאו אתם מארץ מצרים

Comment: The book of Deuteronomy is "this book of the Torah" (Deut. 29.20), which constitutes the covenant made between God and Israel when he brought them out of Egypt (29.24).

1 Kings 19:10
1 Kings 19:14

ויאמר קנא קנאתי ליהוה אלהי צבאות
כי־עזבו בריתך בני ישׂראל את־מזבחתיך הרסו
ואת־נביאיך הרגו בחרב
ואותר אני לבדי ויבקשׁו את־נפשׁי לקחתה

ויאמר קנא קנאתי ליהוה אלהי צבאות
כי־עזבו בריתך בני ישׂראל את־מזבחתיך הרסו
ואת־נביאיך הרגו בחרב
ואותר אני לבדי ויבקשׁו את־נפשׁי לקחתה

Comment: Elijah complains that the sons of Israel have abandoned and forsaken "your covenant," that is, the Mosaic covenant.

Jeremiah 22:9

ואמרו על אשׁר עזבו את־ברית יהוה אלהיהם
וישׁתחוו לאלהים אחרים ויעבדום

Comment: Many nations will observe the destruction of Jerusalem and note that the reason was that the people had abandoned the covenant with Yahweh.

Daniel 11:30 (cf. Dan. 11.28, 30, 32 below at points 28 and 30)

ובאו בו ציים כתים ונכאה ושׁב וזעם על־ברית־קודשׁ ועשׂה
ושׁב ויבן על־עזבי ברית קדשׁ

19. הפר ברית

Genesis 17:14

וערל זכר אשׁר לא־ימול את־בשׂר ערלתו
ונכרתה הנפשׁ ההוא מעמיה את־בריתי הפר

Comment: The person who is uncircumcised will be cut off from his people because he has violated the covenant with God.

Leviticus 26:15

ואם־בחקתי תמאסו ואם את־משפטי תגעל נפשכם
לבלתי עשות את־כל־מצותי להפרכם את־בריתי

Comment: The person who does not observe and practice the commands, who refuses the statutes, and who abhors the Judgments by not practicing the commands thus violates the covenant with God (Mosaic covenant).

Leviticus 26:44

ואף־גם־זאת בהיותם בארץ איביהם
לא־מאסתים ולא־געלתים לכלתם להפר בריתי אתם
כי אני יהוה אלהיהם

Comment: When the people of Israel experience exile as a curse for violating the Mosaic covenant, God will not bring them to an end in the land of their enemies, which would violate his covenant with them. This reference is to the Abrahamic covenant (see Lev. 26.42).

Deuteronomy 31:16

ויאמר יהוה אל־משה הנך שכב עם־אבתיך
וקם העם הזה וזנה אחרי אלהי נכר־הארץ אשר הוא בא־שמה בקרבו
ועזבני והפר את־בריתי אשר כרתי אתו

Comment: Israel will fornicate after the foreign gods of the land and forsake Yahweh and so violate his covenant.

Deuteronomy 31:20

כי־אביאנו אל־האדמה אשר־נשבעתי לאבתיו
זבת חלב ודבש ואכל ושבע ודשן
ופנה אל־אלהים אחרים ועבדום ונאצוני והפר את־בריתי

Comment: Israel will enjoy a good life and turn to worship other gods and spurn Yahweh and so violate his covenant.

Judges 2:1

ויעל מלאך־יהוה מן־הגלגל אל־הבכים ויאמר
אעלה אתכם ממצרים ואביא אתכם אל־הארץ

אשׁר נשׁבעתי לאבתיכם ואמר לא־אפר בריתי אתכם לעולם

Comment: Yahweh brought Israel to the land that he swore to give to their fathers. Yahweh said he would never break his covenant with them. This must be a reference to the Abrahamic covenant.

1 Kings 15:19

ברית ביני ובינך בין אבי ובין אביך
הנה שׁלחתי לך שׁחד כסף וזהב לך
הפרה את־בריתך את־בעשׁא מלך־ישׂראל ויעלה מעלי

Comment: Asa, king of Judah, empties the temple treasuries to bribe Ben-Hadad, son of Tabrimmon, son of Hezion, king of Aram, ruling in Damascus, and induce him to make a treaty between the two of them and break his treaty with Baasha, king of Israel. As part of this treaty Asa is asking Ben-Hadad to commence aggression against Baasha so that Baasha will cease his hostilities against Asa and Judah.

Isaiah 24:5

והארץ חנפה תחת יׁשביה
כי־עברו תורת חלפו חק הפרו ברית עולם

Comment: Destruction is promised for the entire earth because its inhabitants have “violated the eternal covenant.” This is not a reference to the law of Moses, which is never called an everlasting covenant. Instead, it is a reference to the covenant made with Noah, which in reality confirmed and reestablished the original covenant between God and his creation.

Isaiah 33:8

נשׁמו מסלות שׁבת עבר ארח
הפר ברית מאס ערים לא חשׁב אנושׁ

Comment: Zion will be delivered but the peoples punished. Some of the historical references are obscure. Apparently, the attack of the Assyrians affects even most of Judah as well as other nations. The broken treaty may refer to the large sums paid by King Hezekiah to keep the Assyrians away. Now “he violated the treaty.” See 2 Kings 18.13–16.

Jeremiah 11:10

שׁבו על־עונת אבותם הראשׁנים אשׁר מאנו לשׁמוע את־דברי

והמה הלכו אחרי אלהים אחרים לעבדם
הפרו בית־ישׂראל ובית יהודה את־בריתי אשׁר כרתי את־אבותם

Comment: A clear reference to the covenant made at Sinai, which the house of Israel and the house of Judah have violated (cf. Jer. 11.3–4).

Jeremiah 14:21

אל־תנאץ למען שׁמך אל־תנבל כסא כבודך
זכר אל־תפר בריתך אתנו

Comment: A back reference to the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; see Leviticus 26.40–45.

Jeremiah 31:32

לא כברית אשׁר כרתי את־אבותם ביום
החזיקי בידם להוציאם מארץ מצרים
אשׁר־המה הפרו את־בריתי
ואנכי בעלתי בם נאם־יהוה

Comment: A back reference to the covenant made at Sinai.

Jeremiah 33:20

כה אמר יהוה אם־תפרו את־בריתי היום ואת־בריתי הלילה
ולבלתי היות יומם־ולילה בעתם

Comment: A comparison is made between the inviolability of the covenant with day and night (i.e., the covenant with creation) and the covenant with David and the Levites; see Jeremiah 33.21, 25.

Ezekiel 16:59

*ועשׂיתי אותך כאשׁר עשׂית כי כה אמר אדני יהוה ועשׂית
אשׁר־בזית אלה להפר ברית

Comment: According to the context (see Ezek. 16.8 and 16.60), the covenant is probably the covenant made at Sinai (see Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 167–68).

Ezekiel 17:15
Ezekiel 17:16
Ezekiel 17:18
Ezekiel 17:19

וימרד־בו לשלח מלאכיו מצרים לתת־לו סוסים ועם־רב
היצלח הימלט העשׂה אלה והפר ברית ונמלט

חי־אני נאם אדני יהוה אם־לא במקום המלך הממליך
אתו אשׁר בזה את־אלתו ואשׁר הפר את־בריתו
אתו בתוך־בבל ימות

ובזה אלה להפר ברית
והנה נתן ידו וכל־אלה עשׂה לא ימלט

לכן כה־אמר אדני יהוה חי־אני
אם־לא אלתי אשׁר בזה ובריתי אשׁר הפיר
ונתתיו בראשׁו

Comment: See Ezekiel 17.14. If the king of Judah as a vassal of the king of Babylon breaks the treaty by appealing to Egypt, he will not be successful but will die in Babylon.

Ezekiel 44:7

בהביאכם בני־נכר ערלי־לב וערלי בשׂר
להיות במקדשׁי לחללו את־ביתי
בהקריבכם את־לחמי חלב ודם
ויפרו את־בריתי אל כל־תועבותיכם

Comment: The rebellious house of Israel brought foreigners into the sanctuary and so broke the covenant. This is a clear reference to the Mosaic covenant.

Zechariah 11:10

ואקח את־מקלי את־נעם ואגדע אתו
להפיר את־בריתי אשׁר כרתי את־כל־העמים

Comment: The passage is difficult to interpret. The covenant in the symbolic drama probably represents the Mosaic covenant. The phrase “with all the peoples” refers to the scattered exiles of Israel and Judah. A covenant between God and pagan nations is unknown in the Old Testament.

2 Chronicles 16:3

בריתּ ביני ובינך ובין אבי ובין אביך
הנה שׁלחתי לך כסף וזהב לך
הפר בריתך את־בעשׁא מלך ישׂראל ויעלה מעלי

Comment: Baasha, king of Israel, fortifies Ramah so that he may prevent people from entering or exiting Judah. Asa, king of Judah, pays the king of Syria to attack Israel so that Baasha may abandon his fortifications against Judah. This would result in the king of Syria breaking his coalition treaty with Israel.

20. שׁכח בריתּ

Deuteronomy 4:23

השׁמרו לכם פן־תּשׁכחו את־בריתּ יהוה אלהיכם אשׁר כרת עמכם
ועשׂיתם לכם פסל תמונת כל אשׁר צוך יהוה אלהיך

Comment: A reference to forgetting the covenant, namely, the Mosaic covenant, and in particular to the command concerning idol making.

Deuteronomy 4:31

כי אל רחום יהוה אלהיך לא ירפך ולא ישׁחיתך
ולא ישׁכח את־בריתּ אבתיך אשׁר נשׁבע להם

Comment: Yahweh will not forget his covenant made to the fathers, that is, the Abrahamic covenant.

2 Kings 17.38
Jeremiah 50:5

ציון ישׁאלו דרך הנה פניהם
באו ונלוו אל־יהוה בריתּ עולם לא תשׁכח

Comment: The sons of Israel and the sons of Judah together will seek the Lord and ask the way to Zion. They will say, “Come, that we may be joined to Yahweh in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten.” This is another reference to the new covenant.

Proverbs 2:17

העזבת אלוף נעוריה

ואת־ברית אלהיה שׁכחה

Comment: The noun phrase “covenant of her God” is a clear reference to the marriage vows made before God. Another interpretation is possible. In abandoning her marriage vows, she is committing adultery and thus violating the Sinai covenant.

21. חלל ברית

Malachi 2:10

הלוא אב אחד לכלנו הלוא אל אחד בראנו
מדוע נבגד איׁש באחיו לחלל ברית אבתינו

Comment: Malachi denounces divorce as a violation of the covenant of their fathers. This is probably a reference to the Mosaic covenant, which is an extension of the Abrahamic covenant. See E. Ray Clendenen, *Malachi*, in *Haggai, Malachi*, by Richard A. Taylor and E. Ray Clendenen, NAC 21A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 327–28.

Psalm 55:21

שׁלח ידיו בשׁלמיו חלל בריתו

Comment: In Psalm 55.14–15, David complains of betrayal by a close friend with whom he enjoyed participation in divine worship. Verse 21 states that this companion has attacked his friends and profaned his covenant. Presumably, the third-person masculine singular pronoun refers to the friend (and not, e.g., to God). The covenant, then, would be the basis of their close friendship.

Psalm 89:35

לא־אחלל בריתי
ומוצא שׂפתי לא אשׁנה

Comment: God promises he will not profane his covenant or alter what he has spoken. This refers to the covenant with David.

22. שׁחת ברית

Malachi 2:8

ואתם סרתם מן־הדרך הכשׁלתם רבים בתורה
שׁחתם ברית הלוי אמר יהוה צבאות

Comment: The expression “covenant of Levi” described in Malachi 2.4–9 refers to the setting apart of the Levites for special service to God as a result of their commitment to Yahweh expressed during the incident of the golden calf (Ex. 32.27–29; Num. 8.5–26).

23. גאל ברית

Nehemiah 13:29

זכרה להם אלהי
על גאלי הכהנה וברית הכהנה והלוים

Comment: Nehemiah appeals to God because those who were priests in his time used their connections, power, and position for their own gain and interests and thus violated (“defiled”) the covenant of the priesthood.

24. נאר ברית

Psalm 89:40

נארתה ברית עבדך
חללת לארץ נזרו

Comment: Ethan the Ezrahite in his great psalm on the Davidic covenant complains that Yahweh has renounced (“repudiated,” “spurned”) the covenant with David.

25. עבר ברית

Deuteronomy 17:2

כי־ימצא בקרבך באחד שׁעריך אשׁר־יהוה אלהיך נתן לך
אישׁ או־אשׁה אשׁר יעשׂה את־הרע בעיני יהוה־אלהיך לעבר בריתו

Comment: The text speaks of a person who does what is evil in the eyes of Yahweh “so as to transgress his covenant.” This refers to the Mosaic covenant, in either Sinaitic or Deuteronomic form.

Joshua 7:11

חטא ישׂראל וגם עברו את־בריתי אשׁר צויתי אותם
וגם לקחו מן־החרם וגם גנבו וגם כחשׁו וגם שׂמו בכליהם

Comment: Achan’s taking of the devoted things constituted a disobedience resulting in the charge that “Israel has sinned and transgressed my covenant.” According to Leviticus 27.28–29 and

Deuteronomy 20.16–18, the inhabitants of Canaan were to be devoted to destruction. Therefore Achan's disobedience constituted a violation of the Mosaic covenant.

Joshua 7:15

והיה הנלכד בחרם ישׂרף באשׁ אתו ואת־כל־אשׁר־לו
כי עבר את־ברית יהוה וכי־עשׂה נבלה בישׂראל

Comment: The person caught in possession of devoted things has transgressed the covenant of Yahweh.

Joshua 23:16

בעברכם את־ברית יהוה אלהיכם אשׁר צוה אתכם
והלכתם ועבדתם אלהים אחרים והשׁתחויתם להם
וחרה אף־יהוה בכם ואבדתם מהרה מעל הארץ הטובה אשׁר נתן לכם

Comment: Serving and worshiping other gods constitutes transgression of the Mosaic covenant.

Judges 2:20

ויחר־אף יהוה בישׂראל
ויאמר יען אשׁר עברו הגוי הזה את־בריתי
אשׁר צויתי את־אבותם ולא שׁמעו לקולי

Comment: The idolatry of Israel constituted violation of the Mosaic covenant.

2 Kings 18:12

על אשׁר לא־שׁמעו בקול יהוה אלהיהם
ויעברו את־בריתו את כל־אשׁר צוה משׁה עבד יהוה
ולא שׁמעו ולא עשׂו

Comment: This is another reference parallel to 2 Kings 17.15, where following mention of the last king of Israel comes the description of the conquest by the Assyrians and a summary of the reasons why this happened: they refused the statutes and covenant of the Lord. Here in 2 Kings 18.12, the expression is "they transgressed his covenant," and in apposition to this is "all that Moses the servant of Yahweh commanded."

Jeremiah 34:18

ונתתי את־האנשים העברים את־ברתי
אשר לא־הקימו את־דברי הברית אשר כרתו לפני
העגל אשר כרתו לשנים ויעברו בין בתריו

Comment: The king and people concluded (i.e., "cut") a covenant to free their slaves, that is, they made an agreement with one another to free their slaves. Yahweh announces that the people have transgressed "my covenant" when they did not fulfill the obligations of the agreement made to free their slaves. This apparently refers to the Mosaic covenant.

Hosea 6:7

והמה כאדם עברו ברית
שם בגדו בי

Comment: Interpretation of this text is debated. Williamson argues for an interpretation like "they as at Adam, transgressed a covenant." He notes that "most interpreters . . . tak[e] the noun in its geographical sense—referring to the first town Israel reached after crossing into the Promised Land (Joshua 3.16)." *Sealed with an Oath*, 55–56. Yet this is the name of the town where the waters of the Jordan were heaped up, not a place reached by Israel upon entering the land. The presence of שם may support construing אדם as a geographical location, but the occurrences of Gilead (Hos. 6.8) and Shechem (Hos. 6.9) in the subsequent text do not. Williamson does not explain what the text could *mean*. There is no reference in the history of the people to any action at this obscure town. If אדם refers to the first man, then the text speaks of violating a covenant in Eden.

Hosea 8:1

אל־חכך שפר כנשר על־בית יהוה
יען עברו בריתי ועל־תורתי פשעו

Comment: The prophet accuses the people of covenant violation. The covenant in view is the Mosaic covenant; the parallel phrase is ועל־תורתי פשעו.

26. מאס ברית

2 Kings 17:15

וימאסו את־חקיו ואת־בריתו אשר כרת את־אבותם
ואת עדותיו אשר העיד בם
וילכו אחרי ההבל ויהבלו ואחרי הגוים אשר סביבתם

אשׁר צוה יהוה אתם לבלתי עשׂות כהם

Comment: Following mention of the last king of Israel comes the description of the conquest and exile by the Assyrians and a summary of the reasons why this happened: Israel refused the statutes and covenant of the Lord.

27. שׁקר בברית

Psalm 44:18

כל־זאת באתנו ולא שׁכחנוך
ולא־שׁקרנו בבריתך

Comment: The author claims that bad things happened to the people even though they had not been false to the covenant. This must refer to the Mosaic covenant.

28. הרשׁיע ברית

Daniel 11:32

ומרשׁיעי ברית יחניף בחלקות
ועם ידעי אלהיו יחזקו ועשׂו

Comment: Daniel makes predictions concerning Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Daniel 11.28 shows him against “the holy covenant,” that is, opposed to the culture of the Jewish people in Palestine. In a military setback, he vents his wrath against the Jewish people and corrupts those who violate the covenant (11.32).

29. נשׂא ברית

Psalm 50:16

ולרשׁע אמר אלהים מה־לך לספר חקי
ותשׂא בריתי עלי־פיך

Comment: The guilty rebel has no right to speak of the Israelite covenant, that is, to lift it up on his lips or rehearse the covenant statutes. See comments on Psalm 50.5.

30. על ברית

Daniel 11:28
Daniel 11:30

(cf. Dan. 11.30 above at point 18; and Dan. 11.32 above at point 28)

וּשׁב ארצו ברכוּשׁ גדול ולבבו על־ברית קדשׁ
ועשׂה וּשׁב לארצו

ובאו בו ציים כתים ונכאה וּשׁב וזעם על־ברית־קודשׁ ועשׂה
וּשׁב ויבן על־עזבי ברית קדשׁ

Comment: Daniel makes predictions concerning Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Daniel 11.28 shows him against "the holy covenant," that is, opposed to the culture of the Jewish people in Palestine. In a military setback, he vents his wrath against the Jewish people and corrupts those who violate the covenant (11.32).

As Subject

Genesis 17:4

אני הנה בריתי אתך
והיית לאב המון גוים

Comment: God announces that his covenant is with Abraham, who will become a father of a multitude of nations. This is clearly connected to the promise in Genesis 12 that in him all the nations would be blessed.

Genesis 17:13

המול ימול יליד ביתך ומקנת כספך
והיתה בריתי בבשׂרכם לברית עולם

Comment: Circumcision is God's covenant in flesh with Abraham's family.

1 Kings 8:21

ואשׂם שׂם מקום לארון אשׁר־שׂם ברית יהוה
אשׁר כרת עם־אבתינו בהוציאו אתם מארץ מצרים

Comment: The temple that Solomon built was established as a place for the covenant of Yahweh, which was initiated during the exodus. The phrase "covenant of Yahweh" refers to the Ten Commandments. The genitive seems to indicate possession or source rather than the person with whom the covenant is made.

1 Kings 15:19

ברית ביני ובינך בין אבי ובין אביך
הנה שׁלחתי לך שׁחד כסף וזהב לך
הפרה את־בריתך את־בעשׁא מלך־ישׂראל ויעלה מעלי

Comment: Asa, king of Judah, empties the temple treasuries to bribe Ben-Hadad, son of Tabrimmon, son of Hezion, king of Aram, ruling in Damascus, and induce him to make a treaty between the two of them and break his treaty with Baasha, king of Israel. As part of this treaty Asa is asking Ben-Hadad to commence aggression against Baasha so that Baasha will cease his hostilities against Asa and Judah.

Isaiah 28:18

וכפר בריתכם את־מות וחזותכם את־שׁאול לא תקום
שׁוט שׁוטף כי יעבר והייתם לו למרמס

Comment: Interpretation is difficult due to a problem in the text: Should וכפר be corrected to ותפר even though no witnesses support this in the textual transmission, or can an appropriate meaning for כפר be found? Koehler and Baumgartner (3rd ed.) suggest “be covered” as a primary meaning, yielding “be dissolved” as a secondary meaning. This passage corresponds to Isaiah 28.15, where idolaters boast that they have made a covenant with death.

Jeremiah 33:21

גם־בריתי תפר את־דוד עבדי מהיות־לו בן מלך על־כסאו
ואת־הלוים הכהנים משׁרתי

Comment: If God’s covenant with day and night (i.e., creation) can be violated, then so will his covenant with David and the Levites.

Isaiah 54:10

כי ההרים ימושׁו והגבעות תמוטנה
וחסדי מאתך לא־ימושׁ וברית שׁלומי לא תמוט אמר מרחמך יהוה

Comment: The new covenant, called here “my covenant of peace,” is more permanent than the hills and mountains; it will never be annulled.

Ezekiel 37:26

וכרתי להם ברית שׁלום ברית עולם יהיה אותם
ונתתים והרביתי אותם ונתתי את־מקדשׁי בתוכם לעולם

Comment: Ezekiel announces a new covenant, called here a covenant of peace.

Malachi 2:4

וידעתם כי שׁלחתי אליכם את המצוה הזאת
להיות בריתי את־לוי אמר יהוה צבאות

Comment: The passage refers to a covenant between God and the Levitical priesthood.

Malachi 2:5

בריתי היתה אתו החיים והשׁלום ואתנם־לו מורא וייראני
ומפני שׁמי נחת הוא

Comment: The passage refers to a covenant between God and the Levitical priesthood.

Psalm 25:14

סוד יהוה ליראיו
ובריתו להודיעם

Comment: On Psalm 25, see Norbert Lohfink and Erich Zenger, *The God of Israel and the Nations: Studies in Isaiah and the Psalms* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994). God makes his covenant known to those who fear him. This passage extends the covenant beyond the Mosaic covenant to the nations. The basis must be the Abrahamic covenant. See, however, Psalm 25.10.

Psalm 89:29

*אשׁמר־לו חסדי לעולם אשׁמור
ובריתי נאמנת לו

Comment: God promises that he will keep his obligation to David and that his covenant will be firm for him. Strangely, the NIV employs a negative construction in translation.

Job 5:23

כי עם־אבני השׂדה בריתך
וחית השׂדה השׁלמה־לך

Comment: Eliphaz discourses on the blessings experienced by the person who is corrected by God. No harm will come to this man from stones (see Pss. 91.12; 121.3, where one could be injured by stumbling against a stone), and he need not fear harm from wild animals. This is expressed by saying that he has a covenant with stones in the field.

2 Chronicles 6:11

ואשׂים שׁם את־הארון אשׁר־שׁם ברית יהוה
אשׁר כרת עם־בני ישׂראל

Comment: Just before Solomon prays to dedicate the temple, he notes that he has placed the covenant in the ark. This is a clear reference to the "Ten Words" as the "short text" of the Mosaic covenant, identified as the "covenant of Yahweh."

2 Chronicles 16:3

ברית ביני ובינך ובין אבי ובין אביך
הנה שׁלחתי לך כסף וזהב לך
הפר בריתך את־בעשׁא מלך ישׂראל ויעלה מעלי

Comment: Baasha, king of Israel, fortifies Ramah so that he may prevent people from entering or exiting Judah. Asa, king of Judah, pays the king of Syria to attack Israel so that Baasha may abandon his fortifications against Judah. This would result in the king of Syria breaking his coalition treaty with Israel.

Not Object or Subject

Bound phrase: ברית + NOUN

Genesis 14:13

ויבא הפליט ויגד לאברם העברי
והוא שׁכן באלני ממרא האמרי אחי אשׁכל ואחי ענר
והם בעלי ברית־אברם

Comment: Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner were parties in a treaty with Abram.

Exodus 31:16

וְשָׁמְרוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת
לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם בְּרִית עוֹלָם

Comment: The Israelites are to celebrate or observe the Sabbath, thus making it an eternal covenant.

Leviticus 2:13

וְכָל־קָרְבָּן מִנְחָתְךָ בַּמֶּלַח תִּמְלָח
וְלֹא תַשְׁבִּית מֶלַח בְּרִית אֱלֹהֶיךָ מֵעַל מִנְחָתֶךָ
עַל כָּל־קָרְבָּנְךָ תַּקְרִיב מֶלַח

Comment: The expression “covenant of your God” refers to the Sinai covenant.

1 Kings 20:34

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר־לָקַח־אָבִי מֵאֵת אָבִיךָ אָשִׁיב
וְחוּצוֹת תָּשִׂים לְךָ בְּדַמֶּשֶׂק כַּאֲשֶׁר־שָׂם אָבִי בְּשֹׁמְרוֹן
וַאֲנִי בִּבְרִית אֲשַׁלְּחֲךָ וַיִּכְרֹת־לוֹ בְּרִית וַיְשַׁלְּחֵהוּ

Comment: Ahab releases Ben-Hadad “on the basis of a treaty,” that is, if he will make a treaty with Ahab.

2 Kings 13:23

וַיְחָנֵּן יְהוָה אֹתָם וַיְרַחֲמֵם וַיִּפֶן אֲלֵיהֶם
לְמַעַן בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב
וְלֹא אָבָה הַשְׁחִיתָם וְלֹא־הִשְׁלִיכָם מֵעַל־פָּנָיו עַד־עָתָּה

Comment: King Hazael of Damascus oppresses the northern tribal territories, but Yahweh has compassion because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Ezekiel 16:61

וְזָכַרְתְּ אֶת־דְּרָכַיִךְ וְנָכַלְמְתְּ בְּקַחְתֵּךְ אֶת־אֲחוֹתַיִךְ
הַגְּדֹלוֹת מִמֵּךְ אֶל־הַקְּטַנּוֹת מִמֵּךְ
וְנָתַתִּי אֹתָהֶן לָךְ לִבְנוֹת וְלֹא מִבְּרִיתֵךְ

Comment: Judah's sisters are Samaria to the north and Sodom to the south. At the end, she will receive them but not on the basis of a covenant with them—that is, the gift of the nations will not be on the basis of the Mosaic covenant but on the basis of the everlasting (or Abrahamic) covenant.

Obadiah 1:7

עד־הגבול שׁלחוך כל אנשׁי בריתך השׁיאוך יכלו לך אנשׁי שׁלמך
לחמך ישׂימו מזור תחתיך אין תבונה בו

Comment: Obadiah announces coming judgment upon Edom in the form of attack and conquest. Even her allies and friends will betray her. The expression for allies here is "the men of your covenant."

Zechariah 9:11

גם־את בדם־בריתך שׁלחתי אסיריך מבור אין מים בו

Comment: The prophet states that "because of the blood of my covenant," Yahweh will free the exiles. In the context of the larger story of the Old Testament, this must be a reference to the new covenant.

Malachi 2:14

ואמרתם על־מה
על כי־יהוה העיד בינך ובין אשׁת נעוריך
אשׁר אתה בגדתה בה והיא חברתך ואשׁת בריתך

Comment: Apparently, when exiles returned under Ezra and Nehemiah, they divorced their Jewish wives and married foreign women in order to advance their economic status. The "high-school sweetheart" they had originally married is called the "wife of your covenant," indicating that marriage is a covenant made before God.

Malachi 3:1

הנני שׁלח מלאכי ופנה־דרך לפני
ופתאם יבוא אל־היכלו האדון אשׁר־אתם מבקשׁים
ומלאך הברית אשׁר־אתם חפצים הנה־בא אמר יהוה צבאות

Comment: The differences between Yahweh and his people will be resolved by the "messenger of the covenant." It seems that this term may be in apposition to "the Lord whom the people are

seeking," who will come "to his temple." This suggests that the messenger is a divine figure. It may be a reference like that in Isaiah 63.9 to the messenger God sent to help the people through the desert.

Phrase = בעל ברית

Judges 8:33

ויהי כאשר מת גדעון וישובו בני ישראל ויזנו אחרי הבעלים
וישימו להם בעל ברית לאלהים

Comment: After the death of Gideon the Israelites again commit idolatry and worship Baal-Berith as god.

Judges 9:4

ויתנו־לו שבעים כסף מבית בעל ברית
וישכר בהם אבימלך אנשים ריקים ופחזים וילכו אחריו

Comment: This passage locates the temple of Baal-Berith in Shechem.

Judges 9:46

וישמעו כל־בעלי מגדל־שכם
ויבאו אל־צריח בית אל ברית

Comment: The temple of Baal-Berith in Shechem is alternatively called here the temple of El-Berith.

Bound phrase: NOUN + ברית

Genesis 9:12
Genesis 9:13

ויאמר אלהים זאת אות־הברית אשר־אני נתן ביני
וביניכם ובין כל־נפש חיה אשר אתכם לדרת עולם
את־קשתי נתתי בענן
והיתה לאות ברית ביני ובין הארץ

Comment: The bow in the clouds is the sign of the covenant between God and every living being.

Genesis 9:17

ויאמר אלהים אל־נח
זאת אות־הברית אשר הקמתי ביני ובין כל־בשר אשר על־הארץ

Comment: The bow in the clouds is the sign of the covenant between God and every living being.

Genesis 17:7

והפרתי אתך במאד מאד ונתתיך לגוים
ומלכים ממך יצאו
והקמתי את־בריתי ביני ובינך ובין זרעך אחריך לדרתם
לברית עולם להיות לך לאלהים ולזרעך אחריך

Comment: The covenant with Abraham is an everlasting covenant.

Genesis 17:11

ונמלתם את בשר ערלתכם
והיה לאות ברית ביני וביניכם

Comment: Circumcision is the covenant sign between God and Abraham's family.

Genesis 17:13

המול ימול יליד ביתך ומקנת כספך
והיתה בריתי בבשרכם לברית עולם

Comment: The covenant with Abraham is an everlasting covenant.

Genesis 17:19

ויאמר אלהים אבל שרה אשתך ילדת לך בן וקראת את־שמו
יצחק והקמתי את־בריתי אתו לברית עולם לזרעו אחריו

Comment: The covenant with Abraham is an everlasting covenant.

Exodus 24:7

ויקח ספר הברית ויקרא באזני העם

ויאמרו כל אשׁר־דבר יהוה נעשׂה ונשׁמע

Comment: The expression “the Book of the Covenant” refers to the covenant about to be concluded between God on the one hand and Moses and Israel on the other.

Exodus 24:8

ויקח משׁה את־הדם ויזרק על־העם
ויאמר הנה דם־הברית אשׁר כרת יהוה עמכם על כל־הדברים האלה

Comment: The expression “the blood of the covenant” refers to the covenant about to be concluded between God on the one hand and Moses and Israel on the other.

Exodus 34:28

ויהי־שׁם עם־יהוה ארבעים יום וארבעים
לילה לחם לא אכל ומים לא שׁתה
ויכתב על־הלחת את דברי הברית עשׂרת הדברים

Comment: The expression “the words of the covenant” refers to the Ten Words as the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant.

Leviticus 24:8

ביום השׁבת ביום השׁבת יערכנו לפני יהוה תמיד
מאת בני־ישׂראל ברית עולם

Comment: Bread is to be presented before Yahweh regularly, Sabbath by Sabbath, as an “eternal covenant.”

Leviticus 26:25

והבאתי עליכם חרב נקמת נקם־ברית ונאספתם אל־עריכם
ושׁלחתי דבר בתוככם ונתתם ביד־אויב

Comment: Persistent refusal to accept correction from the Lord will result in an “avenging sword,” and in apposition to this is the expression “vengeance of the covenant.” Thus, destruction by sword will constitute the judicial payback for covenant violation.

Numbers 18:19

כל תרומת הקדשים אשר ירימו בני־ישראל ליהוה
נתתי לך ולבניך ולבנתיך אתך לחק־עולם
ברית מלח עולם הוא לפני יהוה לך ולזרעך אתך

Comment: The holy offerings are given to Aaron and his sons and daughters. This permanent statute is called “an eternal covenant of salt” before the Lord for Aaron and his offspring (cf. Lev. 2.13).

2 Chronicles 13:5

הלא לכם לדעת כי יהוה אלהי ישראל נתן ממלכה
לדויד על־ישראל לעולם לו ולבניו ברית מלח

Comment: Describes a war between Abijah of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel. Abijah challenges his opponents, asking them, “Don’t you know that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel forever to David and his descendants as a covenant of salt?” (cf. Lev. 2.13).

Numbers 25:12

לכן אמר הנני נתן לו את־בריתי שלום

Numbers 25:13

והיתה לו ולזרעו אחריו ברית כהנת עולם
תחת אשר קנא לאלהיו ויכפר על־בני ישראל

Comment: Phinehas’s action turned away the anger of Yahweh. As a result, God gave to him a “covenant of peace,” which is described as a “covenant of eternal priesthood.”

Isaiah 42:6

אני יהוה קראתיך בצדק ואחזק בידך
ואצרך ואתנך לברית עם לאור גוים

Isaiah 49:8

כה אמר יהוה בעת רצון עניתיך וביום ישועה עזרתיך
ואצרך ואתנך לברית עם להקים ארץ להנחיל נחלות שממות

Comment: Normally, in a bound phrase where the bound member is ברית and the free member is a person, this person is the covenant partner. Here, in a unique expression, the servant of

Yahweh is himself the covenant between God and the people.

Isaiah 59:21

ואני זאת בריתי אותם אמר יהוה
רוחי אשר עליך ודברי אשר־שמתי בפיך
לא־ימושו מפיך ומפי זרעך ומפי זרע זרעך
אמר יהוה מעתה ועד־עולם

Comment: This passage is another description of the new covenant in which the words of Yahweh will not depart from the mouths of the people or from the mouths of their descendants.

Ezekiel 30:5

כוש ופוט ולוד וכל־הערב וכוב ובני ארץ הברית
אתם בחרב יפלו

Comment: The passage is a lament for Egypt and refers to groups of people and nations who experience demise along with Egypt. Jeremiah 25.20 may be a parallel passage. This appears to refer to non-Israelite peoples in the land of Israel, where the bound noun phrase “land of the covenant” is a way of referring to Israel.

Daniel 11:22

וזרעות השטף ישטפו מלפניו וישברו
וגם נגיד ברית

Comment: Events in the Maccabean period are portrayed as events perpetrated by the king of the north and the king of the south. In the sequence of things, a contemptible person without royalty will gain power. A huge army will be swept away before him, along with a “covenant prince.” This may refer to a Jewish leader.

Deuteronomy 29:20

והבדילו יהוה לרעה מכל שבטי ישראל
ככל אלות הברית הכתובה בספר התורה הזה

Comment: The disobedient person will be singled out to receive all the curses of the covenant. Oath is employed in a positive sense in Deuteronomy 29.11 and in a negative sense here.

Phrase = “ark of the covenant”

Numbers 10:33

ויסעו מהר יהוה דרך שׁלשׁת ימים
וארון ברית־יהוה נסע לפניהם דרך שׁלשׁת ימים לתור להם מנוחה

Comment: The ark of the covenant of Yahweh journeyed before the people.

Numbers 14:44

ויעפלו לעלות אל־ראשׁ ההר
וארון ברית־יהוה ומשׁה לא־משׁו מקרב המחנה

Comment: The ark of the covenant of Yahweh did not accompany the excursion to the hill country from Kadesh Barnea.

Jeremiah 3:16

והיה כי תרבו ופריתם בארץ בימים ההמה נאם־יהוה
לא־יאמרו עוד ארון ברית־יהוה ולא יעלה על־לב
ולא יזכרו־בו ולא יפקדו ולא יעשׂה עוד

Comment: A future time is described when the ark of the covenant will no longer be part of the people of God.

Phrase = “the ark of the covenant”

Joshua 3:6; Joshua 3:6

Phrase = “the ark of the covenant of Yahweh”

Deuteronomy 10:8; Joshua 4:7; Joshua 6:8; 1 Samuel 4:3; 1 Samuel 4:5; 1 Kings 6:19; 1 Kings 8:1; 1 Kings 8:6; 1 Chronicles 15:25; 1 Chronicles 15:28; 1 Chronicles 15:29; 1 Chronicles 16:37; 1 Chronicles 17:1; 1 Chronicles 22:19; 1 Chronicles 28:2; 1 Chronicles 28:18; 2 Chronicles 5:2; 2 Chronicles 5:7

Phrase = “the ark of the covenant of Yahweh of Armies”

1 Samuel 4:4

Phrase = “carriers of the ark of the covenant”

Joshua 3:8; Joshua 3:14; Joshua 4:9

Phrase = “carriers of the ark of the covenant of Yahweh” (הכהנים נשׂאי הארון ברית־יהוה)

Deuteronomy 31:9; Deuteronomy 31:25; Joshua 3:17; Joshua 4:18; Joshua 8:33; 1 Chronicles 15:26

Phrase = “the ark of the covenant of Yahweh your God”

Deuteronomy 31:26; Joshua 3:3

Phrase = “the ark of the covenant of God”

Judges 20:27; 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 15:25; 1 Chronicles 16:6

Phrase = “the ark of the covenant of the Lord”

1 Kings 3:15

Phrase = “the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth”

Joshua 3:11

Phrase = “the ark of God”

1 Samuel 3.3

Phrase = “words of the covenant”

Deuteronomy 29:8

ושׁמרתם את־דברי הברית הזאת ועשׂיתם אתם
למען תשׂכילו את כל־אשׁר תעשׂון

Comment: A reference to the terms of the covenant. The demonstrative shows that this is equivalent to the book of Deuteronomy.

Jeremiah 11:2

שׁמעו את־דברי הברית הזאת
ודברתם אל־איׁש יהודה ועל־ישׁבי ירושׁלם

Jeremiah 11:3

ואמרת אליהם כה־אמר יהוה אלהי ישׂראל
ארור האישׁ אשׁר לא ישׁמע את־דברי הברית הזאת

Jeremiah 11:6

ויאמר יהוה אלי קרא את־כל־הדברים האלה
בערי יהודה ובחצות ירושׁלם לאמר
שׁמעו את־דברי הברית הזאת ועשׂיתם אותם

Jeremiah 11:8

ולא שׁמעו ולא־הטו את־אזנם וילכו אישׁ בשׁרירות לבם הרע
ואביא עליהם את־כל־דברי הברית־הזאת אשׁר־צויתי לעשׂות ולא עשׂו

Comment: Four instances in Jeremiah 11 entail the expression "the words [i.e., terms] of this covenant" and refer specifically to the terms of the Mosaic covenant. This is distinguished from the Abrahamic covenant, which is referred to as "the oath" in 11.5.

2 Chronicles 34:30
2 Chronicles 34:31

ויעל המלך בית־יהוה וכל־אישׁ יהודה וישׁבי ירושׁלם
והכהנים והלוים וכל־העם מגדול ועד־קטן
ויקרא באזניהם את־כל־דברי ספר הברית הנמצא בית יהוה

ויעמד המלך על־עמדו ויכרת את־הברית לפני יהוה
ללכת אחרי יהוה ולשׁמור את־מצותיו ועדותיו וחקיו בכל־לבבו
ובכל־נפשׁו לעשׂות את־דברי הברית הכתובים על־הספר הזה

Comment: The passage relates the discovery of the Book of the Torah (34.14) during Josiah's renovations of the temple and a renewal of commitment to this covenant (doubtless the book of Deuteronomy). The expression is that "he [the king] cut *the* covenant before Yahweh to follow him and keep his commands." One wonders why the word בירת is articulated here and what this may betoken? Does the expression כרת ברית here refer to covenant renewal?

Phrase = "the tablets of the covenant"

Deuteronomy 9:9

בעלתי ההרה לקחת לוחת האבנים לוחת הברית
אשׁר־כרת יהוה עמכם

ואשׁב בהר ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה
לחם לא אכלתי ומים לא שׁתיתי

Deuteronomy 9:11
נתן יהוה אלי את־שׁני לחת האבנים לחות הברית

Deuteronomy 9:15
ואפן וארד מן־ההר וההר בער באשׁ ושׁני לחת הברית על שׁתי ידי

Comment: Reference is made to "the tablets of the covenant that Yahweh cut with you." This indicates the Ten Commandments written on the two stone tablets.

Phrase = "the Book of the Covenant"

2 Kings 23:2
ויעל המלך בית־יהוה וכל־איׁש יהודה וכל־ישׁבי ירושׁלם אתו
והכהנים והנביאים וכל־העם למקטן ועד־גדול
ויקרא באזניהם את־כל־דברי ספר הברית הנמצא בבית יהוה

Comment: Here "the words of the Book of the Covenant" found during the restoration of the temple are read during Josiah's revival.

2 Kings 23:21
ויצו המלך את־כל־העם לאמר עשׂו פסח ליהוה אלהיכם
ככתוב על ספר הברית הזה

Comment: Here the king commands Passover to be celebrated according to "what is written in the Book of the Covenant" found during the restoration of the temple.

Passages Listed Twice in This Appendix

Listed twice = Genesis 9.12 (נתן, Noun + ברית)
Listed twice = Exodus 24.8 (ברית + Noun, כרת)
Listed twice = Deuteronomy 4.23 (שׁכח, כרת)
Listed twice = Deuteronomy 9.9 (לוחת, כרת)
Listed twice = Deuteronomy 29.11 (עבר ב, כרת)
Listed twice = Deuteronomy 29.24 (עזב, כרת)

Listed twice = Deuteronomy 31.16 (הפר, כרת)
Listed twice = 1 Kings 8.21 (Subj, כרת)
Listed twice = 2 Kings 17.15 (מאס, כרת)
Listed twice = 2 Kings 17.38 (כרת, שׁכח)
Listed twice = Jeremiah 11.10 (הפר, כרת)
Listed twice = Zechariah 11.10 (הפר, כרת)
Listed twice = Psalm 105.8–9 (זכר, כרת)
Listed twice = 1 Chronicles 16.15–16 (זכר, כרת)

Parallel Expressions

1. הקים ברית = הקים השׁבעה
Genesis 26:3

גור בארץ הזאת ואהיה עמך ואברכך
כי־לך ולזרעך אתן את־כל־הארצת האל
והקמתי את־השׁבעה אשׁר נשׁבעתי לאברהם אביך

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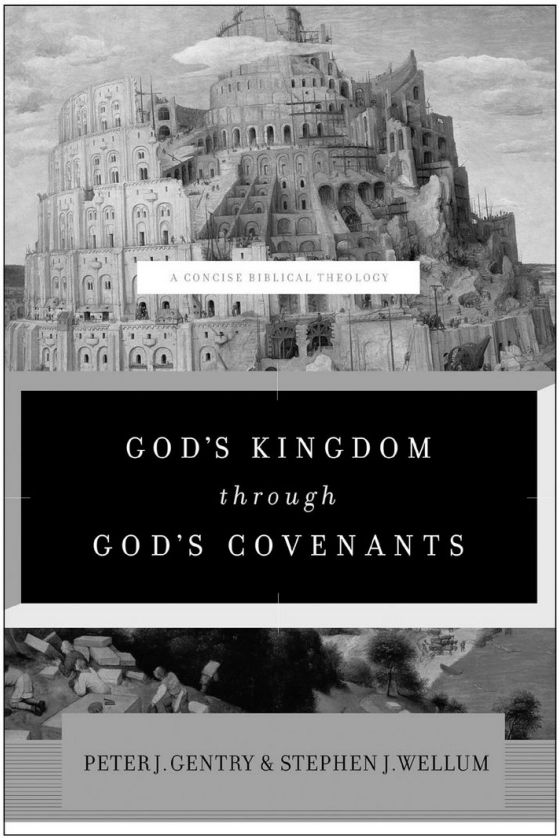
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