INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLICAL COVENANTS;
THE NOAHIC COVENANT AND
THE PRIESTLY COVENANT

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The prominence of the OT covenants throughout the Bible makes various facets of information about them—the etymology of the OT term, the OT and NT usages of relevant terms, covenant phraseologies, pledges, signs, witnesses, consequences, conditionality, and the number of covenants—matters of deepest interest to students of the Bible. The six covenants that provide a foundation for understanding God’s working in human history are the Noahic, the Abrahamic, the Priestly, the Mosaic, the Davidic, and the New covenants. The Noahic Covenant came at the time of the great flood when God promised Noah, his family, and all mankind subsequent to them that He would never destroy the world with a flood again and gave a sign of the rainbow to remind Himself of His promise. God made the Priestly Covenant with Phinehas when Phinehas executed an Israelite man and a Moabite woman who were in process of consummating marriage with one another. He made it clear that this covenant like the other unconditional covenants was to be perpetual too.

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INTRODUCTION

Covenants play a prominent role in OT life—socially, politically, and religiously. The covenant idea itself, first mentioned in Genesis 6 during the days of Noah, is intricately woven into the fabric of the biblical account all the way through to Revelation 11 where the “ark of His covenant” reappears in the temple. The word itself occurs in 27 of 39 OT books and in 11 of 27 NT books.

The rise of the Documentary Hypothesis, fueled by the concept that religion in Israel developed along evolutionary lines, has in recent centuries suggested that the whole idea of covenants in Israel was a very late development. Following Julius Wellhausen’s anti-supernatural system, many modern scholars postulate that the covenant concept was foreign to Israelite society and religion until the late seventh
More recent contributions to covenant discussions, however, indicate an early origin of the covenant idea in Israel. In 1954, George Mendenhall became the first to note the parallels between some biblical covenants and the ancient Near-Eastern treaties, especially the Hittite treaties between overlords and vassals dating from the second millennium B.C.\textsuperscript{2} The parallels, especially with the Mosaic Covenant, are so numerous and compelling that one must conclude that “some of the covenant material in the Old Testament literature may very well be extremely early.”\textsuperscript{3}

Covenant Terminology

OT etymology. Though not totally foreign to present-day vocabulary, the English term covenant is seldom used. Outside of legal documents and marriage ceremonies, the word is absent from normal conversation. Webster defines it as “a binding and solemn agreement made by two or more individuals or parties to do or keep from doing a specified thing; a compact.” The term derives from the Latin co\v{e}nentire, meaning “to convene, meet together, to assemble for a common purpose.”

The meaning of the Hebrew term תִּירָת (bërît) is more obscure. Originating from the root דָּרֶה (bah),\textsuperscript{4} the word has several suggested meanings. Some associate the term with the Akkadian baru, “to bind, fetter,”\textsuperscript{5} pointing to Ezekiel 20:37 for support: “And I shall make you pass under the rod, and I shall bring you into the bond of the covenant” (תִּירָת, bĕmāsôret habërît). A possible parallel may exist with the Hittite dynastic suzerainty treaties, in which a vassal would enter into an oath of loyalty toward the king in return for past favors and future protection.\textsuperscript{6}

On occasion, the root is used in the sense of “food, eating,” suggesting that bërît may speak of making a mutual alliance or obligation while sharing a meal (e.g.,

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\textsuperscript{2}Among others, Meredith G. Kline has authored numerous publications, the earliest of which is Treaty of the Great King (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).


\textsuperscript{5}Ibid.

2 Sam 12:17; 13:5, 6, 7, 10). But while the root may suggest such, the usage of בְּרִית declares otherwise, drawing into question what influence the root should hold in determining the meaning. As Quell notes, “Yet in none of the 286 instances of בְּרִית (bêrît) in the Mas. does it have such a meaning, nor does it ever seem to have been attached to it. . . . We must also remember that the verbal expressions with which בְּרִית (bêrît) is firmly linked in actual usage never have the sense of meal and cannot be understood in terms of it.

It is obvious that etymology sheds only minimal light on the meaning of the term as used by the biblical writers. Reflecting on more recent studies, Von Rad concludes,

Thus, what used to be called the “history of the conception of the covenant” has now turned out to be very involved. . . . Thus, using only the word בְּרִית [beryt] itself, that is, employing the method of investigation of terminology, it becomes more and more difficult to write a history of all the ideas which now and then may have made use of it.

Nor does a comparison with the treaties of Israel’s pagan neighbors generate anything more than an occasional analogy. Rather, its usage within a given context provides the most understanding and perspective. Payne observes that basically “the meaning of the בְּרִית [bêrît] must be sought not in its etymology or significance as found in pagan cultures that surrounded Israel. Only in the transformed usage of the term, as it appears in God’s own historical revelation, is its ultimate import disclosed.”  

**OT usage.** Covenant in the OT essentially incorporates a legally binding obligation. It is employed primarily in two ways. Frequently, the covenant represents an agreement between two parties in which there is basic parity. Both sides enter into the treaty voluntarily, resulting in a partnership relationship. The OT depicts covenants of this type between individuals such as David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18:3-4), between families such as Jacob and Laban (Gen 31:54), or between

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2 Ibid. [transliteration added]
3 Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 1:133. [transliteration added]
nations such as Israel and the Canaanites (Exod 23:32; 34:12, 15). Similar terminology describes the marriage covenant (Prov 2:17; Mal 2:14) or international trade agreements (1 Kgs 20:34).

A second usage depicts an arrangement imposed by a superior on subordinates (e.g., Joshua 9; 1 Sam 11:1-2). It usually designates an agreement made to or for, not with, the subordinate, depicting a legally binding promise which one party makes toward another. In other words, parity between the two parties is absent. Second Kings 11:4 describes a covenant made by Jehoida the priest and the Carites to protect young Joash from the wicked queen Athaliah. Ezra 10:3 speaks of making “a covenant with our God to put away all the [foreign] wives and their children.”

This type of legally binding promise is occasionally made between men or by men toward God. But it is more often a legally binding promise made by God toward men. Though covenants among/between peers were usually negotiated, covenants between God and men were not. Men do not have parity with God. Thus in the covenants of God, it is God alone who sets forth the conditions. “The original idea of a covenant comes directly to expression in the phraseology: God ‘establishes the covenant’ (ךָקִים, kîm), he ‘grants it’ (חָנַן, năn), Gen. vi.18, ix.9, 11f., 17, xvii.2, 7, 19, 21. God speaks ‘his’ covenant.” His sovereign will is set forth unilaterally (e.g., Jer 33: 20, 25).

When the covenant constitutes an obligation solely by the master to the servant, such as the Noahic, Abrahamic, Priestly, and Davidic covenants, Waltke understands it as a grant. Such terminology has the advantage of emphasizing the fact that God alone was obligated to keep the tenets of the covenant. In contrast, he views the Mosaic Covenant as a treaty, since it constitutes an obligation of the vassal to his master.

NT terminology and usage. The Greek term, διαθήκη (diathēkē), is the

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12Job even makes a covenant with himself (31:1).
13The length of time covenants were binding varied, as stipulated in the agreement. The covenant of salt (Num 18:19) may intimate the permanent, non-decaying nature of a covenant as well, or may simply refer to an aspect of the covenant meal itself (so TDNT, 2:115).
14Cf. also 2 Kgs 23:3 and 2 Chr 29:10.
15Psalm 50:5 is not a covenant negotiated with Israel; rather, it describes the saints who have entered the covenant already established by God.
16Von Rad, Old Testament Theology 1:134, n. 10. [transliteration added]
17Waltke, following Moshe Weinfeld (“The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East.” JAOS 90 [1970]:185), labels the Noahic, Abrahamic, Priestly, and Davidic covenants as “grants,” constituting an obligation by the master to the servant, and the Mosaic Covenant as a “treaty” in which the vassal is obligated to his master (“Phenomenon of Conditionality” 124).
normal translation of bērit in the LXX. It occurs thirty-three times in the NT, seventeen in Hebrews, nine in the letters of Paul, four times in the Synoptic Gospels, twice in Acts, and once in Revelation. In Hellenistic times, the term exclusively meant “last will and testament,” making it a difficult translation for the OT bērit. On the one hand, it is true that some essential characteristics of a last will and testament are present in God’s covenants with His people. First of all, “it is the declaration of one person’s will, not the result of an agreement between two parties, like a compact or contract. . . . In the ‘covenants’ of God, it was God alone who set the conditions.” Secondly, the element of God’s grace comes through. “What is indubitable is that in every reference to diathēkē, God’s saving work is prominent.” Hence covenant is useful to translate diathēkē if this be kept in mind.

On the other hand, the translation is difficult since a last will and testament requires the death of the one making it before it can become operative. The OT covenant did not require the death of the testator to initiate it. On the contrary, the death of one of the parties establishing the covenant rendered it null and void. Furthermore, until the death of the testator, the testament remained revocable, subject to change. Such mutability is an inappropriate attribution to God’s covenants. The one alternative translation, συνθήκη (synthēkē), was even more objectionable to the translators. Vos observes,

This word suggests strongly by its very form the idea of coequality and partnership between the persons entering into the arrangement. . . . The translators felt this to be out of keeping with the tenor of the Old Testament Scriptures, in which the supremacy and monergism of God are emphasized. So, in order to avoid the misunderstanding, they preferred to put up with the inconveniences attaching to the word “diathēkē.”

Vos adds that while “testament” in Roman law was not in force until the death of the testator (cf. Heb 9:16), the translators possibly had in mind the Graeco-Syrian law. “This kind of testament had no necessary association with the death of the testator. It could be made and solemnly sanctioned during his life-time, and

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20Ibid.


22G. Vos, Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948) 34. He adds: “The original sense [of διαθήκη, diathēkē] was quite generic, viz., ‘a disposition that some one made for himself’ (from the middle form of the verb διατιθῆμι). . . . Though diathēkē meant currently ‘last will,’ the original generic sense of ‘disposition for one’s self’ cannot have been entirely forgotten even in their day. The etymology of the word was too perspicuous for that. They felt that diathēkē suggested a sovereign disposition, not always of the nature of a last will, and repristinated this ancient signification.”
Covenant Phraseology

A number of OT phrases describe the covenant event. Jeremiah 34:10 speaks of entering a covenant (בָּאָה נְבֵרִית [bā’āh nēverîth]). In Dan 9:27, antichrist is said to impose by force a covenant (הַסְּמָקָה אֲלֹנֵהוֹת [ḥəsəmāqéh alonēhot], הָגִימוֹת ′אֵת-בֶּרֶה [ḥagimōt ʿēth-bērēh]) with Israel at the outset of the Tribulation period. God instructs Noah to build an ark (Gen 6:18), promising Noah that “I will establish My covenant (הָבְרִית בְּרֵית [ḥēḇrîth bērēt]) with you.” Elsewhere He says “I will give (בְּרֵית לֶאַלְמָן [bērēt lēʿālēm]) it (Gen 17:2), establish (בְּרֵית ′ולָם שָמִי [bērēt ′olam šāmi]) it (2 Sam 23:5), and command (נַהֲרוּת בְּרֵית [nāḥārut bērēt]) it (Ps 111:9).

But the predominant verb associated with covenant-making is בָּרָת [bārēth], “to cut”). The frequency of this phrase almost certainly owes its origin to the ancient practice in which the parties ratifying the covenant would cut a sacrifice in pieces and then walk between them (e.g., Gen 15:12-18). So common was this practice that 1 Sam 22:8 uses the term “cut” itself as a synonym for covenant making.24

Covenant Pledges

When two parties entered into a covenant they occasionally offered a pledge or gift as a part of the ratification. Abraham gave sheep and oxen to Abimelech to confirm their covenant and assure his ownership rights to the well he had dug at Beersheba. A more modern assertion of fidelity to a covenant is reflected in Ezek 17:18, where Zedekiah pledged allegiance by giving his hand. Jonathan sealed his covenant with David when he gave David his robe, armor, sword, bow, and belt (1 Sam 18:4).25 Sometimes, oaths or solemn promises were given as pledges of fidelity (e.g., Gen 21:23-24, 31; 26:28; 2 Kgs 11:4) as well. Even God is mentioned as having sworn an oath when He reiterated His covenant with Israel prior to entering the land (Deut 29:12, 14) and when He promised David a perpetual throne (Ps 89:3, 34-37, 49).

Covenant Signs

Another occasional feature was the sign of the covenant. Though similar to a pledge or gift, which was given when enacting a human covenant, the sign of a divine covenant was generally a repeatable memorial. God placed a rainbow in the sky for Noah and subsequent generations, promising that He would never again

certain of its provisions go into immediate effect.”23

23Ibid.

24Some have associated the term with the covenant meal, an event occasionally practiced when making a covenant (e.g., Gen 26:30; 31:44-46, 54; Exod 24:8-11).

25“By taking the clothes and weapons of Jonathan, David takes a substantial share in his person. Entering into a covenant with him, he becomes as the man himself [literally, “as his soul” 18:3]” (Quell, “דיוקן יהודה,” 2:112). Although strict covenant language is absent, 1 Kgs 9:16 depicts marriage between two royal houses as another pledge which seals a covenant. Note also Mal 2:14 and Ezek 16:8.
destroy the earth by flood (Gen 9:14-17). He commanded circumcision as a perpetual reminder to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17:9-10, 13-14). Later, He instituted the Sabbath at Mt. Sinai as a sign of His covenant with Israel (Exod 31:13; Ezek 20:12, 20).

**Covenant Witnesses**

Frequently, covenants between individuals were said to be divinely witnessed. David’s covenant with Jonathan was made “before the Lord” (1 Sam 23:18; cf. 1 Sam 20:8). Laban, when making a covenant with Jacob, repeatedly reminded his son-in-law that though “no man is with us, God is witness between you and me” (Gen 31:50; cf. v. 53).\(^{26}\) Calling God to witness a covenant agreement may be the reason why many covenant oaths between individuals were solemnized in the house of the Lord (e.g., 2 Kgs 11:4; 2 Chr 23:3; Jer 34:15).\(^{27}\)

**Covenant Consequences**

The consequences attached to the covenants, whether human or divine in origin, could be either positive or negative. Regardless of whether the covenant was motivated by friendship (as with Jonathan and David [1 Samuel 18]), suspicion (as with Laban and Jacob [Genesis 31]), or God’s loving choice (as with Israel), fidelity to the covenant is its most fundamental anchor and constitutes the essence of it.\(^{28}\) Covenants were to be remembered and kept, and blessings awaited those who did. God’s covenants began with blessings, with even greater blessings to follow. His covenants were “front-loaded,” so to speak, with divine blessings, wholly undeserved and unmerited, and secured with promises of eternal fidelity.

But they could also be rejected and broken, transgressed, and forsaken.\(^{31}\) And the gravity of failing to honor the stipulations could be severe. Violators of the divine covenant are promised the “curses of the covenant” (Deut 29:21) and divine “vengeance” (Lev 26:25). In the case of a covenant between individuals, walking between the pieces of the sacrifice (e.g., Gen 15:12-18) provided a visual threat of similar dismemberment should the covenant obligations go unmet—a consequence ultimately realized in Judah’s capture by Babylon (Jer 34:18-20). The formula,

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\(^{25}\) Cf. Ezek 17:9; 2 Sam 5:3.

\(^{26}\) And when a covenant was violated, God often called upon creation to testify against the guilty party (Mic 6:1, 2).

\(^{27}\) Payne, “Covenant” 1:1002.

\(^{28}\) E.g., Gen 9:15; Exod 2:24; 6:5; Lev 26:42, 45; Deut 4:23, 31.

\(^{29}\) E.g., Gen 17:9, 10; Exod 19:5; Deut 7:9, 12; 29:9.

\(^{30}\) E.g., Lev 26:15, 44; Deut 31:16, 20.

\(^{31}\) E.g., Deut 17:2.

\(^{32}\) E.g., Deut 29:25.
“may God do so to me and more also” (Ruth 1:17; 1 Sam 3:17; 20:13; 2 Kgs 6:31) probably has its origin in the reference to those who consummate a covenant by walking between a divided carcass. Deuteronomy 28 and 30 are equally vivid in delineating the judgment that awaits disobedience. Ezekiel 17:13 describes how Nebuchadnezzar’s covenant with Jehoiakim put the Judean king under a curse (נְגוֹי, אָם)—an oath of imprecation—should he choose to rebel.

Covenant Conditionality

Conditionality was an integral aspect of every bilateral covenant. Failure of one of the parties to carry out the specified conditions rendered the agreement null and void. Unilateral covenants, on the other hand, wherein the LORD is the sole party responsible to carry out its obligations, are unconditional, depending totally on His faithfulness for their fulfillment. Scripture gives five of these covenants: the Noahic, Abrahamic, Priestly (or Levitical), Davidic, and the New.

Scripture has no evidence of any obligations required of the recipients of these five covenants. It should be noted, however, that this does not deny the possible need for consequent obedience. But it does establish the fact that obedience is not a contingency for its fulfillment. Kiser succinctly explains:

This is not to affirm that subsequent obedience is not required if some or all of these five covenantal benefits are to be enjoyed. On the contrary, obedience is demanded if one is to enjoy the benefits . . . however, failure to participate in the benefits will not thereby frustrate the plan of God as announced in the covenant. Even if some people do not participate in these benefits, they must, by virtue of their being part of Israel or (even more critically) of the messianic line, transmit these benefits to their successors.

Furthermore, God may bring judgment (or blessing) locally when there is disobedience or obedience (as in Genesis 12:3, “I will bless those who bless you and the one treating you lightly I will curse”). Waltke notes, “God’s grant of seasonal harvest and blessing are in space and time universally irrevocable, but locally and temporarily conditional upon moral behavior or providential acts.”

Though God’s unilateral, one-directional covenant making may contain similarities with man’s covenant-making, there are essential differences. Like man’s covenants, God’s covenants are in His self-interest; but God’s covenants are in the best interests of man as well—an attribute that is often lacking in man’s covenants.

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34Quell, “Διαβολή” 2:117. The self-malediction of Jonathan is similar (1 Sam 20:13).
35Nowhere is that more vividly illustrated than in Genesis 15:12-18, where the LORD, having put Abram to sleep, walks through the pieces of the sacrifice alone.
37Waltke, “Phenomenon of Conditionality” 127.
But the primary difference is the predominant presence of grace. “The undertakings from God’s side (his promises) are signally gracious, not only because they are so great but also because they are wholly undeserved, and are often made with the offences of the other party fully in view.”38 To which Perlitt insightfully adds, “The recipients of a berit are first blessed and then show themselves obedient.”39

Number of Covenants

Scripture records numerous covenants, the vast majority established between individuals or nations. Some of these covenants may be described as “of the Lord” or “of God” (1 Sam 20:8; Prov 2:17), although the Lord Himself is not one of the covenanting parties.40 The number of divinely initiated covenants is considerably less.41 Historically, premillennialists have placed five or six covenants in this category—Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Priestly,42 Davidic, and New. Classic Reformed theology, on the other hand, generally concludes that there is essentially one overarching covenant in Scripture—the “covenant of grace.”43 John Walton espouses the “one covenant” perspective as well, though he views revelation as the objective of the covenant program, not redemption (as does Robertson44).

In the end, revelation culminates in God’s plan of salvation, which provides the means by which relationship is achieved. But this plan of salvation is only a part, albeit a highly significant part, of the overall program of revelation. . . . The covenant is revelatory and this program of revelation eventuates in redemption.45

38Beckwith, “God’s Covenant’s” 103.
40Beckwith, “God’s Covenant’s” 100.
41Beckwith (“God’s Covenant’s” 100-101), for example, lists nine.
42The priestly covenant, discussed below, has at times been treated as a part of the Mosaic.
43Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 2:354 ff. Though they adduce a “covenant of works,” comprising the time before the fall of man, their “covenant of grace” replaced it, unveiling God’s redemptive work from Genesis 3 through the rest of Scripture. O. Palmer Robertson (The Christ of the Covenants [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980]) prefers the nomenclature “covenant of creation” and “covenant of redemption” (54-56), concluding that “the cumulative evidence of the Scriptures points definitely toward the unified character of the biblical covenants. God’s multiple bonds with his people ultimately unite into a single relationship. Particular details of the covenants may vary. A definite line of progress may be noted. Yet the covenants of God are one” (28).
44Robertson, Christ of the Covenants 63.
45John Walton, Covenant (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 25. Later, he adds: “I would propose that there is one covenant in two major stages, Old and New. The former is articulated in phases that are linked, yet distinct. The purpose of this one covenant is to serve as a mechanism for God’s self-revelation. That purpose is expressed in the original proclamation of the covenant in terms of Abraham
Beckwith disagrees, however. Though the covenants overlap and are consistent with each other, he claims that “this does not make the covenants identical. . . . To speak of [redemption] as the whole substance of those covenants, when they have so much in them that is more specific, is an exaggeration.”

Importance of the Covenants
Let no one underestimate the importance and significance of a correct understanding of the divine covenants. It is much more than an intellectual pursuit. They provide a most foundational theological anchor for understanding God’s working in human history.

- In the Noahic Covenant, God showed His gracious mercy toward all mankind, both redeemed and unredeemed, causing it to rain on the just and the unjust and assuring the ongoing, uninterrupted cycle of seasons. In it He demonstrated His unwillingness to allow the sinfulness of man to derail His plan set forth in Genesis 3:15. His unwillingness to allow the sinfulness of man to abrogate the pre-fall command to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,” a command reiterated after the flood to Noah.
- In the Abrahamic Covenant, God demonstrated His unmerited favor and unilateral choice of Israel as “the apple of His eye,” a special people called out from among the nations through whom the Messiah would come.
- In the Priestly Covenant, God promised the perpetual priesthood of the line of Phinehas that carries all the way through to serving in the Lord’s earthly millennial temple.
- In the Mosaic Covenant, God revealed His holiness and the heinousness of sin. The daily sacrifices provided a constant reminder of the need for the shedding of blood for the remission of sin, for the propitiating of God’s wrath.
- In the Davidic Covenant, God promised the perpetual reign of the descendants of David, ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah and His millennial reign.
- In the New Covenant, God evidenced anew His continual pouring out of grace, a promise through which He would put His law within His people, writing it on their hearts.

Understanding these six covenants will shape a person’s understanding of Scripture. It will reflect a hermeneutical course that will determine the pitch of one’s eschatological sails. Careful attention to these six covenants will bear an overwhelming abundance of fruitfulness.

When God enters into a unilateral covenant guaranteed only by His own faithfulness; when God enters into a covenant void of any human requirements to keep it in force; when God establishes a covenant that will continue as long as there

and his family serving as instruments of God’s blessing on the world” (60-61).

46Beckwith, “God’s Covenant’s” 101.
is day and night and summer and winter, *then* great care must be taken not to erect
man-made limitations that would bankrupt the heart and soul of these covenants and
annul the glorious full realization of all that He promised through them. Their
significance cannot be overestimated.

**THE NOAHIC COVENANT**

*Genesis 6:18; 9:8-17*

**The Setting**

The Noahic Covenant comes within the context of the great flood. It is
recorded that “the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and
that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5),
making Him “sorry He had made man” and grieving Him in His heart (Gen 6:6). As
a result, “the Lord said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of
the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky’” (Gen 6:7).

But, in contrast to the rest of mankind, it notes that “Noah found grace (*ḥën*) in the
eyes of the Lord” (Gen 6:8), and as a result, God instructed him to build
an ark by means of which he, his family, and “two of every living thing” would be
spared. Significant aspects of God’s original creation of earth were reversed by the
great flood. Yet through the flood, these same aspects would be reinstated.

The nature of this covenant is revealed in three passages of the Genesis account:
6:17-22; 8:20-22; and 9:8-17. This is not to suggest that there is more than
one covenant. Rather, the earlier statements merely precede the actual inauguration
and implementation of the covenant after the flood.

**The Terminology**

The divine initiation and authorization of the covenant with Noah is
emphatically asserted. The text (Gen 9:9) is literally rendered, “And I, behold I am
utterly establishing My covenant with you (*b‘rît itk̄em*)” leaving no doubt as to its author. The great flood
came at the bidding of the Righteous One (Gen 6:17); the same One now assures
Noah and his family that He would also provide protection under the Shadow of the
Almighty. God’s authorization is reassured five times throughout the covenant
(Gen 9:12, 13, 15, 16, 17). “They serve to underline the message, pealing out like

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47This is the first Scriptural occurrence of this term. Though not uncommon in the OT, Wenham
notes that “it is very rare for it to be said outright that a man has found favor in God’s sight. One such
example is Moses (Exod 33:17). This sentence therefore puts Noah on a par with Moses as one of the
greatest saints of the old covenant . . .” (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1 of *Word Biblical


49Cf. identical phraseology in the emphatic announcement of the flood (Gen 6:17): “And I, behold
I, am bringing the great flood (**b‘rît w‘l‘m** אֲנִי כִּבְרֶי אֲלֵהֶם)’.”
bells reverberating into the future."\(^{50}\)

Even the covenant-making terminology employed here is more emphatic
than the more common OT nomenclature associated with making a covenant. As in
Genesis 6:18, God “establishes/causes to stand His covenant (יָשָׁב, ȳshav, יֵתַּבָּרֵךְ, yêtibarêḵ) or יִקְרָא, yiqra) to his covenant.”\(^{51}\)

The Recipients

The Noachic Covenant is the first covenant referenced in Scripture. Its first
mention is in Gen 6:18 where God reveals to Noah His intention to destroy
the whole earth. He includes instructions to build an ark, announcing to Noah that he
and his family would be spared—“But I will establish my covenant with you.” But
God actually enunciates the covenant pledge in Gen 9:8-17

In terms of recipients, it is the widest of all the covenants. The beneficia-
ries of this covenant encompass a wider group of recipients than the other major
covenants. Initially the covenant was established with Noah and with his descend-
ants after him (Gen 9:9). Obviously, since only Noah’s immediate family was
preserved through the flood, this covenant extended to all mankind who would
subsequently populate the earth. But then God enlarged the list to include “every
living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with
you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth” (Gen 9:10). And
lest there be any question as to the extent, He adds in v. 11: “and all flesh shall never
again be cut off by the water of the flood.” “The reason for such detail is to
make the divine concern for even the least of the creatures strongly apparent to
Noah.”\(^{52}\)

In v. 13, God expanded the recipient list even further to incorporate a third
element—the earth: “I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a
covenant between Me and the earth.” The earth had been “destroyed” (Gen 9:11).
A comparison with Genesis 8:21, where the Lord said, “I will never again curse
the ground on account of man,”\(^{53}\) indicates the extent of judgment suffered by the earth

\(^{50}\)Wenham, Genesis 1–15 1:195.
\(^{51}\)Cf. “Covenant Phraseology” above. In both cases here, the Hiphil (causative) stem is employed. In 6:18, however, the tense of the verb anticipates the covenant, while in 9:9 the present participle depicts its occurrence. Wenham prefers to translate the word “to confirm,” contending, “Whereas ‘to cut’ describes the point of entry to a covenant, ‘to confirm’ is used of ratifying pre-existing ‘covenants’” (Genesis 1–15 1:175). W. J. Dumbrell, Covenant and Creation (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1984) 20-33) seeks to garner support here with for a “covenant of creation,” while Wenham concludes that this “shows that Noah is viewed as already in a covenant relationship with God. He is not simply a perfectly righteous man; there is a covenant between him and God” (Genesis 1–15 1:175).


\(^{53}\)Wenham correctly asserts, “It is important to note the position of יָשָׁב in this sentence, coming after לְיָשָׁב to ‘curse,’ not after יָשָׁב ‘do again’ as in the parallel clause ‘Never again shall I smite.’ This shows that God is not lifting the curse on the ground pronounced in 3:17 for man’s disobedience, but promising not to add to it. The flood was a punishment over and above that decreed in 3:17. This is
when it was “laid waste” by the great flood. The earth, too, as a recipient of God’s wrath in this worldwide judgment, would receive divine assurances of “never again.” The cycle of seasons after catastrophic interruption would be permanently reestablished (Gen 8:22).

The Sign

As a sign of the covenant, God placed a rainbow in the cloud (Gen 9:13, 14, 16, 17). As with other covenant signs, this too was a repeatable evidence (cf. discussion above) of God’s promise to Noah. Strikingly, the sign itself incorporated an element of the judgment; it was taken from nature itself. While circumcision (Gen 17:11) and the Sabbath (Exod 31:13-17; Ezek 20:12, 20), as signs of a covenant, were intended to remind man of God’s covenant requirements, this sign is said to be for the purpose of reminding God (Gen 9:15, 16).

The use of the rainbow as a sign of the promise that the earth would not again be destroyed by a flood, according to Keil, “presupposes that it appeared then for the first time in the vault and clouds of heaven.” It is possible, however, that rainbows had appeared earlier and that now they were merely given covenantal significance.

The Promise

Two aspects stand preeminent in the promise made to Noah—the essence of the promise and the extent of the promise. God promises that “all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth” (Gen 9:11). Though the two phrases are essentially parallel, the former focuses more specifically on physical life (both human and animal) while the latter focuses on the destruction of the earth itself. Floods on a smaller scale may destroy many and cause considerable devastation, but never again will He permit worldwide destruction by means of a flood.

The promise is spoken of as an “everlasting covenant” (ם"ח יקנ, bêrît...
The covenant with Noah is the first of five divinely originated covenants in Scripture explicitly described as “everlasting.” The other four include the Abrahamic (Gen 17:7), Priestly (Num 25:10-13), Davidic (2 Sam 23:5), and the New (Jer 32:40). The Mosaic Covenant, though divinely initiated, is not described as everlasting.

Walton, Covenant 132.


Some view this covenant as a development of one specific aspect of the priestly legislation given in the Mosaic Covenant, lacking the same epoch-making character as the others mentioned above (e.g., Robertson, Christ of the Covenants 27).
woman, “in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel” (Num 25:6) into the tent, apparently to consummate the marriage.61

Seizing upon the occasion to carry out God’s command to kill all who had joined themselves to Baal of Peor (Num 25:5), Phinehas,62 a grandson of Aaron, rushed into the tent and executed both the man and the woman (Num 25:8).63 As a result, God instructed Moses with regard to the covenant He was making with Phinehas:

Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel, in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. Therefore say, “Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God, and made atonement for the sons of Israel” (Num 25:11-13).

The Terminology

Here, God tells Moses that He is “giving” (רָא, nōēn) the covenant (Num 25:12) to Phinehas. He has acted with the zeal of the Lord, staying the hand of God’s wrath—“the zeal of Phinehas restrained the zeal of the Lord to annihilate the nation.”64 Rather than a reward for zealous action, Allen views the covenant statement as more of a ratification. “In the case of Abram, God first chose him; then by Abram’s action of faith, the Lord confirmed his covenant with him (see Gen 12, 15, 22). In the case of Phinehas, he was already chosen by God; but in his action, God’s covenant with him is confirmed.”65

The text adds that his action “made atonement for the sons of Israel” (Num 25:13). As noted by the intensive form of the verb יָדַע (kpr, “to make substitutionary atonement”), “the atonement Phinehas had made was the sacrifice of two human

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61“Tent” (תֶּרֶן), used only in Num 25:8 in the OT, may have reference to the Tabernacle compound. Such an act was strictly forbidden by Levitical law and would have defiled the sanctuary. Harrison, however, believes it to be the innermost part of the family tent (R. K. Harrison, Numbers, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 1990] 338). Owens notes that among Bedouin it was a “little sacred tent of red leather in which the stone idols belonging to the tribe were carried” (J. J. Owens, “Numbers,” The Broadman Bible Commentary [Nashville: Broadman, 1970] 150). It is possibly connected to the Arabic al-kubbat, from which the English “alcove” is derived (N. H. Snaith, “Leviticus and Numbers,” The New Century Bible [London: Thomas Nelson, 1967] 303).

62Not to be confused with Eli’s son of the same name (1 Sam 1:3; 4:17).

63The language intimates that Phinehas drove his spear through the man’s torso into that of his partner (cf. Harrison, Numbers 338). That both intermarriage and idolatry were involved is strongly suggested in 1 Cor 10:6-8.


65Allen, “Numbers” 922.
offenders,” allowing the Lord to pardon His people and halt the spread of the plague (Num 25:8).

The Promise

First of all, the promise made with Phinehas is said to be a “covenant of peace” (Num 25:12). The Hebrew construction is unusual, making understanding difficult. It possibly denotes the peace made through Phinehas’ atoning action, causing the plague to be halted.67

The covenant given to Phinehas included his descendants (lit., “seed,” Num 25:13). God promised him and his descendants a perpetual (דַּעַת, ὀδακί) 68 priesthood, designating its enduring nature. Harrison notes, “The high priesthood promised continued among the Israelites, with the exception of an interval during the time of Eli (1 Sam 1-3; 14:3), until the final dissolution of the Jewish state in NT times.” 69 Harrison fails to note, however, that the genealogical line of Phinehas continues into the millennial kingdom through Zadok (cf. 1 Chr 6:50-53). Ezekiel indicates that the only priests permitted to minister in the millennial temple are those of the line of Zadok (44:15; 48:11). Non-Zadokian priests were prohibited from the priestly office because of past idolatrous activity (44:10).

The perpetual nature of the Priestly Covenant suggests that it should stand as a separate covenant and not a part of the Mosaic Covenant—on the basis of a number of factors. First, the terminology employed is similar to the covenants made with Noah, Abraham, David, and the New Covenant. As Allen observes of Phinehas: “He was a priest by divine right, being descended from the right family in an immediate line. He showed himself to be the rightful priest by his interest in divine righteousness. He is now confirmed priest by the rite of the divine covenant.” 70

Second, the fact that it remains when the Mosaic Covenant was rendered obsolete speaks even louder for its standing as a separate covenant. The Mosaic Covenant was abrogated by the New Covenant, but the promise given to Phinehas continues into the Millennium! Third, the language of Jer 33:20-21 places its permanence alongside the Davidic Covenant, contending that it remains in force as long as the cycle of day and night remains. “Thus says the Lord, ‘If you can break My covenant for the day, and My covenant for the night, so that day and night will not be at their appointed time, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levitical priests, My ministers’” (Jer 33:20-21, emphasis added). Feinberg concludes:

66Harrison, Numbers 339.
67Some have suggested emendation, changing the text to read “my covenant of requital” (Allen, “Numbers” 922).
68See earlier discussion under “The Promise” of the Noahic Covenant.
69Harrison, Numbers 339.
70Allen, “Numbers” 922.
This passage has been a *crux interpretum* for expositors. It is especially difficult for those who hold an amillennial position in eschatology. The only resort for them is in allegorization of the text or the use of a dual hermeneutic. Simply stated, the passage assures that just as the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7) is guaranteed by God’s promise, so is the Levitical priesthood. But whereas the amillennial system can find room for the Son of David to reign now and in the future by transferring the earthly throne to the heavenly one at the Father’s right hand, it is not so easy to find Levitical priests with their ministrations in the same framework.\(^7\)

Consequently, it appears best to give it its rightful place among the covenants with the others.

**CONCLUSION**

One’s ability to understand the Bible in particular and God’s dealings with humanity in general depends on how well he/she understands the biblical covenants. They are six in number: the Noahic, the Abrahamic, the Priestly, the Mosaic, the Davidic, and the New covenants. The Noahic Covenant pertained to all mankind, not just to Israel, and promised that God would never again destroy the world by flood. He sealed His promise with the continuing sign of a rainbow. The Priestly Covenant promised a perpetual priesthood to the descendants of Levi because of the righteous act of Phinehas in freeing Israel from the consequences of God’s wrath. That priesthood will continue throughout the future millennial kingdom under the rule of David’s descendant. The articles to follow in this issue of *The Master’s Seminary Journal* will detail the origin and implementation of the remainder of the biblical covenants.

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THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

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All admit the importance of the Abrahamic Covenant in understanding biblical revelation, but not all agree on its interpretation. Genesis 12 is a pivotal statement of the covenant because it contains God’s first recorded speech to Abraham. There God promises to make Abraham a great nation, to bless him, and to make his name great. Genesis 15 makes clear that the Lord took upon Himself alone the responsibility for fulfilling the covenant. Genesis 17 adds the revelation that the covenant would be everlasting. Genesis 18 and 22 restate terms of the covenant in connection with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the offering of Abraham’s son Isaac. Exodus through Deuteronomy describe the initial outworking of the Abrahamic Covenant. The elements of the covenant are threefold: making Abraham into a great nation, blessing Abraham personally, and blessing all nations in Abraham. The promises of the covenant are unconditional. The rest of the OT repeatedly refers back to God’s oath to Abraham in the Torah. The NT does the same by pointing out that Jesus Christ, Abraham’s seed, will make possible the final fulfillment of that covenant in the future.

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The importance of the Abrahamic Covenant for a proper understanding of the whole Bible is widely accepted. For example, dispensationalist John F. Walvoord writes,

It is recognized by all serious students of the Bible that the covenant with Abraham is one of the important and determinative revelations of Scripture. It furnishes the key to the entire Old Testament and reaches for its fulfillment into the New. In the controversy between premillenarians and amillenarians, the interpretation of this covenant more or less settles the entire argument. The analysis of its provisions and the character of their fulfillment set the mold for the entire body of Scriptural truth.

Covenantalist John Murray also emphasizes the importance of the Abrahamic Covenant when he states,

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1John F. Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Dunham, 1959) 139.
It is this Abrahamic covenant, so explicitly set forth in Gn. xv and xvii, that underlies the whole subsequent development of God’s redemptive promise, word, and action. . . . The redemptive grace of God in the highest and furthest reaches of its realization is the unfolding of the promise given to Abraham and therefore the unfolding of the Abrahamic covenant.2

All segments of evangelicalism recognize the importance of a proper understanding of this covenant. Interpretive decisions concerning it will determine one’s theological perspective. Therefore, it is imperative that every Bible student study the Abrahamic Covenant carefully. Paul R. House fittingly sums up the situation when he says of Gen 11:10–25:18, “Simply stated, then, it is hard to overstate this section’s importance in biblical literature and thus biblical theology.”3

Though widespread agreement exists about the importance of the Abrahamic Covenant, the same unanimity concerning its meaning does not prevail. William J. Dumbrell points out that “the material associated with the Abrahamic covenant is not . . . easy to systematize. Not only is it dispersed over different chapters but also it often seems repetitive in its presentation.”4 This difficulty has led to differing answers to such fundamental questions as (1) Did the Lord make one or two covenants with Abraham? (2) What are the basic provisions of the covenant? (3) Is the covenant unilateral or bilateral? (4) When are the differing provisions of the covenant fulfilled in the Bible? The following pages will address each of these questions.

With varying answers to the questions, the procedure adopted for studying the scriptural accounts of the Abrahamic Covenant is crucial. Dumbrell suggests a viable procedure that the present study adopts: “Careful evaluation of the accounts is required and particular matters relating to the order of the presentation of the material need to be discussed.”5 Therefore, the following discussion will follow the canonical order of biblical books. As a foundation for the study, first will come a careful evaluation of the revelation of the Abrahamic Covenant in the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy). Then will follow a survey of the remainder of OT references to the covenant. Finally, the study will summarize the NT revelation concerning this covenant.

**THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT IN THE TORAH**

**The Terms Used**

Before analyzing the Abrahamic Covenant in the Torah, it is necessary to

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5Ibid.

In contrast, the NT refers only five times to the Lord’s “covenant”: (διαθήκη, diathēkē) with Abraham (Luke 1:72; Acts 3:25; 7:8; Gal 3:17; 4:24). The preferred term is “promise” (ἐπαγγελία, epangélia), a term the LXX never uses in referring to the Abrahamic Covenant. “Promise” is used nineteen times with clear reference to the Lord’s word/promise to Abraham (Acts 7:17; Rom 4:13, 14, 16, 20; Gal 3:16, 17, 18, 21, 29; 4:23; Heb 7:6; 11:9, 13, 17).

NT usage raises the question about the relationship between the “promise” and the “covenant.” A close connection exists between the terms as evidenced by the phrase “the covenants of promise” (Eph 2:12). The Lord’s covenants with Israel include the “promise.” However, the “promise” and the “covenant” are not synonymous; Paul distinguishes the two entities in Rom 9:4. Hebrews 6:13-18, a passage dealing with God’s affirmation to Abraham, articulates the relationship between the two terms. The writer of Hebrews speaks of “two unchangeable things” in 6:18. The “two unchangeable things” in this context refer to (1) God’s word of

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4 Two evangelical OT scholars have written at length about the “promise” and “covenant” (“oath”) in the OT. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. (Toward an Old Testament Theology [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978] 32-35) views what the NT eventually calls “promise” as the center that binds various OT themes, concepts, and books together. A constellation of OT terms, formulae, and metaphors refers to the “promise.” According to Kaiser, over thirty times in the OT, the verb שָׁוָא (usually translated “to speak”) meant “to promise.” To these ‘promises’ God added His ‘pledge’ or ‘oath,’ thus making the immediate word of blessing and the future word of promise doubly secure. Men now had the divine word and a divine oath on top of that word (see Gen 22; 26:3; Deut 8:7; 1 Chron 16:15-18; Ps 105:9; Jer 11:5)” (33). He defends and expands this understanding in Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 83-95. Thomas Edward McComiskey (The Covenants of Promise [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985]) sees the “promise” as the basis of God’s gracious actions from the beginning of human history (190-91). “The promise comprises the heart of the biblical teaching regarding the people of God. . . . The promise thus provides a theological continuum that spans all time. . . . The promise was placed in the form of a covenant [Abrahamic] in Genesis 15 and continues in that form today” (58). For McCominsky, the “promise” is now in the “promissory covenants” of the Bible.

5 Andrew T. Lincoln (Ephesians, vol. 42 of Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas: Word, 1990] 137) states, “The only other place in the NT where the plural form ‘the covenants’ is found is Rom 9:4. . . . The writer probably has in mind a series of covenants with Abraham (Gen 15:7-21; 17:1-21), with Isaac (Gen 26:2-5), with Jacob (Gen 28:13-15), with Israel (Exod 24:1-8), and with David (2 Sam 7).” Contrary to Lincoln’s enumeration, the OT covenants that contain the “promise” are the Abrahamic (Gal 3:16), the Davidic (Acts 13:23), and the New (Acts 2:33; cf. Ezek 36:27).
promise (2) (guaranteed by) His covenant oath. 8

Thus, this essay will use the terms and phrases according to the following definitions: (1) promise—a declaration of the Lord’s intention to do something for Abraham and his seed; (2) covenant—the Lord’s binding obligation, confirmed by a culturally known practice including an oath, to do something for Abraham and his seed; (3) the Abrahamic Covenant—all that the Lord has declared and bound Himself to do for Abraham and his seed. 9 Because God cannot lie (Heb 6:18), all His declarations, including but not limited to those sworn by covenant oath, will certainly come to pass.

Exposition of the Abrahamic Covenant in the Torah

**Genesis 12.** Genesis 12:1-3 plays a pivotal role in the biblical narrative that records the Abrahamic Covenant. These verses contain the first recorded speech of the Lord to Abraham (here called by his former name, Abram, until his name-change in Gen 17:5; from that point on, Scripture uses the name Abraham to refer to this patriarch, except for 1 Chr 1:27, 32 and Neh 9:7). The Lord’s words here are foundational to all that follows in His dealings with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the sons of Israel in the remainder of the Torah. But the verses also link the Abraham narrative to what has been recorded in Gen 1:1–11:26.

The following based on the New American Standard Bible is a schematic of Gen 12:1-4a with footnotes that give reasons for exegetical decisions made in support of this rendering. 10 The observations made on these verses will then be the basis for the following discussion of the need for and the narrative concerning the Abrahamic Covenant.

Now the Lord said to Abram,

“Go forth11 from your land.

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9See also the definitions provided by Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., “Evidence from Genesis,” *A Case for Premilennialism*, ed. by Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody, 1992) 36. Chisholm notes that Gen 25:32-33 and 47:28-30 validate and illustrate the distinction between “promise” and “oath” in situations involving agreements among men. In both cases, promissory declarations were formally ratified and guaranteed through the swearing of an oath.

10See similar schematics of Genesis 12:1-3 in Chisholm, “Evidence from Genesis” 37 (based on the NIV), and Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* 64 (based on the RSV).

11The Hebrew has the verb in the imperative followed by a preposition with the pronominal suffix which would literally translate, “Go for yourself.” E. Kautzsch and A. E. Crowley (eds. Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar [GKC] [Oxford: Clarendon, 1970] 381 [Par. 119]) clarify this usage of the preposition as an ethical dative, subordinated to the verb, “to give emphasis to the significance of the occurrence in question for a particular subject” and would translate, “Go, get thee away.” Here, the LORD is calling Abraham to break himself away from what is specified in the following three phrases.
The Abrahamic Covenant      195

and from your relatives,¹²
and from your father’s house,
to the land which I will show you;
And¹³ I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And I will make your name;
And so you shall be a blessing;¹⁴
And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who slights you I will curse;
And all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you.”¹⁵

¹²The Hebrew term בֵּית הַנָּחָר can refer to either “birthplace” or “relatives” (Paul R. Gilchrist, “môlemet,” Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament [TWOT], ed. by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke [Chicago: Moody, 1980] 1:379-80). Although either meaning would make sense here, unless the expression is a hendiadys (“land” plus “birthplace” equals “land of birth”) which is unlikely because there are three coordinate phrases, môlemet most likely means “relatives,” those in Abraham’s extended family outside of his father Terah’s direct authority, particularly Abraham’s uncles’ families (Nahor’s sons other than Terah in Gen 11:25).

¹³Based on GKC 320 (Par. 108d), Chisholm (“Evidence from Genesis” 37) interprets the three cohortatives, since they follow the imperative “go” and are introduced with “and,” to express purpose or result; he translates, “Leave . . . so that I might. . . .” However, Gordon J. Wenham (Genesis 1–15, vol 1 of Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas: Word, 1987] 266) points out that this grammatical construction can also convey intention, yielding the translation “Go . . . and I will. . . .” On the basis of Abraham’s obedience, the LORD intends to do what He declares to/for Abraham.

¹⁴The form of the verb “to be” is here an imperative. H. C. Leupold (Exposition of Genesis [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1949] 1:412-13) argues that this imperative places a responsibility on Abraham. Though it is God who will make Abraham a blessing to others, “he should do his part that he may become a blessing to others.” However, GKC 325 (Par. 110f) states, “The imperative, when depending (with וַיִּשַׁלָּח yow was, yow yad) upon a jussive (cohortative), or an interrogative sentence, frequently expresses also a consequence which is to be expected with certainty, and often a consequence which is intended, or in fact an intention.” Thus, the Lord intends to “make . . . bless . . . make great” Abraham with the certain consequence that Abraham “shall be a blessing.” After arguing that the Hebrew text should not be emended, but the imperative form kept, Victor P. Hamilton (The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 369-70, 373) concludes, “Here the first imperative states the exhortation, and the second imperative touches on the results which are brought about by the implementation of the first imperative [he cites Gen 17:1; 1 Kgs 22:6; 2 Kgs 5:13; Isa 36:16 as exampless]. Applied to Gen 12:1-2, this construction means that the first imperative, go, is related as effect to cause to this second imperative, be. Abram cannot be a blessing if he stays in Haran. But if he leaves, then a blessing he will be.”

¹⁵The verb “bless” is in the Niphal stem here (and Gen 18:18; 28:14). The most common use of the Niphal is passive (GKC 138 [Par. 51f, b]), which yields the meaning here “through you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” But GKC, 138 [Par. 51h] also states, “Although the passive use of Niphal was introduced at an early period, and became tolerable common, it is nevertheless quite secondary to the reflexive use.” Since it is argued that the original sense of the Niphal was reflexive, although the common use was passive, the question has arisen as to how to understand the Niphal here. Because the verb “bless” is found in the Hithpael stem in Gen 22:18; 26:4 (and the Hithpael is primarily used reflexively [GKC 149 (Par. 54c)]), the Niphal in 12:3 has been understood as reflexive also, which leads to the translation, “by you shall all the families of the earth bless themselves” (RSV). On the basis
So Abram went as the LORD had spoken to him. . . .

The need for the Abrahamic Covenant emerges in Gen 12:1-3. Five times the verses use the Hebrew root מָרָכָה (maraḵ, “to bless”). Further, the LORD promises Abraham, “I will make great your name.” Significantly, both “blessing” and “name” appear repeatedly in Gen 1:1–11:26.

God’s word of blessing expresses His favor and desired good that leads to the fertility, prosperity, protection, and preservation of the one(s) blessed. “That which is blessed functions and produces at the optimum level, fulfilling its divinely designated purpose.”16 At creation, God blessed the man and the woman (Gen 1:28-30; 5:2). God’s blessing called for the multiplication of mankind who would subdue and rule over the earth. After the flood, God blessed Noah and his sons in a similar way, calling on them to multiply and exercise authority over the earth (Gen 9:1-7). The involvement of both God and Adam in naming the animals (Gen 2:19-20; cf. 1:28; 9:2) implies that mankind’s exercise of authority was to be with and for God.17

However, instead of retaining God’s favor and exercising authority on His behalf, man rebelled against the Creator who blessed him (Gen 3:1-7; 4:1-24). Instead of experiencing all of God’s blessing, God’s “curse” fell upon mankind (Gen 3:17; 4:11; 5:29).18 Just before the flood this rebellion produced “men of renown,” literally, “men of a name” (Gen 6:4). These “men of a name” were the offspring of the sexual union of “the sons of God” and the “the daughters of men.”19 The text depicts them as ancient warriors who had established their reputation or fame (the implication of the term דַּעַת [daʿat, “name”]) apart from God. After the judgment of the flood, mankind once again rebelled against God. Although God had

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17“...and to have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Genesis 1:26

18Mankind continued to experience the blessing (i.e., fertility) from God in multiplication (Gen 5:1-32; 10:1-32). However, mankind’s ability to rule over the earth was compromised because God placed a “curse” on the ground (Gen 3:17). תַּעֲנָן (“to curse”) means “to bind, hem in with obstacles, render powerless to resist.” The clause “cursed is the ground because of you” means “condemned be the soil (i.e., fertility to man is banned) on your account.” See Victor P. Hamilton, “תַּעֲנָן,” TWOT 1:75-76.

19For discussion of the differing viewpoints concerning the meaning of “the sons of God” in Gen 6:2, 4, see Wenham, Genesis 1–15 139-40.

directed mankind to populate all the earth (Gen 9:1; 11:4), men came together saying, “Let us make for ourselves a name” (Gen 11:4). Again, אֵלַי has the connotation of reputation or fame apart from God.21 God judged mankind through the confusion of languages, not by a flood as previously because of the provisions of the covenant with Noah (Gen 11:7-8; cf. 9:8-17).

The Lord’s determination to bless mankind leads to the narrative concerning the Abrahamic Covenant. The foundation of the Abrahamic Covenant is in the promises declared by the Lord to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17. As stated above, Gen 12:1-3 is pivotal because it stated the essential features of the Lord’s promises to Abraham that would be developed in the ensuing narrative.

The first clause of the Lord’s speech to Abraham is the command to leave his “land” and go to the “land” that the Lord would show him (Gen 12:1). According to the genealogical record of the sons of Noah, the “nations” (אָנָנָיִם, gôyîm) were divided according to their “lands” (Gen 10:5, 20, 31, 32). By leaving his “land,” Abraham would in essence be leaving his nation. “From your relatives” and “from your father’s house” in this verse further confirms this understanding. According to Genesis 10, common ancestry was the basis of national identity. Thus, the Lord called Abraham to renounce his identification with the nations who were in rebellion against Him. The promises of God to Abraham (12:2-3) were contingent on Abraham’s obedience to the Lord’s command.

In response to his obedience, the Lord promised Abraham three things in three clauses with the cohortative verbs.22 First, He declared, “I will make you a great nation” (12:2a). By Abraham’s renouncing of his national identity, He promised to make him the progenitor of a nation like the men listed in Genesis 10. But this nation would be distinct from all previous nations, because her ancestor is not an immediate descendent of Noah (ten generations separated Noah and Abraham [Gen 11:10-26]). In calling this nation “great,” God referred to a large population, a large territory, and a wise character (cf. Gen 12:7; 13:14-17; Deut 4:7-8).23 Second, the Lord stated, “I will bless you” (12:2b). He promised Abraham personal favor from Himself, which would be manifest in fertility and prosperity. Third, He promised, “I will make great your name” (12:2c). What men had sought by human effort, a “name” (Gen 6:4; 11:4), the Lord will give to Abraham. The OT usually reserves this “great” reputation for God (Josh 7:9; 1 Sam 12:22; Ps 76:2; Mal 1:11), along with kings (2 Sam 7:9; Ps 72:17).24 Abraham would have an exalted status and authority. Once Abraham comes into the land the Lord would show him, these

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21Ibid.

22“The cohortative expresses the direction of the will to an action . . . , a resolution or a wish . . .” (GKC, 130 [Par. 48c]). The cohortative gives the sense in Gen 12:2 of “I will certainly . . .”


promises of the Lord are certain. 25

The next clause (12:2d) states the Lord's intention in fulfilling these promises for Abraham. “Abraham is to be a great nation, be personally blessed, and receive a great name ‘so that [he] might be a blessing.’ But to whom? And how was Abraham to be a blessing? Those questions appear to be answered in the next three clauses.” 26 The verb in the first clause of v. 3 is a cohortative. The Lord will certainly show favor (“bless”) to those who are favorable (“bless”) to Abraham. However, in the second clause of v. 3 the one who slights 27 Abraham the Lord will curse. 28

The climax of God’s first speech to Abraham comes in the third clause of v. 3. Again the verb is bārak (“bless”). 29 In the future, “all the families of the earth will be blessed in Abraham.” In Gen 18:18, 22:18, and 26:5, the term gōyim is used. But here, the Lord uses the term āḇerō∅ (“families”). These families are subunits who make up the nations. 30 According to Gen 10:32, the genealogy given in that chapter details “the families of the sons of Noah.” The Lord affirms here to Abraham that those listed in Genesis 10 are the very ones who would receive blessing in him. “Not every individual is promised blessing in Abram [i.e., ‘the one

25Chisholm (“Evidence from Genesis” 38) argues that the Lord’s promises of Gen 12:2-3 do not become unconditional even though he acknowledges that Abraham obeyed the only specific condition (moving to Canaan) that the Lord had commanded. The basis of his argument is that the God’s oaths recorded in 22:16-18 and 26:3-5 note other instances of Abraham’s obedience. Thus he concludes, “This implies that the journey to Canaan was only the first in a series of obedient responses leading up to the eventual ratification of the promises made in Haran.” Though it is true that Abraham will be obedient to other commands from the Lord in the future, the grammar is clear in 12:1-3 (note GKC 320 [Par. 108d] that says the cohortative in dependence on an imperative expresses an intention or intended consequence): on the basis of Abraham’s obedience to the Lord’s command in leaving Ur and Haran and coming to Canaan, He will certainly fulfill the promises He makes to Abraham; Abraham’s further obedience is not stated here as a contingency to the Lord’s faithfulness to His promises.

26Kaiser, Toward an Old Testament Theology 87.

27The term לָשׁוּנָה ("to curse") has the implication "of intending a lowered position, technically, to curse" (Leonard I. Coppes, לָשׁוּנָה: TWOT 2:800). The term here refers to the one who “slights” Abraham by not recognizing the exalted, blessed position given to him by the Lord.

28The verb “will curse” is here in the imperfect, not the cohortative. However, as GKC 317 [Par. 107n] notes, the imperfect when referring to future time can sometimes be used in place of the cohortative. The use of the imperfect here does not necessarily connote any sense of conditionality to the Lord’s intended determination. The one who slights Abraham, the Lord will curse (for the meaning of “curse,” see n. 18 above).

29The verb is a ṣāw consecutive perfect, which here again denotes the sense of a future determination (see GKC 132-3 [Par. 49a], “a series of future events...is continued in the perfect.”). In contrast, Kaiser (Toward an Old Testament Theology 87) states, “This time the Hebrew verb shifts suddenly to the ‘perfect tense’ in what again can only be a result clause: ‘So that in you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”

30"Family"... is a grouping intermediate between a tribe and a father’s house” (Wenham, Genesis 1–15 278). However, Robert H. O’Connell ("Family," NIDOTTE 2:1141) states that the term “families” is synonymous with “nations” here.
who curses you’] but every major group in the world will be blessed.”
Thus, the promise is that the one in whom some of the earth’s rebellious inhabitants will be blessed from that point on is Abraham.

Genesis 12:4-6 clearly depicts the obedience of Abraham to God’s command. The Lord had said “go” (גָּו, hālak) (12:1), and Abraham “went” (hālak) as the Lord had told him to (12:4). When Abraham came into the land of Canaan, the Lord gave a further promise to him, “To your seed I will give this land” (12:7). The land then occupied by the Canaanites was to be the land where the nation made up of Abraham’s descendants would live. Later, according to Gen 13:17, the Lord commanded Abraham to walk throughout the land because He would certainly give it to him.32 “The command ‘walk to and fro’ . . . throughout the land probably represents a symbolic appropriation of the land.”33 Abraham’s obedience, not explicitly stated in this text (note Gen 15:6), would demonstrate his faith in God’s promise to give the land to him and his innumerable “seed”34 (Gen 13:15-16).

**Genesis 15.** Genesis 15:1-21 records the Lord’s next communication to Abraham. Significantly, this chapter emphasizes the “seed” and the “land” (cf. Gen 12:7; 13:14-17) and describes the making of the Lord’s “covenant” with Abraham (15:18). The chapter contains a parallelism that may be charted as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>first scene</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>second scene</th>
<th>v. 1</th>
<th>The Lord’s Word to Abraham</th>
<th>v. 7</th>
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<tr>
<td>vv. 2-3</td>
<td>Abraham’s Questioning the Lord</td>
<td>v. 8</td>
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<td>vv. 4-5</td>
<td>The Lord’s Assurance to Abraham</td>
<td>vv. 9-21</td>
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<tr>
<td>v. 6, Abraham’s Faith in the Lord and Consequent Righteousness</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Both of these incidents conclude at night (15:5, 17). The text does not indicate the

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31Wenham, Gen 1–15 278.
32The cohortative is used here to again connote future certainty (see n. 22 above).
33Wenham, Genesis 1–15 298.
34The term יָרָא (“seed”) has a prominent place in the Lord’s promise to Abraham. This noun is used 224 times in the OT and can mean 1. seedtime; 2. seed (that is scattered); 3. semen; and 4. offspring. The last sense is that used here. In this theological usage, “thus the word designates the whole line of descendants as a unit, yet it is deliberately flexible enough to denote either one person who epitomizes the whole group (i.e. the man of promise and ultimately Christ), or the many persons in the whole line of natural and/or spiritual descendants” (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “YR,” TWOT 1:252-53).
time sequence of the two encounters or the timing of what precedes (Abraham’s victory over the kings of the East) and what follows (the conception and birth of Ishmael). Textually, verse six acts as a hinge between the scenes.

In the first scene (15:1-5), the main subject is Abraham’s “seed.” God seeks to encourage Abraham in his fear by affirming that his reward would be very great (15:1). Abraham responds by questioning Him about the validity of the reward because he is childless (“You have given no ‘seed’ to me”) and Eliezer is his heir (15:2-3). The Lord assures Abraham that his heir would not be Eliezer, but one born naturally to him. He then assures him that his “seed will be more numerous than the stars in the heavens” (15:4-5; cf. 13:16). He promises Abraham again what He is going to do in the future; the “seed” promise is as certain as the reliability of God.

Genesis 15:6 breaks the narrative pattern. John H. Sailhamer observes, “The syntax . . . suggests that this is a comment within the narrative and is not to be understood as an event within the framework of the other events of the narrative.”

The author of the text, Moses, affirms that Abraham responded to God’s promise of innumerable seed with faith. But more than this one occurrence is in view; Moses is confirming that Abraham’s past pattern was one of faith in the Lord’s promises as seen in his repeated obedience (cf. Gen 12:1-4, 7; 13:14-18). On the basis of Abraham’s faith, the Lord reckons him as righteous. He recognizes Abraham as His loyal servant with whom He will enter into covenant.

Genesis 15:7-21 recounts God’s making of the covenant with Abraham. The emphasis in this section shifts to the “land” promised by the Lord to Abraham’s “seed.” He encourages Abraham with the fact that He had brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give him the land of Canaan as his inheritance (15:7). The root יָרָשׁ (yāraš, “to inherit”) connects the “land” with the “heir” (from yāraš) in verses 3 and

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35In 15:5, the imperfect tense is used in the divine promise, “so shall be your seed” (see n. 28 above).


37Based on GKC, 339 (Par. 112ss), Wenham (Genesis 1–15, 329) states “The verbal form (waw + perfect) ‘he believed’ probably indicates repeated or continuing action. Faith was Abram’s normal response to the Lord’s words.”

38Righteousness (“righteousness”) is derived from a root which “connotes conformity to an ethical or moral standard.” (Harold G. Stigers, “Righteous,” TWOT 2:752-55). Chisholm (“Evidence from Genesis” 40) writes that יִרְשָׁא in Gen 15:6 appears to have “the nuance of ‘loyal, rewardable behavior.’ . . . Abraham’s response is followed by a formal ceremony in which God rewards his faith.”

39“Like the royal grants in the Ancient Near East, so also the covenants with Abraham and David are gifts bestowed upon individuals who excelled in loyally serving their masters” (M. Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” JAOS 90 [1970]:185). Sailhamer (“Genesis” 129) describes the relationship between Abraham’s “faith” and “righteousness” and God’s “covenant” in these words: “God was about to enter a ‘covenant’ with Abraham that would lay at the base of all of God’s future dealings with him and his seed (vv. 7-21). Verse 6 opens the scene by setting the record straight: Abraham had believed in Yahweh and had been accounted ‘righteous.’ The ‘covenant’ did not make him ‘righteous’: rather it was through his ‘faith’ that he was reckoned righteous. Only after he had been counted righteous through faith could Abraham enter into God’s covenant.”
4. Thus, the inheritance to be given to Abraham’s “seed” refers primarily to the “land.” Abraham then questions the Lord as to how he can know that he shall inherit the “land” (15:8). In response to Abraham’s question, God gives assurance by entering into a covenant with him (15:9-21).40

The covenant ceremony begins with the familiar pattern of the Lord’s command and Abraham’s faithful obedience (cf. Gen 12:1, 4; 13:17; 15:5, 6). The Lord commands Abraham to take to Him certain animals. Abraham obediently complies, cutting and laying some of the animals opposite each other (but not the birds) and protecting all the dead animals from scavenging birds (15:9-11). The text implies that Abraham knew the ritual to take place41 because God does not explicitly state what he is to do with these animals. He only commands Abraham to “take” (15:9), but Abraham “took,” “cut in two,” and “laid” (15:10). Abraham seems to understand what the animals signify: the Lord’s assurance to Abraham would come through a binding “covenant” in which both He and Abraham would swear to fulfill certain obligations to each other, recognizing that death would be the certain consequence of their failure to accomplish their binding commitment faithfully.42

However, this particular “covenant” is not a mutually binding obligation. A deep sleep (cf. Gen 2:21) falls upon Abraham and only the Lord, represented by a smoking oven and a flaming torch, passes between the animals (15:12, 17). He binds Himself through the “covenant” to give Abraham’s “seed” the “land” described by its general borders and present occupants (15:18-21). However, this land grant will take place only after Abraham’s “seed” has endured oppression in another “land” and the Lord has judged that nation. Then He will give Abraham’s “seed” the “land” He has promised (Gen 12:7, 13:15), and now covenanted, to give. His promise is certain because He cannot lie; His covenant is certain because He

40The most common expression for establishing a covenant is “to cut a covenant” (Gen 15:18). Other terms expressing the establishing of a covenant are “to give a covenant” (Gen 9:12; 17:2) and “to erect a covenant” (Gen 6:18; 9:9, 11; 17:7, 10, 19). See M. Weinfeld, “’בַּרְכָּה,” Theological Dictionary of Old Testament [TDOT], ed. by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgen, trans. by John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 2:259-60.


42Hess (“The Slaughter of the Animals in Genesis 15: Genesis 15:8-21 and Its Ancient Near East Context” 62-63) notes, “It is not clear that Genesis 15 intends to imply a substitutionary element. Nowhere is there the implication that God accepts the possibility of being torn in two if the promise to Abraham is not kept. . . . Nor is it clear that there is a transformation of the rite which somehow results in the curse being applied to anyone who interferes with the divine promise. . . . Instead, the common element found in each case is that the life of each of the animals has been taken away. The implication of this is that God’s own divine life forms the surety for the promise.”

43
cannot die! He answers Abraham’s questions about his “seed” and “inheritance.”

**Genesis 17.** When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared (cf. Gen 12:7) to him and spoke about the “covenant” (bērît occurs 13 times in Gen 17:1-21). The structure of Gen 17:1-21 forms around the speeches of God. Victor P. Hamilton explains,

> There are no less than five speeches of God to Abraham: I, vv. 1-2; II, vv. 3-8; III, vv. 9-14; IV, vv. 15-16; V, vv. 19-21 . . . . In three of these speeches (nos. II, IV, V), the focus is on God’s commitment to bless. In the remaining two (nos. I, III), the focus is on God’s expectations of Abraham. The major speech by God to Abraham about Abraham’s need to take appropriate action (vv. 9-14) is ringed by speeches of God’s promises to Abraham (vv. 3-8 and 15-21), showing that the demands of God must be interpreted within the context of the promises of God.

The following schematic portrays the first speech (17:1-2), which is a summary of and introduction to what follows and is crucial to the interpretation of the segment.

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old,  
The Lord appeared to Abram,  
And said to him,  
“I am God Almighty;  
Walk before Me,  
and you will be blameless.  
So that I will give my covenant between Me and you,  
And I will multiply you exceedingly.”

Here the Lord identifies Himself to Abraham as “God Almighty” (יהוה, ēl šadday, cf. Gen 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; Exod 6:3). “The context for most of

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43 Hamilton (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* 438) concludes, “Nothing, however, in this chapter is imposed on Abram. He is free of any obligation. The only imposition or obligation that Yahweh lays upon anybody is upon himself, and that is the obligation to implement his promise of descendants, and especially of land, to Abram and to his descendants.”


45 This verb is in the imperative mood. While the imperative can express mere admonitions or requests, its usual usage is to express real commands (see GKC 324 [Par. 110a]).

46 “Be” is also in the imperative mood. GKC 324-25 (Par. 110f) states, “The imperative in logical dependence upon a preceding imperative . . . serves to express the distinct assurance or promise that an action or state will ensue as a certain consequence of a previous action.” Here, the first imperative “walk” contains the condition, while the second “be” declares the consequence which obedience to the condition will bring.

47 The cohortatives “give” and “multiply” following the imperative “walk” express purpose or result (see GKC 320 [Par. 108d]).
these references is the covenant, more precisely the commandment for obedience and faithfulness on the part of the vassal and the promise of progeny by God." As the powerful God, the Lord can fulfill His promise to Abraham to "multiply you exceedingly" (cf. Gen 13:16; 15:5). But the powerful God demands submission on the part of His loyal servant; thus, He commands Abraham to "walk before" Himself. The result of Abraham’s obedience would be a "blameless" standing in the presence of God (cf. Gen 6:9; 2 Sam 22:24; Job 1:1; 2:3, 9).

The consequence or result of Abraham’s obedience will be the giving of a covenant between "God Almighty" and Abraham. "To give a covenant" is usually used in the context of the establishment of a covenant (Gen 9:12; Num 25:12). However, the Lord had already initiated His covenant with Abraham in Gen 15:18. Therefore, this covenant is either a second covenant the Lord makes with Abraham or a further confirmation and ratification of the covenant made previously. As Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. notes,

In the writing of a compact history, as the Old Testament, it would hardly be necessary to reproduce a treaty text with all of its formal parts. This was not done in the extrabiblical historical texts, nor is it the common practice of modern historians. . . . It may be better to speak of "component parts of a covenant" when discussing the treaty as found in historical texts. This is certainly the case with the covenant with Abraham.

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48Victor P. Hamilton, ""'YH.'" TWOT 2:907. Hamilton (The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17 463) describes the usage of "'God Almighty': "’The same name occurs in other patriarchal stories, always in connection with Jacob. . . . In five of the six places in Genesis where El Shaddai is used, the name is followed by the promise of posterity. . . . And three times (28:3; 43:3; 49:25) the activity of El Shaddai is described with the verb bärak, ‘bless.’"

49"’The expression walk in front of . . . usually expresses the service or devotion of a faithful servant to his king, be the latter human (1K. 1:2; 10:8; Jer 52:12) or divine . . .’” (Hamilton, Genesis: Chapters 1–17 461). The same expression is used in Gen 24:40; 48:15.

50The fundamental idea of the term דוד ה ("blameless") is completeness. "It represents the divine standard for man’s attainment" (J. Barton Payne, "DOD", TWOT 2:973-74).

51T. Desmond Alexander (From Paradise to the Promise Land: An Introduction to the Main Themes of the Pentateuch [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998] 52-54) lists three differences between the covenant of chapter 17 and the one in chapter 15: (1) it is a conditional covenant; (2) it is an eternal covenant; (3) it focuses primarily on Abraham as the father of many nations instead of on his descendants and land. See also McComiskey, The Covenants of Promise 146-50, who sees the covenant of circumcision as an administrative covenant separate from the promise covenant of Gen 15:7-21 and 17:2-8. Sailhamer’s ("Genesis" 138) conclusion is that "the two covenants [are], in fact, two distinct aspects of God’s covenant with Abraham—the one stressing the promise of the land (15:18-21) and the other stressing the promise of a great abundance of descendants (17:2),”


Thus, here Moses seems to be recounting component parts of the Lord’s one covenant with Abraham, particularly: (1) the obedience of Abraham and his “seed” necessary for the experience of the covenantal blessings (17:1, 9-14); (2) the self-obligation of the Lord to multiply Abraham’s descendants who will occupy the land of Canaan (17:2, 4-8a); (3) the self-obligation of the Lord to be the God of Abraham’s “seed” (17:8b); (4) the sign of the covenant being circumcision (17:11); and (5) Isaac (and his descendants) being the recipient and avenue of covenantal fulfillment (17:15-21). Further, the Lord calls the covenant “everlasting”54 in Gen 17:7, 13, 19.

As in Gen 12:4, this passage portrays Abraham as obedient to the Lord’s commands. “God Almighty” commands Abraham to “walk before” Him (17:1) and Abraham “falls on his face” (17:4), a gesture of the loyal submission commanded by God. On the basis of Abraham’s obedience, the Lord affirms that “My covenant is with” Abraham. Later, the Lord calls for Abraham to circumcise every male of his household (17:10, 12-13). The text again affirms Abraham’s obedience (17:23). Circumcision55 is the “sign” of the Lord’s “everlasting” covenant with Abraham, one that will endure into the far distant future (17:9-13). Significantly, the one in future generations not circumcised “shall be cut off from his people,” that is, be expelled from the community that will experience the blessings of this “everlasting” covenant (17:14).

With the ceremony recorded in Gen 15:7-21 and the sign given in Gen 17:1-21, the Abrahamic Covenant is finalized. This covenant binds the Lord to fulfill the promises He has made to Abraham in Gen 12:1–15:5. Two further statements of God recorded in the Abraham narratives (Gen 18:17-19; 22:15-18) confirm that He is committed to fulfill His covenant obligations to Abraham.

**Genesis 18.** Before His destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20–19:29), He appears with two angels to Abraham to assure him that Sarah would have his son within a year (Gen 18:1-15; cf. 17:15-21). The text also reveals His thinking that leads Him to reveal to Abraham what He is about to do to the two cities (Gen 18:17-1955). He makes it clear that Abraham will certainly become a

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54« вековечный » ("everlasting") has the basic meaning "most distant times." The term can be used in reference to the past (Gen 6:4) or as here to the future. The term in itself does not contain the idea of endlessness, but a far distant past or future. (See Allan A. MacRae, "TWOT" 2:672-63.)

55"Circumcision is called both 'My covenant' (v. 10) and a mark (or sign, 'œ) of the covenant (v. 11). The designation of circumcision itself as a covenant is a synecdoche for covenantal obligation: 'This is [the aspect of] my covenant you must keep.' . . . Circumcision is a means by which Abraham and his seed ratify God’s lordship over them. It is their identity sign as God’s covenant people” (Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17 470-72).

56Chisholm ("Evidence from Genesis" 45) explains, “Though future generations were obligated to observe the rite (cf. 17:11-13), their failure in this regard would jeopardize only their personal participation in the promised blessings, not the oath itself.”

57For a grammatical analysis of Gen 18:17-19, see Wenham, Genesis 16–50 34, 37.
“great and populous nation” (cf. Gen 12:2a) and “all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him” (cf. Gen 12:3b). The future fulfillment of these promises is stated as a divine certainty (Gen 18:18). Although the future fulfillment is a surety, the fulfillment is contingent on the descendants of Abraham “keeping the way of the Lord” (Gen 18:19).

**Genesis 22.** The LORD’s final recorded verbal communication to Abraham is in Gen 22:15-18. These words follow Abraham’s obedience to God’s test, seen in his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac (22:1-14). On the basis of Abraham’s obedience the LORD reafirms by oath His commitment to both bless Abraham and multiply his “seed” [in this context, definitely the corporate physical progeny of Abraham] (22:16-17a). Further, He affirms that “your ‘seed’ shall possess the gate of his enemies ['ôyêb']” (22:17b). The ‘seed’ in this context could also have its plural sense, pointing forward to Israel’s conquest of the land of Canaan. However, as T. Desmond Alexander points out,

Ultimately, according to Gen 49:8, it will be Judah, particularly the final ruler from Judah (49:10), whose “hand shall be on the neck of your enemies [the only other use of ‘ôyêb in Genesis].” He will be the one whom the peoples will obey and who will lavish blessing to all (49:10-11). Truly, “all nations of the earth will gain blessing for themselves” (22:18) through obedience to “the lion from the tribe of Judah” (Rev 5:5). Therefore, it seems best to understand the “seed” in Gen 22:17b and 18 in the singular; the final fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant comes through

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58Sailhamer (“Genesis” 149) remarks, “Here the intention is directed internally (‘to keep the way of the Lord’) with the end in view that Abraham and his descendants do ‘what is right and just.’ Only then will the Lord fulfill what he had promised Abraham. . . . The notion of an internalized obedience found in this verse is remarkably close to the terms of the ‘new covenant’ found in the prophetic literature [Jer 31:33].”


60Representative of this understanding is Wenham, Genesis 16–50 112. He cites Gen 24:60 as a parallel passage; however, although the “seed” here is clearly plural in sense, the term “enemies” is not used.

61Alexander, From Paradise to the Promised Land 40. “Royal lineage” refers to the unique family line that starts with Adam and continues through the sons of Jacob, anticipating the royal dynasty that will arise from the descendants of Judah (6-18).

62See the discussion of Gen 49:8-12 in Sailhamer, “Genesis” 276-77.

63The verb stem is in the hithpael, indicating a reflexive meaning (see n. 15 above).
Abraham’s “seed,” the king of the sons of Israel from the line of Judah. All of this is certain because Abraham obeyed God’s voice (22:18).

After the death of Abraham, the next time the biblical text used the term בְּרִית to refer to the Abrahamic Covenant it speaks of “His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Exod 2:24). The LORD reaffirmed the promises He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He recognized Isaac and Jacob as recipients of His covenant commitment because of His choice of them among Abraham’s progeny (Gen 17:19, 21; 25:23; 27:27-29). He commanded Isaac to obey Him so that he would receive the blessings already assured to come to fruition because of Abraham’s faithful obedience (Gen 26:2-5). When Isaac faced trials after his obedience, He reaffirmed His intention to bless him for the sake of Abraham (Gen 26:24). Likewise, the Lord promised Jacob personal blessing [His presence and protection] and a large progeny that would become a great nation and inherit the “land” (Gen 28:14-15; 35:10-12; 46:2-40). The narrative of Genesis concludes with Joseph’s confession of confidence in the God’s faithfulness to His covenant oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen 50:24-25; cf. Josh 24:32).

**Exodus through Deuteronomy.** The experience of the nation of Israel recorded in Exodus through Deuteronomy is an initial outworking of the promises the Lord gave to Abraham. First, the children of Jacob/Israel grew into a great nation in Egypt in accordance with the Abrahamic Covenant. God had promised to make Jacob a great nation in Egypt (Gen 46:3). Later, Pharaoh confessed, “Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we” (Exod 1:9). Two of the terms used to describe this growth in Exod 1:7, “bear fruit” (cf. Gen 17:6) and “multiply” (cf. Gen 17:2), echo the LORD’s covenant commitment to Abraham. In a similar way, Balaam’s words concerning the people of Israel in Num 23:10, “count” and “dust” (cf. Gen 13:16) recall the LORD’s promise to Abraham.

Second, the LORD delivered the nation from bondage in Egypt in accordance with the Abrahamic Covenant. In Gen 15:13-14, the LORD told Abraham that his “seed” would “serve” another nation and be “oppressed,” but He promised to judge that nation and have his “seed” “come out” from her. Later, Israel was “afflicted” by (Exod 1:11-12; same term as “oppressed” in Gen 15:13) and “served” (Exod 2:23 [“bondage” in NASB]; cf. Gen 15:13, 14) Pharaoh and the Egyptians. But God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and “brought them out” of Egypt (Exod 3:10; 6:6; 12:41; 13:4; 14:8; 18:1; 20:2; cf. Gen 15:14).

Third, Israel was to inherit the land of the Canaanites in accordance with the Abrahamic Covenant. The LORD multiplied the sons of Israel and brought them out of Egypt so that they might occupy the land He promised to Abraham (Exod 3:8; 6:4, 8; cf. Gen 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:8). The Torah closes with an anticipation of a fulfillment of this promise to Abraham in the conquest of the land under Joshua in the near future (Deut 31:1-8). However, the Torah predicts that Israel would forfeit the land because of disobedience and be scattered among the
nations (Deut 29:22-28). In the distant future, after the scattering (Deut 4:30-31), the Lord will return repentant Israel to the land in accordance with His covenant with Abraham (Lev 26:40-45).

Fourth, sinful Israel’s continuance as a nation is a result of the Lord’s mercy extended to her in accordance with the Abrahamic Covenant. At Mount Sinai, Israel practiced idolatry with a golden calf, provoking God’s anger (Exod 32:1-10; cf. 20:4-6). The Lord would have destroyed Israel, but He did not because of His covenant commitment to Abraham (Exod 32:11-14).

Fifth, the blessings of the Lord promised to Israel in the Mosaic Covenant are in accordance with the Abrahamic Covenant. William D. Barrick aptly notes,

> The blessings recited in Leviticus 26:4-12 are at least in part a fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham. Those blessings fall into six categories:

- productivity (vv. 4-5; cf. Gen 24:35; 27:28; 30:43)
- peace (v. 6; cf. Gen 22:17)
- power (v. 7-8; cf. Gen 22:17)
- population (v. 9; cf. Gen 12:2; 15:5; 17:6)
- provision (v. 10; cf. productivity, above), and
- presence (vv. 11-12; cf. Gen 17:7-8).

All these blessings were associated with the land that Israel would receive from Yahweh. They are consistent with various statements and restatements of the Abrahamic Covenant.  

This exposition of the Torah demonstrates the vital role the Abrahamic Covenant played in God’s dealings with Abraham and Israel: Gen 1:1–11:26 anticipates, Gen 11:27–50:26 elucidates, and Exod 1:1–Deuteronomy 34:12 substantiates the Abrahamic Covenant.

### Elements of the Abrahamic Covenant

Because of the many statements of promise given by the Lord to the patriarchs, a question concerning the number and content of these promises has

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64Deuteronomy 4:30 uses the phrase “end of the days,” one of four usages in the Torah. At the phrase’s first usage, Gen 49:1, Sallamah (“Genesis” 275) explains, “The same expression occurs in the Pentateuch as an introduction to two other poetic discourses, the oracles of Balaam (Num 24:14-24) and the last words of Moses (Deut. 31:29). On all three occasions the subject matter introduced by the phrase ‘in days to come’ is that of God’s future deliverance of his chosen people. At the center of that deliverance stands a king (Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:7; Deut. 33:5). In Genesis 49 that king is connected with the house of Judah.”

arisen. The predominant viewpoint is that the Lord’s promises to Abraham can be grouped into three main categories: (1) land; (2) seed; and (3) blessing. An alternate, threefold grouping proposes the promises as: (1) national; (2) personal; and (3) universal. This final grouping of the promises seems to emerge most naturally from the foundational text (Gen 12:1-3), with further explanation in later texts (Gen 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; 18:17-19; 22:15-18; 26:2-5, 24; 28:13-15; 35:10-12; 46:2-4).

First, the Lord promised to make Abraham into a great nation. This is the first promise given in Gen 12:2, being reiterated in 18:18 and 46:3. Ishmael, as a son of Abraham, will also become a great nation (Gen 17:20; 21:18), but the great nation of the Lord’s covenant will come through Isaac (Gen 17:19, 21; 26:3-4) and Jacob/Israel (Gen 28:13-14; 35:11; 46:3).

People coming from a common ancestor inhabiting a particular land (Gen 10:5, 20, 31-32) comprise a nation. Thus, if Abraham is to be a great nation, he must have numerous offspring who will occupy a certain land. Accordingly, the Lord promised Abraham a multitude of descendants (Gen 13:16; 15:5; 17:2, 4-6; 22:17a) who would receive the land of Canaan (Gen 13:14-15, 17; 15:18-21; 17:8). The Lord’s word to Abraham when he first came to the land of the Canaanites summarized this promise: “To your seed I will give this land” (Gen 12:7). He reiterated the promise of numerous descendants who would receive the land promised to Isaac (Gen 26:4) and Jacob/Israel (Gen 28:13-14; 35:11-12).

Second, the Lord promised to bless Abraham personally (Gen 12:2). He showed His favor to Abraham in His provision of livestock (Gen 13:2), victory in battle (Gen 14:1-24), and sons (Gen 16:15; 21:22-3; 25:1-4). The following statement comes toward the end of the narrative of Abraham’s life: “The Lord had blessed Abraham in every way” (Gen 24:1). The Lord also gave a promise of personal blessing to Isaac (Gen 26:3) and Jacob/Israel (Gen 28:15).

Third, the Lord promised to bless all the nations (families) of the earth in Abraham (Gen 12:3). Even though the Lord called Abraham (Gen 12:2) and all his descendants (Gen 18:18-19) to be a blessing to the nations, the ultimate fulfillment...
of this promise is stated to be the singular “seed” of Abraham (Gen 22:18). Again, God repeated this promise of universal blessing to Isaac (Gen 26:4) and Jacob/Israel (Gen 28:14).

Nature of the Abrahamic Covenant

During the last century, the most discussed issue concerning the Abrahamic Covenant has been its nature. Paul N. Benware introduces this topic with the following words:

Probably the most significant issue related to the Abrahamic covenant has to do with its nature. Is it a conditional (bilateral) covenant or an unconditional (unilateral) covenant? How one answers that question determines the framework of one’s prophetic studies.

In the biblical text God placed definite indications of obligation on Abraham. First, He gave commands to Abraham on a number of occasions in Genesis (“go,” 12:1; “arise and walk to and fro,” 13:17; “look and count,” 15:5; “take,” 15:9; “walk,” 17:1; “take,” 22:2). Second, He obligated Abraham and his “seed” to submit to circumcision in order to participate in the covenant (Gen 17:9-14). Third, He said He would fulfill His promises to Abraham because of Abraham’s obedience (Gen 22:18; 26:5). These considerations seem to point to the Abrahamic Covenant as essentially conditional in nature, a bilateral (i.e., obligations placed on two parties) relationship where the LORD only obligated Himself to fulfill His promises if the response was human obedience.

However, the biblical text also has strong indications of unconditionality. First, the LORD made promises to Abraham whose only human contingencies were clearly stated as being met (Gen 12:1, 4; 17:1, 3). Thus, the present obligation rests solely upon Him to do what He has promised. Second, in the covenant-making ceremony, only God walked through the animals (Gen 15:17). Although He and Abraham were both parties to the covenant, the covenant was unilateral in the sense that He obligated only Himself to fulfill His commitments. Third, the promises (Gen 13:15) and covenant (Gen 17:7-8, 13, 19) were called “everlasting.” The fulfillment lies far into the future and thus rests upon the LORD alone for realization. These considerations seem to point to the conclusion that the Abrahamic Covenant is essentially unconditional in nature, a unilateral (i.e., obligations undertaken by only one party) relationship where only the LORD has bound Himself to fulfill His

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69 See n. 61 above.

70 Paul N. Benware, Understanding End Times Prophecy (Chicago: Moody, 1995) 34.

promises to Abraham.\textsuperscript{72}

Differing understandings of the biblical affirmations of divine commitment and human obligation in reference to the Abrahamic Covenant have arisen. First, some assert that human obedience is necessary for the fulfillment of the covenant. Without this obedience, God is not obligated to fulfill His promises.\textsuperscript{73} Second, some declare that no human obedience is required for the instituting or the fulfillment of the covenant.\textsuperscript{74} Third, some state that the Abrahamic promises were originally unconditional, but were understood as conditional in later Israelite history.\textsuperscript{75} Fourth, some aver that the Lord made two covenants with Abraham, one unconditional (Gen 15:17-21) and one conditional (Gen 17:1-21).\textsuperscript{76} Fifth, a consensus is growing that the promises the Lord bound Himself to fulfill in the Abrahamic Covenant are unconditional, but the timing of and participants in that fulfillment are conditioned by faith-produced human obedience. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. writes,

In our judgment, the conditionality was not attached to the promise but only to the participants who would benefit from these abiding promises. . . . The duty of obedience (law, if you wish) was intimately tied up with promise as a desired sequel.\textsuperscript{77}

This fifth viewpoint accords with all the biblical data.\textsuperscript{78}

\textbf{THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT IN THE REMAINDER OF THE OLD TESTAMENT}

The remainder of the OT, from Joshua on, contains few specific references to the Abrahamic Covenant. However, Psalms 105 and 106 are reminders that the Abrahamic Covenant lies behind all that the God did for Israel in the past and provides the foundation for Israel’s hope for what He will do in the future.

In Psalm 105, the Lord is praised for His loyalty to His covenant with

\textsuperscript{72}Victor P. Hamilton ("Genesis: Theology of," \textit{NIDOTTE} 4:668) notes, "Nowhere does God ever add a conditional if clause to any promises he makes to Abraham or Jacob that suggests that obedience or faithfulness is a sine qua non for the fulfillment of that promise."

\textsuperscript{73}E.g., Oswald T. Allis, \textit{Prophecy and the Church} (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945) 31-36, 56-58.

\textsuperscript{74}E.g., Clarence E. Mason, Jr., \textit{Prophetic Problems} (Chicago: Moody, 1973) 27-42.

\textsuperscript{75}E.g., Weinfeld, \“יִתְנָה\” 270-72.

\textsuperscript{76}E.g., Alexander, \textit{From Paradise to the Promised Land} 51-54.


\textsuperscript{78}See nn. 43, 56, and 58 above.
The Abrahamic Covenant

The Abrahamic Covenant is a central theme in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, God established a covenant with Abraham, promising him and his descendants land, prosperity, and blessing. In the New Testament, Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of this covenant, bringing salvation to Israel and the nations. The Abrahamic Covenant in the New Testament is explored through the coming of Jesus as the Christ, His fulfillment of His promises to Abraham, and the NT's view of national Israelites as the descendants of Abraham.
“seed” of Abraham does not guarantee experiencing the future blessings associated with the promises to Abraham (Matt 8:11; Luke 13:28). An Israelite must come to faith leading to repentance to experience the Lord’s deliverance and blessing (Acts 3:19-26). Nevertheless, the NT does affirm that the present remnant of faithful Israelites is an indication that the Lord will in the future deliver “all Israel” and bless her in accordance with the Abrahamic Covenant (Rom 11:1-32).

Third, the NT calls Gentile believers “the seed of Abraham” because of their union with Jesus Christ, “the Seed of Abraham” (Gal 3:6-29). Jesus as the Christ is the “Seed” who brings the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant to Israel and the Gentiles (Gal 3:16; cf. Gen 22:17b-18). The church today experiences in Christ some spiritual benefits that Israel and the nations will experience (with physical results) in the future when Jesus implements fully the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. The NT, like the Old, views the complete fulfillment of the Lord’s promises to Abraham as a future event (Matt 8:11; Acts 3:19-26; Rom 11:25-32).

CONCLUSION

The Abrahamic Covenant undergirds the totality of the biblical revelation. Specifically elucidated in Genesis, its promises govern the pattern of all that follows in Exodus to Revelation. On the basis of Abraham’s faithful obedience, the Lord gave Abraham many promises. Ultimately, He bound Himself by covenant to bring to pass what He had promised Abraham. The Scriptures, from Exodus to Revelation, continually speak of one covenant between the Lord and Abraham. This covenant promises Abraham personal, national, and universal blessings. Because He based this covenant on Himself alone, the final fulfillment of the promises to Abraham have no human conditions. However, the faithful obedience of man determines the participants in and timing of its final fulfillment. Although Abraham experienced personal blessings from the Lord in the past and some Israelites and Gentiles enjoy spiritual blessings at present, the full and final fulfillment of the covenant, particularly the “great nation” promises, await the future coming of Jesus Christ.
THE MOSAIC COVENANT

William D. Barrick
Professor of Old Testament

The Mosaic Law is one of six covenants that God made with Israel, all six of which have five concepts in common: their authority resides in Him, they all came at a time of crisis, no covenant nullifies a previous one, salvation from sin is not obtained by keeping any covenant, and significant negative events followed the instigation of each. The theological context of the Mosaic Covenant is Israel’s election by grace and the redemptive context God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The content of the covenant follows the pattern of the ancient suzerainty treaty. The covenant was the most conditional of all the covenants, and like all the covenants, it promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. The covenant addressed itself to Israel and Israel alone with its divinely authoritative rules that stipulated standards of righteousness. No one can justly separate the moral, civil, and ceremonial parts of the Law from each other; it is a unit. The Law has no authority over Christians because it has been fulfilled by the death of Christ.

* * * *

Divine revelation is saturated with pertinent theological pericopes. The pericope containing the Mosaic Covenant is a very important OT passage. Exodus 19–24 had a significant impact on the writers of both the OT and the NT:

There is no way to describe adequately the canonical implications of Exodus 19–24. Everyone from Moses (Deut 5:6-21), to Jeremiah (Jer 7:1-15), to Jesus (Mt 5–7), to Peter (1 Pet 2:9), and every other biblical writer who has anything to say about covenant, morality and relationship to God reflects directly or indirectly on this passage.¹

¹Paul R. House, Old Testament Theology (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998) 117.
Paul House’s declaration is seconded by William Bellshaw and William Dumbrell in their respective works on biblical covenants. Theologian and preacher alike should not neglect the study and proclamation of God’s revelation in the Mosaic Covenant. It is part and parcel of “the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27). By way of introduction, one must consider the identity, nature, and interrelationships of the biblical covenants.

Introduction

The pages of the OT identify six covenants having been made with the nation of Israel: the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Priestly, the Deuteronomic, the Davidic, and the New.

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...
Covenants’ Source

Theologians have tended to attribute to each covenant either a conditional or an unconditional nature. That which is conditional from a limited human perspective, however, might not be conditional from the divine perspective, so the issue is debatable. Undoubtedly God unilaterally and unconditionally proscribed and promulgated the terms or stipulations of all six biblical covenants. Man had no significant choice in their wording. The covenants were not the product of human wheeling and dealing—they were imposed and enforced by a sovereign God. Ultimately, all covenantal promises will be fulfilled.

The alleged conditional elements . . . never threatened the constituent nature of these covenants, nor did they add any stipulations to them. . . . [T]here was a duty of obedience, which was intimately tied up with promise as its only rightful outcome and sequel, but in no case could it be shown that the promising elements themselves were prior to the promise or were placed in jeopardy by human disobedience.

Covenant Concepts

To understand the Mosaic Covenant, one must keep in mind a number of general concepts concerning biblical covenants. Firstly, all biblical covenants were promulgated by the divine Suzerain on behalf of His vassal-people. The authority of the covenants resides in Him and Him alone—He is Lord. Secondly, the covenants appear to have been promulgated at times of crisis or change when God’s people were upon the threshold of the unknown. The Abrahamic Covenant was established following Abram’s departure from Ur. The Mosaic Covenant came on the heels of Israel’s departure from Egypt. Immediately following the forty years of wilderness wandering and just prior to Israel’s entry into Canaan the Priestly and the Deuteronomic covenants were promulgated. The ending of the ark’s “exile” among the Philistines appears to have been the catalyst for the Davidic Covenant. Lastly,
the New Covenant was revealed at the time of the greatest disruption for Israel, the Babylonian exile.
Due to the limitations of this particular study, the elements represented in this chart will not be discussed. The chart is offered as a catalyst for further studies by the reader. As with all such charts, a certain degree of oversimplification is present.

Specifically, the descendants of Eleazar were separated from the descendants of Ithamar.

See Table 2. The plan and will of God is progressive in its development. God leads His people along step by step through the different circumstances and stages of history. He graciously provides them with the revelation they need to face the changing face of history. A simple example of progressive revelation can be seen in the divinely appointed diets of His people. Adam and Eve were given a vegetarian diet in the Garden of Eden, forbidden one fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-17). When they disobeyed, God removed them from Eden and eliminated the fruit of the tree of life from their diet (3:22-24). After the flood, God added meat to the diets of Noah and his descendants (9:3-4). In the Mosaic Covenant God eliminated the flesh of certain animals from the Israelites’ diet (Lev 11; Deut 14:3-21). In the NT the Mosaic legislation’s limitations were revoked, restoring the post-flood diet (Acts 10:9-16; 1 Tim 4:3-5). God deals differently with His people in different periods of time because He has a different purpose for them in the progressive development of His plan of redemption.

Thirdly, no covenant superseded or nullified any previous covenant (cf. Gal 3:17-19). Each covenant advanced the previous without abrogating it. This is part and parcel of the process of progressive revelation. Thus, when the Mosaic Covenant was established at Mt. Sinai, it did not nullify the Abrahamic Covenant.

Table 1. Contextual & Theological Elements Related to Israelite Covenants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE ISRAELITE COVENANTS</th>
<th>ABRAHAMIC</th>
<th>MOSAIC</th>
<th>PRIESTLY</th>
<th>DEUTERONOMIC</th>
<th>DAVIDIC</th>
<th>NEW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>From Ur &amp; from Idolatry</td>
<td>From Egypt</td>
<td>From Levites</td>
<td>From the Wilderness</td>
<td>From Israel &amp; Judah</td>
<td>From Sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God’s Possession</td>
<td>The Hebrews</td>
<td>The Israelites</td>
<td>The Zadokites</td>
<td>The Israelites</td>
<td>The Davidites</td>
<td>The Israelites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>Command to Leave</td>
<td>Torah</td>
<td>Torah</td>
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<td>Torah</td>
<td>Torah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Near Application</td>
<td>Descendants of Abraham</td>
<td>National &amp; Individual</td>
<td>Descendants of Phinehas</td>
<td>National &amp; Individual</td>
<td>Descendants of David</td>
<td>National &amp; Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distant Fulfillment</td>
<td>Messianic Kingdom</td>
<td>Messianic Kingdom</td>
<td>Messianic Kingdom</td>
<td>Messianic Kingdom</td>
<td>Messianic Kingdom</td>
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</table>

14Due to the limitations of this particular study, the elements represented in this chart will not be discussed. The chart is offered as a catalyst for further studies by the reader. As with all such charts, a certain degree of oversimplification is present.

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The apostle Paul made this point emphatically in Gal 3:17: “the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate (ἀκυροί, akyroí) a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify (καταργήσαι, katargēsai) the promise.” Why was the Mosaic Covenant given to Israel if it did not nullify the Abrahamic? Paul responded, “Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made” (v. 19). Many have used Heb 8:13 as evidence for abrogation at this point. That passage, however, does not say that the older covenant would be nullified or abrogated, but that it would become obsolete, old-fashioned, or outdated (πεπαλαιώκεν, pepalaiôken).\(^\text{17}\) Each covenant “is a part of a single, unified program of revelation. The enactment or primacy of one does not mean the nullification\(^\text{18}\) of any previous covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant initiated the major revelatory themes of the biblical covenants. Each subsequent covenant focused on one or more of those themes, providing further development of those themes pertinent to the times in which the recipients were living.\(^\text{19}\)

Fourthly, no Israelite was ever saved from his or her sins by obedience to any covenant. Covenantal revelation instructed believers in matters of practical godliness—how they were to live with each other and how they were to serve Yahweh. Fifthly, significant events involving individual or national apostasy and divine judgment seem to have followed in the wake of each covenant promulgation.\(^\text{20}\)

Lastly, God always demonstrated His faithfulness in spite of His covenanted

\(^{17}\)The next clause in Heb 8:13 (τὸ δὲ παλαιώμενον καὶ γηράσκον ἐγγὺς ἀφανισμοῖ = “and what is outdated and aged is about to vanish”) does not define the covenant. “Covenant” in Greek is a feminine noun (διαθήκη—thus, the use of the feminine adjective καινή, “new”). The neuter participle and adjective in the follow-up clause refer to the levitical system of sacrifices centered in the Temple, which was still in existence at the time Hebrews was written (cf. present tenses in 5:1-4; 7:21, 23, 27-28; 8:3-5, 13; 9:6-9, 13, 25; 10:1, 3-4, 8, 11; 13:10-11). That system was outmoded and would very soon vanish when the Temple itself was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. The Mosaic Covenant is not what will vanish—the levitical sacrificial system and the Temple will vanish.

\(^{18}\)Walton, Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan 49.

\(^{19}\)See Table 2 on next page.

\(^{20}\)Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands in a misguided attempt to produce descendants who could inherit the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 16). Israel’s idolatry in the golden calf incident occurred even while Moses was on the mountain receiving the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant from Yahweh (Exodus 32). Achan’s sin came soon after the Deuteronomic Covenant (Josh 7:10-26). David’s adulterous relationship with Bathsheba in all its sordid details and tragic outcome followed the revelation of the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 11-12). Jeremiah 32-44 chronicle a number of instances of disobedience and rebellion against the Word of God following the promulgation of the New Covenant. In a variation of the other covenants’ order of apostasy, the Priestly Covenant was given after the Israelite apostasy at Peor and the divinely appointed plague that slew 24,000 Israelites. Yahweh established the covenant with Phinehas, the priest who had brought an end to the plague by killing a couple who were openly participating in the cultic prostitution and immorality associated with Baal worship at Peor.
people’s unfaithfulness.
Table 2. Thematic Progression in Israelite Covenants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES</th>
<th>ABRAHAMIC</th>
<th>MOSAIC</th>
<th>PRIESTLY</th>
<th>DEUTERONOMIC</th>
<th>DAVIDIC</th>
<th>NEW</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Land</td>
<td>Land</td>
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<tr>
<td>BLESSING (Spiritual)</td>
<td>Blessing (Spiritual &amp; Material)</td>
<td>Blessing (Material)</td>
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The Context of the Mosaic Covenant

The covenant at Sinai marked the beginning of a new era in the history of God’s people. It marked the next stage in the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises. By its revelation spiritual vassals were instructed in their duties. Salvation, however, was obtained only by faith. The Mosaic Covenant’s theological and redemptive contexts must be examined carefully if the reader is to understand rightly its relationship to salvation.

The Theological Context: Worshiping God

Long before the exodus from Egypt, God had revealed to Moses that the nation’s experience at Mount Sinai would be primarily an exercise in worship: “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain” (Exod 3:12). Israel entered the Mosaic Covenant during, through,

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21Upper-case themes (e.g., NATION) are major features within their pericopes; lower-case themes (e.g., Nation) are secondary features within their pericopes.

22It might be objected that Deut 27–30 does not give any description of the promised land in the way that Gen 15:18-21 does. However, the blessings and curses of the Deuteronomic Covenant are very closely tied to the land by means of their emphasis upon the fruit of the land (cf. Deut 28:3, 4, 8, 11, 12, 16, 21, 23, 24, 33, 52, 63; 29:27-28).
and for the purpose of worship.23 At Sinai the covenant reinforced the necessity of worshiping Yahweh (Exod 23:25; Deut 10:20). Unbelievers cannot participate in true worship since they have no relationship to the object of worship, God (cf. John 4:24).

It is obvious that the covenant was not to be the means of salvation. Participants in the covenant at Sinai were already worshipers of Yahweh. The works specified in the covenant’s stipulations were never designed to bring anyone into a salvific relationship to God.24 The stipulations were designed to enhance the believer’s worship and service.25 Obedience to the laws of Moses would bring blessings to God’s people, but not salvation from sin (cf. Rom 3:20). Indeed, the worship at Sinai was motivated by a salvation that had already been experienced. “The distinctive characteristic of the Mosaic covenant is its setting of God’s laws regulating Israel’s life in the framework of a theology of the election of Israel by grace.”26

**The Redemptive Context: Deliverance from Egypt**

While Israel was still in bondage in Egypt, Yahweh announced that He cared for them and would deliver them: “I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt. . . . I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exod 3:16-17). They were already His people and He was already their God.

Yahweh’s love was manifested in the way He brought Israel from Egypt to
Mount Sinai: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself” (Exod 19:4). Israel’s redemption was occasioned by God’s love, mercy, and grace (Deut 4:37; 7:7-9; 10:15). He redeemed them before He entered the covenant with them at Sinai. Any claim that the covenant needed to be kept in order for someone to be saved from sin denies the theological and redemptive contexts of the Mosaic Covenant historically.

The Content of the Mosaic Covenant

In order to interpret and apply the content of the Mosaic Covenant correctly, one must first understand the biblical arrangement of the covenant. Then the conditional (or unconditional) nature of the covenant must be defined. Having accomplished these two steps, the reader needs to identify the participants in the covenant: For whom was the covenant intended? Next, he/she must handle the question of expectations: What are the legally binding stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant? Are the stipulations a unit, or should they be divided into three different categories? Lastly, the issue of legacy demands attention: What relationship do Christians have to the Mosaic Covenant?

Suzerainty Treaty Pattern

When God revealed the Mosaic Covenant to Israel, He chose to accommodate the form of the revelation to a format with which they were familiar.28 In the ancient Near East a conquering king would often promulgate a covenant (i.e., a treaty) governing the lives of his new subjects. Such covenants exhibited a variety of patterns, but generally paralleled each other in their structures. Theologians have noted a similar structure in the Mosaic Covenant (see Table 3).

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28The propriety of treating the Law of Moses as a covenant has been ably defended by Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., “The Covenant with Moses and Its Historical Setting,” JETS 14/3 (1971):141-46. The relationship between the secular treaties and the biblical covenants is such that Kitchen commented, “[T]he happy confluence of law and treaty in their most developed second millennium form” (K. A. Kitchen, The Bible in Its World: The Bible and Archaeology Today [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1977] 83 [emphasis in the original]).
The Mosaic Covenant

Table 3. The Mosaic Covenant’s Format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>John J. Davis⁴⁹</th>
<th>Paul R. House⁵⁰</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preamble</td>
<td>Exod 19:3</td>
<td>Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Prologue</td>
<td>Exod 19:4</td>
<td>Historical Prologue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statement of</td>
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<td>General Principles</td>
<td>Exod 19:5a</td>
<td>Stipulations</td>
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<td>Reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blessings</td>
<td>Exod 19:5b-6</td>
<td>Blessings &amp; Curses</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Exod 23:20-23</td>
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Davis and House both compare the content of the Mosaic Covenant with the normal format of ancient near eastern suzerainty (unilateral) treaties. Their formatings differ primarily in identifying the specific pericope containing the covenant. Perhaps a combination of their views would be nearer a correct division of the covenant’s structure. One must also remember that the biblical covenants may not have followed the secular treaties completely.⁵¹ With these two factors in mind, the following outline is offered for the reader’s consideration:⁵²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exod 19:1-4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical Prologue</td>
<td>Exod 19:1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preamble</td>
<td>Exod 19:5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stipulations</td>
<td>Exod 20:3–23:19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provision for Reading</td>
<td>Exod 24:4-7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blessings &amp; Curses</td>
<td>Exod 23:20-23</td>
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**Conditionality**

On the surface it appears that the Mosaic Covenant was conditional. After

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all, the text does declare, “[I]f you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then...” In addition, conditionality might be argued from Israel’s willing submission to God in the implementation of the covenant (Exod 24:7). However, the mere existence of conditionality in some portion of a covenant does not necessarily mean that it is the dominant characteristic of that covenant. Just as emphatically, one could affirm the theological certainties involved in the Mosaic Covenant:

In the end, however, all that is in question is whether God will be revealed through Israel’s faithful reflection of him, or whether he will reveal himself through his discipline of Israel’s unfaithfulness... God’s self-revelation will be accomplished through Israel, one way or another.34

Over forty years ago, Chester Woodring made the same observation in his doctoral dissertation at Dallas Theological Seminary:

It was impossible that the law should conflict with grace or hold it back. It is true that gross disobedience of the Mosaic covenant as well as blatant unbelief did in effect suspend temporal and local enjoyment of covenant blessings. Still the overall providential grace of God was unaffected. On the higher divine plane, whatever discipline fell upon His people came from the hands of Jehovah as a discipline of grace. When concrete manifestations of grace were thus suspended, it was possible to reverse the situation by repentance, confession, and supplication on the ground of immutable divine grace alone apart from any merit of the law.35

It is true that the Mosaic Covenant was the most conditional of all the biblical covenants. Of all the covenants, it dealt specifically with how the people of God should live. The fulfillment of the promises and blessings of any of the covenants for any particular individual or generation was dependent upon their obedience to God’s revelation. Disobedience annulled the blessings of God for that individual or generation in his/her/its own time, but disobedience did not invalidate the unconditional terms of the covenant.36

33Such a conclusion would be akin to describing the KJV as a paraphrastic translation of the Bible on the basis of its rendering of Ps 68:13 (Hebrew, 68:14), or describing the Living Bible as a literal translation on the basis of its translation of Romans 1.
34Walton, Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan 100 (emphasis in the original).
36Even though Israel today is not behaving as a holy nation and a kingdom of priests, a generation of Israelites will yet do so in accordance with God’s irrevocable promise. The same observation applies to the Abrahamic Covenant and its ultimate fulfillment. Cf. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Toward an Old Testament Theology (Grand Rapids: Academic Books/Zondervan, 1978) 157: “The ‘breaking’ or conditionality can only refer to personal and individual invalidation of the benefits of the covenant, but
Israel’s Disobedient Nature. Conditionality, therefore, seems to be related more to the nature of Israel than to the nature of the covenant or the divine Promulgator. Israel’s nature was sinful. They were prone to stray from God’s will and God’s Word. The Law provided a spiritual hedge to keep them from becoming like all the nations around them.

Paul had written to the Galatians that the Law was “added because of transgressions” (Gal 3:19). Yahweh knew His people well. He knew their propensity for sin—the existence of their sinful nature. In the light of that knowledge, God instructed Moses to teach the Israelites a song that would remind Israel of their ineradicable sinfulness and their persistent straying after idols (Deut 31:19-21; chap. 32). He also reminded them that the Law had been given to them as a hedge to keep them from straying (32:44-47; cf. Ps 119:9, 104).37

Blessings and Curses. The following elements characterize the Abrahamic Covenant: (1) its promissory tone, (2) emphasis on divine fulfillment, and (3) references to land, prosperity, and blessing and/or cursing. On the other hand, the Mosaic Covenant is characterized by (1) its legal tone, (2) emphasis on human responsibility, and (3) references to sabbath, sanctuary, and divine sovereignty. The legal revelation is equal in authority to the older promissory revelation. In order to receive the promised blessings contained in the Abrahamic Covenant, Israel would have to obey the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, obedience to the Mosaic Covenant would be the means by which the Israelites would manifest their faith in the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Jas 2:14-26). The nation did not need to keep the Law to be freed from their bondage; they were freed from their bondage that they might live for God in the midst of the crooked and perverse Gentile nations.38

The curses and blessings found in the second through the fifth commandments (Exod 20:4-12) as well as in the more extensive catalogs of cursing and blessing (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27–28) are clearly conditioned upon individual and national obedience.39 Those are distinct from the unconditional blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant.

The Ten Commandments were not a totally new revelation; they were a fresh restatement of some of the key principles of godly living which God’s people

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38“To aid the young nation recently released by centuries of bondage into the privileges and responsibilities of freedom, God gave His law” (Kaiser, Toward an Old Testament Theology 114).

had come to accept as the divine will. In actuality, “most, if not all, of its basic precepts can be inferred from the creation and patriarchal narratives, and they strongly reinforce the morality of creation.”\footnote{Allan M. Harman, “Decalogue (Ten Commandments),” New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 4:519. Cf., also, Kaiser, “God’s Promise Plan and His Gracious Law,” 299-300.}

The law was but a prescription for obedience in a particular period of Israel’s history.\footnote{Thomas E. McComiskey, The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 73.} Israel’s obedience to the Law, however, was no guarantee that they would inherit the land promised to Abraham’s descendants. Rather, the Law preserved and protected the people for that inheritance.\footnote{Ibid., 75.} One result of Israel’s continued obedience would be preservation from experiencing the same kind of plagues that Yahweh had brought upon the Egyptians (Exod 15:26). It was Abraham’s obedience to the pre-Mosaic commandments of Yahweh that guaranteed the land for his descendants (Gen 26:4-5). In a sense, the descendants of Abraham were credited with Abraham’s faith and obedience (cf. Heb 7:9-10).

**National Identity—Particularistic**

Undoubtedly God established the Mosaic Covenant with the Israelites who were at Mt. Sinai. The very focus of the covenant was the formation of a nation through whom the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant could be mediated. The plural second person in Exodus 19:4-6 referred to those individual Israelites who were gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai.\footnote{By contrast, the utilization of the singular “son” in Exod 4:22-23 and the singular second person in parts of the Torah referred to corporate Israel collectively. Cf. Kaiser, Toward an Old Testament Theology 101. See also Eugene H. Merrill, Deuteronomy, vol. 4 in The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) 162, 383.} Both covenants were particularistic—the former identified an individual and his descendants, the latter identified a national entity composed of those descendants.\footnote{J. Barton Payne, The Theology of the Older Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962) 100.} Denial of particularism in the Mosaic Covenant leads to hermeneutical suicide. No passage says it clearer than Psalm 147: “He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation” (emphasis added).

The three descriptions of Israel in the preamble (Exod 19:5-6) were the result of the promises revealed in the Abrahamic Covenant and are particularistic in their meaning.\footnote{House, Old Testament Theology 110.} “My own possession” referred to the fact that God had chosen...
Abraham’s descendants to be the recipients of blessing and also to be the channel for blessings upon all peoples (cf. Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). Through one particular nation all peoples would be blessed. Before Israel agreed to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Exod 24:7), God had already declared that they would be His people, His precious possession. That special divine choice of a single nation was not predicated upon their obedience (cf. Deut 7:6-11).

“A kingdom of priests” identified Israel as the priestly mediator of God’s revelation for other peoples. McComiskey observed that “the only major aspect of the promise not given prominence in the Mosaic covenant is the extension of divine favor to Gentiles.” However, although the covenant’s immediate vassals were Israelites, the Gentiles were not being neglected. Yahweh revealed that the nation of Israel would serve as a community of mediatorial priests whose responsibilities included teaching the Torah (including the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant; Gen 12:3; cf. Isa 56:6-8). Psalm 114:1-2 provided the Scripture’s own description of “a kingdom of priests”: “When Israel went forth from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language, Judah became His sanctuary, Israel, His dominion.”

The third phrase defined Israel as “a holy nation.” All priests must be holy in order to serve the holy God. This was first of all a description of their character before God: they were set apart to His service and were to be separated from anything that would defile them and hinder their divinely appointed service. Secondly, however, it is a confirmation of the particularistic nature of the covenant. The Mosaic Covenant was promulgated and ratified with but one nation: Israel. “It is essential to recognize this national element in defining the relationship between Israel and the church.” That national particularism was carried over from the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:2; Ps 147:19-20).

Legislation contained in the Mosaic Covenant encouraged a serious mindset regarding submission to the Lord. It also produced humility because of Israel’s unworthiness to be the special people of God, the chosen people (cf. Deut 7:6-11). Right behavior (one of the aspects of holiness) was the means by which Israel would be a witness to other nations (cf. Lev 19:2). They were to agree with Yahweh’s own

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46 This is the first use of “kingdom” in the OT.

47 McComiskey, The Covenants of Promise 70. McComiskey recognized that the “paucity of emphasis on Gentile blessing in the Mosaic covenant does not imply the abrogation of that element of the promise” (71).

48 Teaching the Torah was a priestly duty (cf. Lev 10:11; 16:29; 18:26; Num 15:14-16; Deut 17:9-11; 33:8-10; 2 Chron 15:3).

49 E.g., because of Joseph (a descendant of Abraham), blessing came upon his Egyptian master (Gen 39:5).

declaration that He brought them out of Egypt so that He might be their God (Lev 26:45). Mosaic legislation marked Israel as the people belonging to Yahweh, who had delivered them from Egypt.

Disobedience to the sovereign Lord would result in the removal of covenant blessings associated with the Mosaic Covenant. When Yahweh sent Israel into exile to chastise them for their continual rebellion, the following aspects of the Mosaic Covenant were rendered inoperable:

(1) Though previously a people above all the nations (Exod 19:5; Deut 26:18-19), Israel was abhorrned by Yahweh and treated as the tail of all the nations (Lev 26:30; Deut 28:43-44). Placing disobedient Israel under a curse made it appear as though they were no longer Yahweh’s treasured possession.

(2) The kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6) had become ceremonially unclean and their sacrifices unacceptable (Lev 26:31). They were unfit to serve as priests of God.

(3) The holy nation of Israel (Exod 19:6) was burdened with guilt (Lev 26:39) and characterized by an uncircumcised pagan heart (v. 41). They were unholy, no longer reflecting God’s holiness in their lives.

(4) Israel’s history of national deliverance (Exod 19:4) was converted into a history of national exile (Lev 26:33, 38). In a sense, they had returned to their previous Egyptian bondage. Their love for the things of the world had overcome their commitment to Yahweh.

Sinai had been a recommitment to a continuing relationship between God and Israel. God and the nation must identify with each other if the wilderness years were to lead to the promised land. The apostasies of Sinai only served to remind the nation why Yahweh had given them the Mosaic legislation. They needed standards. Without the order those standards produced, there would be chaos and anarchy. The nation must be prepared for their landed inheritance. Israel received the legal stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant to prepare them for living in the promised land.

Legal Stipulations

Stipulations were a part of the treaty form employed by several cultures in the ancient Near East. Thereby the suzerain could identify himself as the overlord, the one with authority to establish the calendar, ordain boundaries, grant life, or deal out death. Without legislation, authority could not be clarified. An authority must preside over every covenant—an authority capable of meting out the punishments

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51 The golden calf incident provoked the public shattering of the covenant tablets (Exod 32:19). About 3,000 died that day (v. 28). Two priests, sons of Aaron, also died at Sinai when they did not follow divine instructions concerning service at the altar (Lev 10:1-2). Later, a man was executed because of his blasphemous appropriation of the name of God (Lev 24:10-23).
required for breach of covenant. In addition, a covenant is only as lasting, wise, and moral as its ratifier. The legal stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant\(^{53}\) testify to the nature and personality of the Law-giver. The morality of the Law is a reflection of Yahweh’s morality.

The Mosaic covenant is an administration of law in that the Lord bound individuals and tribes together into one nation by detailed regulations. The law was God’s means of shaping Israel into a “counter-community.” Yahweh had consecrated Israel as a witness to the nations by showing them in the law how to mirror his perfections. The legal system of any other people reflects the culture of that people. Through God’s law, however, the godly came to know how to reflect God’s love, compassion, fidelity, and other perfections.\(^{54}\)

The ratifier of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants was Yahweh Himself—the eternal, all wise, and holy God. The covenants were His covenants (cf. “My covenant,” Exod 6:4, 5; 19:5; Lev 26:9, 15, 42, 44), and the laws were His laws (cf. first person singular suffixes on terms for law in Exod 20:6; Lev 18:4, 5; 26:3, 5, 15, 43; Deut 11:13).

Israel was to ground her faith in the precepts of the divine law that identified Yahweh as the Creator of the heavens and earth, the Promise-Giver, the Land-Giver, and the Exodus-Causer. Every statute was a testimony to the election of the people and a witness to their identification with their sovereign Lord.

Breach of covenant occurred when Israel disobeyed the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant (Lev 26:15; Deut 31:16, 20). Idolatry and sabbath breaking, especially, constituted breach of covenant (Exod 20:3-8; Lev 26:1-2). Such actions were willful. They resulted in the nullification of blessings associated with the Abrahamic Covenant and the obscuring of identification associated with the Mosaic Covenant. Any infraction of Mosaic legislation was deemed rebellion against the sovereign will of the suzerain-legislator, Yahweh.

In contrast to Israel’s tendency to violate the covenants, Yahweh “remembered” His covenants (Exod 2:24; Lev 26:42, 45; Ezek 16:60; Ps 105:8). This is not

\(^{52}\)The covenants are often referred to as eternal, everlasting, or perpetual covenants in Scripture: the Noahic Covenant in Gen 9:16; the Abrahamic in 17:7, 13, 19 (cf. Ps 105:10; 1 Chron 16:17); the Mosaic in Exod 31:16 (cf. Lev 24:8; Isa 24:5); the Levitical in Num 25:13; the Davidic in 2 Sam 23:5; and the New in Jer 32:50 (cf. Isa 55:3; 61:8; Jer 50:5; Ezek 16:60; 37:26).

\(^{53}\)It becomes quite obvious in the reading of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy that the covenant stipulations were not limited just to those contained in Exod 20–23.

The blessing and cursing were the divinely appointed evidence of Yahweh’s faithfulness to do exactly what He said He would do. Blessing and cursing were initiated by promise, and implemented by legislation. Promise emphasized divine sovereignty; legislation highlighted human responsibility. When Israel was unfaithful, Yahweh yet remained faithful. The suzerain’s faithful preservation of the covenant was in sharp contrast to the vassal’s failure to submit. Covenant history confirms both divine dependability and human culpability.

**Unity**

The essential unity of the Law of Moses is clear in the Scriptures (Jas 2:10; Gal 5:3). Dividing the Law into moral, civil/social, and ceremonial/religious is really an artificiality unsupported by the overwhelming evidence of Scripture.

As long as the covenant with Moses was in effect Israel was obligated to keep the entire law. (Division of the Mosaic law into distinct categories—such as civil, ceremonial and moral—was unknown to the OT Israelite. Within the theocracy the law of Moses was a unified entity.)

Division into three categories of law is unmasked as a fallacy by the testimony of the Book of Deuteronomy alone. Moses’s second exposition (4:44—26:19) presented the Decalogue and then illustrated each of the Ten Commandments by means of various legal stipulations. Such an arrangement demonstrates that the so-called civil and ceremonial stipulations are inextricably interwoven with what are considered to be the moral laws. Violation of any of the stipulations is a breach of the Decalogue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DECALOGUE</th>
<th>COMMANDMENT</th>
<th>DEUTERONOMY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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56 Mark W. Karlberg, “The Significance of Israel in Biblical Typology,” *JETS* 31/3 (September 1988):263. Cf. also Kaiser, “God’s Promise Plan and His Gracious Law” 290-91. Kaiser concludes that an all-or-nothing attitude toward the Law is a danger to the church’s preparation for dealing with moral issues like abortion (301).

A consideration of some of the key stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant will illustrate this point regarding unity.

**Moral (Exod 20:1-17).** Keeping the sabbath is part of the Ten Commandments, the so-called moral law. The legal stipulation concerning the sabbath was promulgated at Sinai, not at creation (Neh 9:13, 14).

The sabbath was the sign of the Mosaic Covenant (Exod 31:13-17). According to Walton, circumcision was the individual sign of participation in the Mosaic Covenant while keeping the sabbath (cf. Exod 31:13-17) was the corporate sign.\(^58\) The covenant at Sinai was based upon the historical deliverance of Israel from Egypt, a deliverance in accord with the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Lev 26:13, 45). One of the purposes of the Mosaic Covenant was to identify the people of Yahweh more narrowly, supplementing the Abrahamic Covenant’s identification of the generation who would inherit the land of promise.

The sign of the Abrahamic Covenant was circumcision; the sign of the Sinaitic Covenant was observance of the sabbaths (cf. Lev 25:26-35). The sign of each covenant affected the realm of the other covenant. The covenant regarding the land (Abrahamic) was related to the people by circumcision, and the covenant regarding the people (Mosaic) was related to the land by the sabbaths.\(^59\) Thus these two covenantal elements (the land and the people) were bound together. The land was for the people, and the people for the land. The sabbath was ordained for those who were delivered out of Egypt and who would inhabit the land of promise.

\(^{58}\)Walton, *Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan* 114.

\(^{59}\)A distinction between a covenant regarding land and a covenant regarding people should not be pressed to an extreme. The Abrahamic Covenant also identified the people of promise, referring to them as the descendants of Abraham. It became clear, however, that some of the descendants of Abraham (through Ishmael) would not be the people of promise. The Mosaic Covenant clarified the situation regarding the identification of the covenant people.
Civil (Exod 20:22–23:33). Putting a disobedient child to death is one of many social or civil stipulations included in the Mosaic Covenant (Exod 21:15). This particular stipulation is directly tied to the fifth commandment in the so-called moral law (20:12). It was the commandment with the promise of life—physical life. The child’s opportunity for a long life was ended by execution.

Ceremonial (Exod 25:1–31:18). Laws of blood sacrifice, ceremonial ablutions, and religious festivals abound in the ceremonial laws of the Mosaic Covenant. The ceremony was the means of regular reinforcement and instruction as well as the vehicle of worship. The sacrifices were theological preparation for the Messiah’s atoning work. To be disobedient to any one of the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant is to be guilty of disobedience to all of the stipulations of the covenant (Jas 2:10).

Theological Legacy

The particularism of the Mosaic Covenant would seem to eliminate the church from direct subjugation to its stipulations. “Quite clearly the national element is lacking in the concept of the church in the New Testament.” The Law of Moses had a fivefold purpose: (1) to reveal man’s sinfulness (Rom 3:19–20); (2) to reveal the hideous nature of sin (Rom 7:8-13); (3) to reveal the holiness of God; (4) to restrain sin so that the sinner might come to Christ (Gal 3:24); and (5) to restrain wrong doing in order to protect the integrity of the moral, social, and religious

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62Saucy, The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism 194. In this same vein, Saucy makes the following comment: “While the language of Israel and its function is generally applicable to the church during this age, it is difficult to see all of the function of Israel in relation to the world as taking place through the church as ‘new Israel,’ unless one holds to a generally postmillennial view of history ... although much language about Israel is applied to the church, the name ‘Israel’ is not used” (ibid., 206).
institutions of Israel.63 Have these purposes been completely fulfilled? Does the Law have any force or control today over Christians? Before answering these questions, the matter of abrogation must be settled.

*Abrogation of the Mosaic Covenant.* To abrogate means “to abolish or annul by authority.” In Hebrews 7:11-28 several principles are enunciated:

1. Mosaic Law could not perfect the believer in his or her relationship to God (7:11).
2. A change (μετάθεσις, metathesis) has taken place in the Law of Moses (7:12).
3. The ordinance or commandment regarding the priesthood under the Law has been set aside (ἀθέτησις, athetesis, 7:18).
4. The reason for the change in the ordinance of the priesthood is related to the New Covenant which is better than the Mosaic Covenant (7:22).
5. The change provided an unchangeable priesthood (7:24).

The Messianic force of this particular context fits well with the overall focus of the Epistle to the Hebrews: Why would any Hebrew Christian ever consider returning to the levitical system which was about to be replaced? It was merely the prophetic shadow (Col 2:17; Heb 8:5), the preparation for the better covenant.

A change did take place which prepared the way for the subsequent covenant, but it was not an abolishing of the entire Mosaic Covenant. Just as dietary ordinances were altered from covenant to covenant without abolishing the preceding covenants, so also the priesthood ordinance was changed without abolishing the previous covenant.

The matter of abrogating Mosaic Law is unrelated to the topic of salvation because salvation has never been by means of keeping the Law (Rom 3:20). Whether the Law has been abrogated or not, the NT clearly declares that the believer is not under the Mosaic Law (Rom 6:14-15; Gal 5:18; 1 Cor 9:20). Indeed, the stipulations of the Mosaic Law have been replaced with the stipulations of “the perfect law of liberty” (Jas 1:25), “the royal law” (2:8). It is far more strict in its righteousness than the Mosaic Law (cf. Matt 5:19-48).64

*Christians and the Law of Moses.* If any of the Mosaic stipulations are for today, they must be obeyed completely. Imperfect obedience is unacceptable before God (cf. Gal 3:10). Disobedience makes the believer unfit to be a priest of God (cf. 1

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64 Matthew 5:19’s “annuls” is a form of the Greek verb ἀποκλίνειν (“break, destroy, pull down”). The reference is to the breach of the Law through flagrant disobedience or with a selfish and greedy intent. It does not carry the same sense as “setting aside” in Heb 7:18.
1 Pet 2:4-5). If the reader believes that he or she is currently under obligation to the Law of Moses, that person must face the following questions:

1. Are you observing the seventh day of the week as the sabbath?
2. Have you taught, encouraged, and participated in the exercise of capital punishment for chronically disobedient children? Have you observed the food laws, the laws requiring the separate cooking of meat and milk, the laws regarding unmixed material in clothing?
3. How many animal sacrifices have you offered in the past month?

Most of those who erase all theological distinctions between Israel and the church and who claim to submit to the Ten Commandments would probably have to respond in the negative to these three questions. It soon becomes evident that the majority of Christians live today as though the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant are outmoded—even if they teach and preach otherwise.

Arthur Pink argued that Christians need the Law (1) “to subdue the spirit of self-righteousness,” (2) “to restrain the flesh and hold us back from lawlessness,” and (3) “as a rule of life, setting before us continually that holiness of heart and conduct which, through the power of the Spirit, we should be ever striving to attain.”\(^6\) Basically, Pink is making the same mistake as the recipients of the Epistle to the Hebrews. By adopting his view of the Law, one would, in effect, be rejecting “the perfect law of liberty” and its better hope and covenant.

At the death of Christ the Temple curtain in front of the inner sanctuary was torn from top to bottom (Matt 27:51), indicating that the Savior had opened direct access to God (Heb 10:20). The NT believer is “free from the Law” (Rom 7:3; 8:2; Gal 5:1). Walter Kaiser warns Christians about “hiding behind the stipulatory covenant of Sinai as their reason for disregarding the whole message of the OT.”\(^6\) His point is well made, but perhaps another warning needs to be given: NT preachers should beware of hiding behind the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law in Christ as their reason for neglecting the exposition of the OT. The NT teaches that the role of the OT in the life of the Christian is to provide admonition (νουθεσία, nouthesia, 1 Cor 10:11-13), doctrine (διδασκαλία, didaskalia), reproof (ἐλεγμός, elegmos), correction (ἐπανόρθωσις, epanorthōsis), and instruction (παιδεία, paideia, 2 Tim 3:16). The challenge will be to avoid Peter’s error on the rooftop in Joppa. NT believers dare not live as though nothing has changed.


THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

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The centrally important Davidic Covenant was one of the “grant” covenants, along with the Abrahamic Covenant, in contrast to the Mosaic Covenant that was a “suzerain-vassal” treaty. Second Samuel 7:8-16 articulates the Davidic Covenant in two parts: promises that find realization during David’s life and promises that find realization after David’s death. Though “grant” covenants such as the Davidic are often considered unconditional, conditionality and unconditionality are not mutually exclusive. God’s covenant with David had both elements. Psalms 72 and 89 are examples of ten psalms that presuppose God’s covenant with David. Various themes that pervade the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants show the continuity that connects the four.

* * * *

God’s establishment of His covenant with David represents one of the theological high points of the OT Scriptures. This key event builds on the preceding covenants and looks forward to the ultimate establishment of God’s reign on the earth. The psalmists and prophets provide additional details concerning the ideal Davidite who will lead God’s chosen nation in righteousness. The NT applies various OT texts about this Davidite to Jesus Christ (cf. Matt 1:1-17; Acts 13:33-34; Heb 1:5; 5:5; et al). In the Book of Revelation, John addresses Him as the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Rev 19:16).

Walter Kaiser suggests at least four great moments in biblical history that supply both the impetus for progressive revelation and the glue for its organic and continuous nature: (1) the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, 17; (2) the promise declared to David in 2 Samuel 7; (3) the promise outlined in the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31, and (4) the day when many of these promises found initial realization in the death and resurrection of Christ.¹

Ronald Youngblood’s understanding is that 2 Samuel 7 is “the center and

focus of . . . the Deuteronomic history itself.” Walter Brueggemann regards it as the “dramatic and theological center of the entire Samuel corpus” and as “the most crucial theological statement in the Old Testament.” Robert Gordon called this chapter the “ideological summit . . . in the Old Testament as a whole.” John Levenson contended that God’s covenant with David “receives more attention in the Hebrew Bible than any covenant except the Sinaitic.”

After setting the background for the Davidic Covenant, the bulk of this essay considers the OT articulation of that covenant. Attention then focuses on the coherence of the various OT covenants, i.e., how they relate to each other and what they represent as a whole.

THE BIBLICAL BACKGROUND TO THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

Different Kinds of Biblical Covenants

The Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic, and New covenants are often called “covenants of promise” or “grant” covenants, whereas the Mosaic Covenant is likened to a “suzerain-vassal” treaty. The following chart (Figure #1) delineates some of the fundamental differences between the two types of covenants.

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[Notes and references]

The Abrahamic Covenant

The Abrahamic Covenant is a personal and family covenant that forms the historical foundation for God’s dealings with mankind. Through this covenant God promises Abraham and his descendants land, seed, and blessing. The Abrahamic Covenant delineates the unique role that Abraham’s seed will have in God’s plan for the world and paves the way for Israel’s prominent role in that plan.

The Mosaic Covenant

This covenant follows the format of a suzerain-vassal treaty and represents the constitution for the nation of Israel that grew out of Abraham’s descendants, a development envisioned by the Abrahamic Covenant. In this covenant, God offered cursing for disobedience and blessing for obedience. God’s basic demand was that Israel would love Him exclusively (Deut 6:4-5).

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10Bock, “Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism” 160. Bock (159) comments, “[T]he program begun with Abraham gives Israel a central role in God’s plan and represents part of God’s activity to restore a relationship lost with man at the fall.”
THE OLD TESTAMENT ARTICULATION
OF THE DAVIDIC COVENANT
2 Sam 7:8-16 (cf. 1 Chr 17:7-14)

Background Issues

Historical Preparation. David’s transportation of the ark to the city of Jerusalem made that city the center of Israelite worship (2 Sam 6:1-23). With the entire nation under his control, with the government centralized in Jerusalem, and with no external foes at that time (7:1), David expressed his desire to build a structure to house the ark of the covenant (7:2). Nathan initially encouraged David to proceed with his plans to build the Temple (7:4-7). However, that night Yahweh told Nathan to inform David that a descendant of David would build this Temple. The Lord had other plans for David. As the God who orchestrated David’s meteoric rise to power and prominence, Yahweh related His plan to establish David’s lineage as the ruling line over God’s chosen people (7:8-16).

The term “covenant” ( Nẵב, bērît). Although the Hebrew term for “covenant,” Ú낂 runes (bērît), does not occur in 2 Samuel 7, the biblical expositions of the passage (cf. 2 Sam 23:5; Pss 89:35; 132:12) make clear that it provides the initial delineation of the Davidic Covenant. In his covenant with David, Yahweh presents David with two categories of promises: those that find realization during David’s lifetime (2 Sam 7:8-11a) and those that find fulfillment after his death (2 Sam

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11 Various historians contend that David did not move the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem until the latter part of his reign (e.g., Eugene H. Merrill, Kingdom of Priests [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987] 243, 245-46; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age through the Jewish Wars [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998] 246-48). Chapters 6 and 7 are located at this place in 2 Samuel for thematic rather than chronological reasons. It appears that the event of 2 Samuel 6–7 did not take place until after David completed his building projects in Jerusalem (with Hiram’s assistance, 1 Chr 15:1) and after his many military campaigns (2 Sam 7:1).


13 The Lord softens the impact of this announcement on David by using the title “servant” to demonstrate that although David’s plan is rejected, David himself is not. Also, rather than using a blunt negative statement, the Lord addresses David in the form of a question (cf. Gordon, I & II Samuel 237).


15 Although some scholars contend that the provisions in 7:8-11a were not fulfilled in David’s lifetime (e.g., Robert D. Bergen, I, 2 Samuel [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996] 339), at the very least they found initial fulfillment during David’s lifetime. David’s reputation was established, Israel occupied the land of promise, and Israel had no major contenders for power in their part of the Near East. This initial fulfillment does not mean that the prophets could not look forward to the presence of these same provisions in future settings (cf. Isa 9:7; 16:5; Jer 23:5-6; 33:15-16).
Promises that find realization during David’s lifetime (7:9-11a)

A Great Name (v. 9; cf. 8:13). As He had promised Abraham (Gen 12:2), the Lord promises to make David’s name great (2 Sam 7:9). In Abraham’s day, God’s making Abraham’s name great stood in clear contrast to the self-glorifying boasts of the builders of the tower of Babel (Gen 11:4). The same is true in David’s day. Although David’s accomplishments as king cause his reputation to grow (2 Sam 8:13), Yahweh was the driving force in making David’s name great. He is the One who orchestrated David’s transition from being a common shepherd to serving as the king over Israel (2 Sam 7:8).

A Place for the People (v. 10). The establishment of the Davidic Empire relieved a major concern involved in God’s providing a “place” for Israel (7:9). The land controlled by Israel during David’s reign approached the ideal boundaries of the promised land initially mentioned in conjunction with God’s covenant with Abram (Gen 15:18). Consequently, during David’s reign the two provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant that deal with people and land find initial fulfillment. In addition to this and more closely tied to the immediate context, the “place” that Yahweh will appoint for Israel probably highlights the idea of permanence and

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16This break in the passage is indicated by at least two structural elements. The third person affirmation in 7:11b, “Yahweh declares to you,” interrupts the first-person address in 7:8-11a and 7:12-16. The timing of the anticipated fulfillment of the promises made in 7:12-16 is found in the phrase, “When your days are over and you rest with your fathers” (7:12a).

17The standard translations evidence a debate among scholars over the perspective of this issue of making David’s name great. The KJV and NKJV render it as a past reality (“have made your name great”) while a number of translations (NASB, NIV, NRSV) translate it as a future promise (“will make your name great”). Although certain scholars contend that the form (יָנֵה) represents a copulative or connective vav on the perfect verb and carries a past nuance (A. Anderson, 2 Samuel [Dallas: Word, 1989] 110, 112, 120; O. Loretz, “The Perfectum Copulativum in 2 Sm 7:9-11,” CBQ 23 [1961]:294-96), most scholars posit that the form entails a vav consecutive (also called correlative) on the perfect verb and should be translated with a future sense in this case (A. Gelston, “A Note on II Samuel, 7:10,” ZAW 84 [1972]:93; R. P. Gordon, I & 2 Samuel [Sheffield: JSOT, 1984] 74-75; P. K. McCarter, Jr., II Samuel [New York: Doubleday, 1984] 202-3). Although the shift from past to future that occurs at the midpoint of verse nine is not clearly demarcated, the fact that three other perfect verbs prefixed with a conjunction and then two imperfects (preceded by the negative particle) suggest that a future nuance fits all these verbs. The verb in question (יָנֵה) occurs after a break in verse nine (after the athnach) and probably looks back to the imperfect verb that begins this section (“thus you will say,” v. 8). The intervening material provides the foundation for the promise that Nathan introduces in verse 9b.

18Deuteronomy 11:24 affirms that “every place” where the Israelites set their feet will be theirs. Cf. Carlson, David, the Chosen King 116.

19In this appointed place Israel will not move any more and will not be oppressed by the sons of wickedness (2 Sam 7:10). This place will be Israel’s own place as well. The “plant” imagery also suggests permanence (cf. Exod 15:17; Pss 44:2; 80:8; Isa 5:2; Jer 2:21; Amos 9:15).
security.20

Rest (v. 11). David’s “rest” from his enemies mentioned in 7:1 sets the historical and conceptual stage for the promise of rest in verse eleven. Though the absence of ongoing hostilities provided the window of opportunity for David to move the ark to Jerusalem and consider building a Temple for Yahweh, that “rest” only foreshadowed the “rest” to which Yahweh refers.21 Even after all of David’s accomplishments, level of security and prosperity was yet unattained by the kingdom, a rest that is still future.22 The noun “rest” (נְתוֹנָה, mēnuhāh) “is intimately associated with the land”23 and accompanies the expulsion of those who lived in the land (i.e., the Canaanites). The Lord also contrasts this enduring rest He promises David with the temporary rest provided by the various judges (who periodically delivered Israel from oppression at the hands of the “sons of wickedness”; 7:10b-11a).

Promises that find realization after David’s death (7:11b-16)

A House (v. 11). Dumbrell24 suggests that 2 Samuel 6 provides the theological preparation for chapter seven. The divinely approved movement of the ark to the city of Jerusalem represents God’s choice of Jerusalem as the future site for the Temple, i.e., a “house” for the ark of the covenant. The presence of God, which rests on the ark of the covenant, will serve as a tangible reminder of Yahweh’s kingship over Israel. Next, chapter seven focuses attention on the erection of another “house,” i.e., the dynasty of David and, consequently, the perpetuation of his line. This juxtaposition of these chapters suggests that the king had to provide for the kingship of Yahweh before the question of Israel’s kingship is taken up.25 It also implies that the Davidic kingship was ultimately to reflect the kingship of God.26

In 2 Samuel 7 Yahweh had to first establish the “house” of David before

20D. F. Murray, “MQWM and the Future of Israel in 2 Samuel VII 10,” Vetus Testamentum 40 (1990):318-19; cf. Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel 339 n. 67. Murray (“MQWM and the Future of Israel” 319) argues that the locative aspect of מֶּנֶה is subsidiary to the qualitative aspect. He concludes, “2 Sam vii 10, then, acknowledges that Israel’s occupation of the land, long since a physical reality, has been beset by many hazards. It affirms, however, that through David (and his dynasty) Yahweh will transform that place of hazard into a place of safety, into a permanent haven of security for his people” (“MQWM and the Future of Israel” 319).

21The same debate over whether the verb here signifies a past occurrence or a future promise seen in verse 9b also occurs here. For the reasons detailed above, the future sense is accepted.

22R. P. Gordon, 1 & 2 Samuel 74.

23Carlson, David, the Chosen King 102.


25Ibid.

26Ibid., 45.
He would permit the building of a “house” of worship by David’s son, Solomon. In verse five, Yahweh asks, “Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in?” In verses twelve and thirteen Yahweh introduces the “descendant” of David and affirms that “he will build a house [i.e., the Temple] for My name,” placing the personal pronoun in the emphatic position. After describing the rest He would give David during his reign (v. 11), Yahweh affirms His intention to build David’s “house.” Not only does Yahweh seek to have the ark of the covenant moved to Jerusalem to demonstrate tangibly the presence of His dominion in Jerusalem, but He also attends to the eternal “house” of David before He speaks of the erection of a structure to house Israel’s worship of Himself. The building of the “house”/Temple by mankind could only occur after Yahweh “built” the “house” of David.

Although the Hebrew term יָהּ (bayit) refers to a fixed house built of any material in most instances, its meaning can shift to the contents of the house and particularly to the household living in the house. In this usage it can refer to a family or clan of related individuals (e.g., Noah’s family, Gen 7:1), lineage or descendants (e.g., the house/line of Levi, Exod 2:1), or, in reference to kings, a royal court or dynasty (the house/dynasty of David, 2 Sam 7:11; Isa 7:2, 13). The term occurs seven times as part of Yahweh’s promise to David (7:11, 16, 19, 25, 26, 27, 29). At least two contextual indicators demonstrate that bayit refers to David’s dynasty rather than his immediate family or even his lineage. The juxtaposition of “house” with “kingdom” suggests that it deals with a royal dynastic line (7:16) and the presence of “forever” with reference to this “house” in three verses (7:16, 25, 29) and mention of “distant future” in another verse (7:19) suggests a duration that exceeds most family lineages.

A Seed (v. 12). Although this term יָהּ (zera’), “seed” can signify a collective meaning of posterity (Gen 3:15; 12:7; 13:15), it occurs only once in 2 Samuel 7 and refers to Solomon, to all the royal descendants of David, and ultimately to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Solomon would be the guarantee for the rest of David’s descendants and would erect the Temple (7:13). Yahweh also guarantees that Davidic descendant would always be available to sit on the royal throne. Yahweh states that He will set up or raise up (דָּאָר, qûm) this seed.

A Kingdom (v. 13). Various passages in the Pentateuch anticipated that

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27After the introductory expression, “thus says the Lord,” the question is introduced by an interrogative he prefixed to the second person pronoun: “You, will you build for me a house to dwell in?”


30Athaliah had sought to exterminate the “whole seed of kingship,” i.e., David’s dynasty (2 Chr 22:10).
Israel would one day have a king (Gen 17:6, 16; 35:11; Deut 17:14-20) and constitute a kingdom (Num 24:7, 19). However, this kingdom which God promises to establish through David does not replace the theocracy. It is regarded as God’s throne/kingdom (1 Chr 28:5; 2 Chr 9:8; 13:8). In fact, the Davidic ruler is called “the Lord’s anointed” (1 Sam 24:6; 2 Sam 19:21).

In verse 12 the Lord spoke of raising up the descendant or seed of David and in verse 13 declared that this descendant would erect His “house” or Temple. The reader immediately thinks of Solomon, David’s son and heir to the throne who constructed the first glorious Temple in Jerusalem. Yahweh then affirms that David’s dynasty (“house”) and throne/kingdom would be eternal (7:13 16). This statement in verses 13 and 16 vaults this portion of God’s oath beyond the time frame of Solomon’s reign (which ceased to exist immediately after his death). This incongruity between divine prophecy and human history invited the NT writers to await a different son of David who would rule eternally.31

**Conditionality/Unconditionality**

**Grants vs. Treaties**

As with the other biblical covenants treated in this issue, the concepts of conditionality and unconditionality are not mutually exclusive. An unconditional covenant is not necessarily without conditions just as a conditional covenant can have unconditional elements. Weinfeld’s proposal of the terms grant and treaty clarifies the differences between the biblical covenants.32 In a grant the giver/maker of the covenant offers the promise or commitment. The grant constitutes an obligation of the master to his servant and protects the rights of the servant primarily.33 The grant may be called unconditional “in the sense that no demands are made on the superior party.”34 In a treaty the giver/maker of the covenant imposes an obligation upon someone else. A treaty represents the obligation of the vassal or servant to the master and primarily protects the rights of the master.35 A treaty is conditional in the sense that the master promises to reward or punish the vassal for obeying or disobeying the covenant stipulations.36

As with other “grant”-style covenants, in establishing this covenant with David Yahweh places no obligations on David as it relates to the enactment or

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31Bergen, J., 2 Samuel 340. Notice how this reality appears in the NT writers’ application of 2 Sam 7:13 to Jesus (see below).

32Weinfeld, “Covenant of Grant” 185.

33Ibid.

34Waltke, “Phenomenon of Conditionality” 124.


36Waltke, “Phenomenon of Conditionality” 124
perpetuation of the covenant.\textsuperscript{37} In that sense the Davidic Covenant is unilateral and, consequently, unconditional. Any conditions attached to this covenant concern only the question of which king or kings will enjoy certain provisions laid out by the covenant.

**Contextual Indicators of Conditionality and Unconditionality**

The writer of 2 Samuel brings together the irrevocable and conditional elements of Yahweh’s grant to David by means of the imagery of sonship\textsuperscript{38} in 7:14-16:

I will be his father and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever (NIV).

The clause “I will be His father and he will be My son” serves as an adoption formula and represents the judicial basis for this divine grant of an eternal dynasty (cf. Pss 2:7-8; 89:20-29).\textsuperscript{39} The background for the sonship imagery (and the form of the Davidic Covenant, see above) is the ancient Near Eastern covenant of grant, “whereby a king would reward a faithful servant by elevating him to the position of ‘sonship’ and granting him special gifts, usually related to land and dynasty.”\textsuperscript{40} Unlike the suzerain-vassal treaty (e.g., the Mosaic Covenant), a covenant of grant was a unilateral grant that could not be taken away from the recipient.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., 131.


\textsuperscript{40}Weinfeld (“Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament” 191) refers to a treaty between Šupilišummaš and Mattiwaza which illustrates this practice of adoption/sonship: “(The great king) grasped me with his hand . . . and said: ‘When I will conquer the land of Mittani I shall not reject you, I shall make you my son [using an Akkadian expression for adopting a son], I will stand by (to help in war) and will make you sit on the throne of your father.’”


\textsuperscript{42}Weinfeld (“Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament” 189) cites a treaty between the Hittite king Hattüšiliš III and Ulmi-Tēšup of Dattara to illustrate this point: “After you, your son and grandson will possess it, nobody will take it away from them. If one of your descendants sins the king will prosecute him at his court. Then when he is found guilty . . . if he deserves death he will die. But nobody will take away from the descendant of Ulmi-Tēšup either his house or his land in order to give it to a descendant of somebody else” [emphasis in the original].
It is as Yahweh’s son that David and his descendants will enjoy the provisions of this covenant. These verses also introduce the possibility that disloyal sons could forfeit the opportunity to enjoy the provisions of this covenant (cf. 1 Kgs 2:4; 8:25; 6:12-13; 9:4, 6-7; Pss 89:29-32; 132:12). As with Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), Yahweh promised David an eternal progeny and possession of land. Loyal sons, i.e., those who lived in accordance with the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant, would fully enjoy the provisions offered them. However, disloyal sons, i.e., Davidic descendants who practice covenant treachery, will forfeit the promised divine protection and will eventually lose their enjoyment of rulership and land. Even though Yahweh promises to cause disloyal sons to forfeit their opportunity to enjoy the provisions of this covenant, He affirms that the Davidic house and throne will endure forever, giving the hope that Yahweh would one day raise up a loyal son who would satisfy Yahweh’s demands for covenant conformity. Although the line of David may be chastised, the terms of this covenant, the hesed (חסד) of God, will never be withdrawn.

David himself had no doubts concerning the ultimate fulfillment of this divine grant. Although 2 Samuel 7 and the related passages do not refer to any external sign or token, David regards these promises as certain when he declares, “For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant” (2 Sam 7:21). In 2 Sam 7:13b, the Lord stresses that “I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” In his last words, David affirms, “Truly is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me, ordered in all things, and secured; For all my salvation and all my desire, will He not indeed make it grow?” (2 Sam 23:5).

In addition to various references in the historical books to the everlasting nature of this covenant, the prophet Jeremiah records how the Lord vividly affirmed His unwavering intention to bring the Davidic Covenant to fulfillment. The Lord compares the certainty of the Davidic Covenant to the fixed cycle of day and night (Jer 33:19-21). He hypothetically proposes that if God’s covenant with day and night would lapse, i.e., if one could somehow alter the established pattern of day and

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44Although Gileadi (“The Davidic Covenant” 160) suggests Yahweh’s presence in Zion constitutes the sign or token of the Davidic Covenant, Waltke (“Phenomenon of Conditionality” 131) suggests that the absence of a sign might be intentional since anything in addition to the promised son or sons would be superfluous.

45A number of scholars argue that the term “forever” in 2 Samuel 7 and “everlasting” in the expression “everlasting covenant” in other passages only refers to the span of a human life (e.g., Mattithahu Tsevat, “Studies in the Book of Samuel (Chapter III),” Hebrew Union College Annual 34 [1963]:76-77) and does not signify the idea of “non-breakability” (Marten Woudstra, “The Everlasting Covenant in Ezekiel 16:59-63,” Calvin Theological Journal 6 [1971]:32-34). Tsevat (“Studies in the Book of Samuel” 77-80) and others (e.g., Woudstra, “Everlasting Covenant” 31-32) also contend that the unconditional elements in 2 Samuel 7 were glosses added to the passage (which was originally exclusively conditional) at a later time.
night (Gen 1:5; 8:22), then God’s covenants with David (2 Sam 7) and the Levites (Exod 32:27-29; Num 25:10-13) could also be broken. As Huey points out, “The hypothetical (but impossible) termination of day and night is an emphatic way of stating that those covenants cannot be broken.”46

Like the other unilateral biblical covenants or grants (Abrahamic, New), the Davidic Covenant demonstrates a balance between the potential historical contingencies and the ultimate theological certainty.47 On one hand, the conditional elements or historical contingencies could affect whether or not the nation and its Davidic leader enjoy the provisions offered by the covenant made with David. On the other hand, the unconditional elements leave open “the possibility of YHWH’s appointment of a loyal Davidic monarch in the event of a disloyal monarch’s default. YHWH’s protection of his people, by virtue of the Davidic Covenant, could thus be restored at any time.”48 As Kaiser points out, The “breaking” or conditionality of the Abrahamic/Davidic Covenant “can only refer to personal and individual invalidation of the benefits of the covenant, but it cannot affect the transmission of the promise to the lineal descendants.”49

That David’s sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–12) closely follows the presentation of the Davidic Covenant is contextually significant in showing the unconditionality of the covenant.50 Also, King Solomon’s covenant treachery that led to the dissolution of the Davidic empire did not represent the failure of the Davidic Covenant. As Waltke points out, this arrangement of the biblical text demonstrates that “the beneficiaries’ darkest crimes do not annul the covenants of divine commitment.”51

Royal Psalms

Scholars have categorized a number of psalms under the heading of “royal psalms” because they share a common motif—the king. These psalms (Psalms 2,
18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 144) draw heavily on the idea of a Davidic dynasty and presuppose the covenant God established with David. They focus on a Davidic figure who, as Yahweh’s son, lived in Zion, ruled over God’s people, and was heir to the divine promise.\(^5\) As examples of this psalmic genre, two of the royal psalms receive consideration (Pss 72, 89).

**Psalm 72**

By personal example and deed, the Davidic king was to promote righteousness and justice in the land (v. 1). He would do this by defending the cause of the afflicted, weak, and helpless and by crushing their oppressors (vv. 2, 4, 12-14). The ideal Davidic ruler would occasion the national experience of peace, prosperity, and international recognition (cf. vv. 3, 5-11, 15-17).\(^5\) God promised to give His anointed king dominion over the entire earth (vv. 8-11). Although this psalm may have been written at the beginning of Solomon’s reign, it envisions ideals never fully realized in Israel’s history. Only during the millennial reign of Christ will the peace and prosperity depicted by this psalm find fulfillment.

**Psalm 89\(^5\)**

In concert with the initial expression of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7, the psalmist affirms that the Davidic king enjoyed the status of God’s “firstborn” (vv. 26-27). God promised His chosen king a continuing dynasty (v. 4), victory over his enemies (vv. 21-23), and dominion over the whole earth (v. 25). If a Davidic ruler failed to obey God’s Word he would be severely disciplined and forfeit full participation in the benefits of the covenant (vv. 30-32). However, even in the wake of disobedience the Lord would not revoke His promise to the house of David (vv. 33-34). God’s lovingkindness to David, i.e., the Davidic Covenant, will endure “forever” (vv. 28, 29, 36, 37). The psalmist affirms that God’s promise to David was as certain as the constantly occurring day/night cycle (v. 29; cf. Jer 33:19-21) and as reliable as the continuing existence of the sun and moon, which never fail to make their appearances in the sky (vv. 35-37).

This psalm depicts the psalmist seeking to resolve his belief in God’s oath to David and the reality of his day, divine judgment for covenant treachery. After reminding God of his promised to David’s house (vv. 1-37), he lamented the fate experienced by the Davidic dynasty in his lifetime (vv. 38-51). Yahweh had “cast off and abhorred” his anointed ruler (v. 38) and had “profaned his crown” (v. 39). The Lord had given victory to the king’s enemies (vv. 40-44) and had covered him with shame (v. 45). The psalmist cries out, “How long . . . will your wrath burn like

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\(^5\)Chisholm, “A Theology of the Psalms” 268.

\(^5\)Kaiser, “The Blessing of David” 301-3, provides a helpful treatment of the differences between presentations of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89.
fire,” and “Where are Your former lovingkindnesses, which you swore to David?” (vv. 46, 49).

The psalmist’s frustration demonstrates at least two truths. First of all, at this point in Israel’s history, the ideal of a just king who would bring the nation lasting peace and prosperity was still an unfulfilled ideal. Secondly, the inability of Davidic rulers to live and rule in accordance with God’s demands causes the reader to look forward for a Davidic figure who would one day perfectly satisfy those divine expectations.

THE COHERENCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT COVENANTS

Every student of the Bible must realize that the various biblical covenants revealed in the OT are interconnected. One must not keep the promises they contain separate from each other as mutually exclusive sets of covenant provisions (like distinct post office boxes). Rather, throughout the OT God is weaving a beautiful covenant tapestry, weaving each new covenant into the fabric of the former covenants.55 Although the Davidic Covenant does introduce something new to the covenantal package, Kaiser is correct when he affirms, “What God promised to David was not a brand new, unrelated theme.”56

The recognition of continuity or sameness and discontinuity or differences in God’s revelation of the biblical covenants must accompany belief in progressive revelation. As God reveals His will for mankind and Israel in particular, He repeats certain features already presented and introduces other brand-new elements. Students of God’s Word must take great care not to ignore either side of that coin. The following section emphasizes the points of connection between the biblical covenants to help visualize the forest as well as the trees. The coherence of these covenants does not signify sameness. Although each covenant addresses distinct issues in God’s plan for His creation, they do not operate in a mutually exclusive fashion.

Thematic Connections with the Preceding Covenants

Several themes in 2 Samuel 7 mirror similar statements in the various articulations of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants (see Figure #2).57

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55Kaiser (“The Blessing of David” 307) calls the complex of OT covenants “the Abrahamic-Davidic-New Covenant.”
56Ibid., 308.
57Besides a few changes and additions, most of the following information comes from Kaiser, “The Blessing of David” 309.

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**Figure #2: Thematic Parallels between the Davidean Covenant and Preceding Scripture Passages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Statement</th>
<th>Specific Phrase</th>
<th>2 Sam 7 Passage</th>
<th>Similar Statements in Preceding Scriptures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Reputation</td>
<td>“I will make you a great name”</td>
<td>7:9b</td>
<td>Gen 12:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Inheritance</td>
<td>“I will also appoint a place for my people”</td>
<td>7:10a</td>
<td>Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; Deut 11:24-25; Josh 1:4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descendants</td>
<td>“I will raise up your descendants after you”</td>
<td>7:12b</td>
<td>Gen 13:16; 15:5; 16:10; 17:7-10, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonship</td>
<td>“I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me”</td>
<td>7:14a</td>
<td>Exod 4:22-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimate Relationship</td>
<td>“My people”</td>
<td>7:7-8, 10-11</td>
<td>Gen 17:7-8; 28:21; Exod 7:7; 29:45; Lev 11:45; 22:33; 5:38; 26:12; 44:45; Num 15:41; Deut 4:20; 29:12-13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

David’s prayer of thanksgiving to God after the Lord established His covenant with David offers another connection with the Abrahamic Covenant. In six verses (7:18, 19 [2x], 20, 22, 28, 29) David uses the compound divine title “‘|dnî YHWH’ אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה to address the Lord. This title does not occur elsewhere in 1 and 2 Samuel and occurs only twice in 1 Kings (2:26; 8:53). The passage in 1 Chronicles 17 that parallels 2 Samuel 7 uses “YHWH lîhîm” (יהוה אלהים, 17:16, 17), “¢lîhîm” (אלוהים, 17:17), and “YHWH” (יהוה, 17:19, 20, 26, 27) instead of the title originally used by David (see Figure #3). The special significance of David’s use of this title derives from the fact that Abraham used the same title when
addressing the Lord in Genesis 15 (vv. 2, 8) as the Lord was reaffirming His intention to make Abraham’s seed abundantly numerous. Based on this correlation, Kaiser argues that David’s use of this compound name for God indicated that he “was fully cognizant of the fact that he was participating in both the progress and organic unity of revelation. The ‘blessing’ of Abraham is continued in this ‘blessing’ of David.”

As seen in the above thematic parallels, the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants share the motifs of international reputation, land inheritance, and descendants. McClain suggests that the Davidic Covenant “consisted of a reaffirmation of the regal terms of the original Abrahamic Covenant; with the further provision that these covenanted rights will now attach permanently to the historic house and succession of David; and also that by God’s grace these rights, even if historically interrupted for a season, will at last in a future kingdom be restored to the nation in perpetuity with no further possibility of interruption.” Merrill points out that the Davidic Covenant is theologically rooted in the Abrahamic Covenant rather than the Mosaic Covenant. He contends that

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**Connections between the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants**

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60Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH, 1974) 156. McClain refers to the provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant as “regal terms” because of their connection with the Mediatorial Kingdom.
Davidsic covenants. This is most apparent in Ruth itself. The narrator is writing, among other reasons, to clarify that the Davidsic dynasty did not spring out of the conditional Mosaic covenant, but rather finds its historical and theological roots in the promises to the patriarchs. Israel as the servant people of Yahweh might rise and fall, be blessed or cursed, but the Davidsic dynasty would remain intact forever because God had pledged to produce through Abraham a line of kings that would find its historical locus in Israel, but would have ramifications extending far beyond Israel.\textsuperscript{61}

The writer of the first gospel, Matthew, introduces his genealogy of Jesus Christ by pointing out that the Messiah is both the son of David and the son of Abraham (Matt 1:1).

**Connections between the Mosaic and Davidsic Covenants**

Most comparisons of the Mosaic and Davidsic covenants focus on the conditional/unconditional issue.\textsuperscript{62} The Mosaic Covenant is obligatory, bilateral, and conditional. The Davidsic Covenant is promissory, unilateral, and ultimately unconditional. The Mosaic Covenant is like a treaty while the Davidsic Covenant is comparable to a grant. Under the Mosaic Covenant, the failure by the Israelites to live in conformity to the covenant stipulations can occasion covenant curse and the loss of covenant favor, including tenure in the land of promise. However, according to the Davidsic Covenant, the treacherous conduct of any one or series of Davidsic rulers does not hazard the ultimate realization of its provisions.

The Psalms, however, suggest a point of connection between these two covenants. The royal psalms depict the king as conducting his rule in accordance with the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant. Dumbrell concludes, “Davidsic kingship is thus to reflect in the person of the occupant of the throne of Israel and as representative of the nation as a whole, the values which the Sinai covenant had required of the nation.”\textsuperscript{63}

The reigns of Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah (2 Kgs 18-23) provide a

\textsuperscript{61}Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* 185.

\textsuperscript{62}David M. Howard, Jr., “The Case for Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets,” *WTJ* 52 (1990):114. Levenson (“The Davidsic Covenant” 207-15) delineates two common ways that scholars have explained the relationship between the Mosaic and Davidsic covenants. The “integrationists” view the Davidsic Covenant as an outgrowth of the Sinaitic Covenant, overlooking the differences with regard to conditionality and unconditionality (ibid., 207-9). The “segregationists” identify some kind of tension or even antimony between these two covenants, often suggesting points of tension without scriptural support (ibid., 210-15). Although Levenson’s overview is helpful, his solution is not compelling. He suggests that scholars can only understand the relationship between these two covenants by recognizing the plurality of theological stances that co-existed in Israel (ibid., 219).

\textsuperscript{63}Dumbrell, “The Davidsic Covenant” 46
The stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant provide the “measuring stick” for the reign of each of these kings (2 Kgs 18:6; 21:7-9; 23:24-25). The function of the God-fearing king was to lead Israel in keeping covenant and in relying on God for deliverance. As Gerbrandt points out, the king “was to lead Israel by being the covenant administrator; then he could trust Yahweh to deliver. At the heart of this covenant was Israel’s obligation to be totally loyal to Yahweh.” The proper role of the Davidic king was to lead his people in keeping Torah. Herein lies an important convergence between the Mosaic and Davidic covenants. The Davidic ruler should epitomize the standards of the Mosaic Covenant, even though his conformity or lack of conformity to those standards does not determine whether or not Yahweh will one day bring to realization the provisions of the Davidic Covenant.

Connections between the Davidic and New Covenants

The connections between these two covenants are limited in scope since the Davidic Covenant focuses on regal issues and the New Covenant concerns redemptive issues. An important touchstone is the fact that the perfect descendant of David also functions as the mediator of the New Covenant. More broadly, the New Covenant appears to be the covenant that brings to fruition all the preceding covenants. In addition to the locus classicus for the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34), other statements or allusions to the New Covenant include more tangible blessings (possession of the promised land, regathering of Jews, one kingdom ruled by one king centered in Jerusalem, etc.) along with the intangible spiritual blessings conveyed by the New Covenant.

Summary

The provisions of the Davidic Covenant represent part of the plan God has

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64Gerald Gerbrandt (Kingship according to the Deuteronomistic History [Atlanta: Scholars, 1986] 45-102) provides a helpful study of 2 Kings 18–23 regarding the relationship of the king’s function to the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant.

65Howard, “Case for Kingship in Deuteronomy” 102.

66Gerbrandt, Kingship according to the Deuteronomistic History 102.

67Erich Sauer (The Triumph of the Crucified [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951] 92) states, “In its essence this new covenant is the fulfilment of two Old Testament covenants, that with Abraham and that with David.”

for His creation. As God set forth the various biblical covenants, each one represented a step forward in the revelation of God’s intentions for the world. Rather than operating in distinct orbits or realms, each covenant builds on the preceding covenant or covenants. Each covenant introduces new elements to God’s revelation of His plan and those elements become part of the multi-faceted tapestry of biblical covenants.

CONCLUSION

As part of God’s revelation of His plan for His chosen people, the Davidic Covenant has both immediate and far-reaching implications. In addition to establishing David’s dynasty, this covenant looks forward to a descendant of David who would bring peace and justice to God’s people through his reign. The conditions that accompany this covenant only determine who will function in this capacity, not whether or not a Davidite will rule in this way.
THE NEW COVENANT

Larry D. Pettegrew
Professor of Theology

Theologians of all kinds focus on Christ as the key to understanding the biblical covenants. Two significant characteristics of the New Covenant promised to Israel are its newness in replacing the Mosaic Covenant and its everlasting and irrevocable nature. For Israel the New Covenant promises her transformation through providing her a new heart, her final and permanent forgiveness, and the consummation of her relationship with the Lord. Through Israel God will also bless the Gentiles because of this covenant. As mediator of the New Covenant, the Messiah will be identified with Israel as God’s Son, Servant, covenant, and Abraham’s seed. Though the Messiah is not yet identified nationally with Israel, He is already identified with the church. Terminology and provisions spelled out in the NT indicate that Christ inaugurated the New Covenant at His first advent. Though the New Covenant will not be fulfilled with Israel until her future repentance, the church through Spirit baptism into Christ participates in that covenant.

* * * * *

Strange as it may seem at first, many covenant and dispensational theologians seem to agree that union with Christ solves the problem of how the church relates to the New Covenant. Of course, the theological underpinnings and implications are different for each system. When covenant theologian Vern Poythress argues that the covenants are fulfilled in Christ, he implies that Israel has no future as a covenant nation. Advising covenant theologians how they should explain that Israel’s covenant promises are fulfilled in the church Poythress writes,

The argument is strongest if one does not bluntly and simplistically assert that the church is a straight-line continuation of Israel. Rather one proceeds by way of Christ himself as the center point of fulfillment of the promises. Christ is an Israelite in the fullest sense. In fact, though all Israel be rejected for unfaithfulness (Hos. 1:9), yet Christ would remain as the ultimate faithful Israelite, the ultimate ‘remnant’ (cf. Isa. 6:11-13; 11:1).1

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Church saints united to Christ thus replace Israel as the recipient of the covenant blessings.

On the other side of the spectrum, some traditional dispensationalists teach that union with Christ solves the problem of how the church relates to a covenant not made with her. According to them, the church does not participate in the New Covenant at all. John Master concludes his discussion on the New Covenant by making this very point:

What then is a suggested relationship of the church to the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34? The church is united to the mediator of the new covenant. The new covenant has been cut. The actualization of the new covenant in the lives of believers, however, is yet future, when Christ returns and the house of Israel and the house of Judah are transformed by God’s grace to obey completely the commands of God.2

Similarly progressive dispensationalists speak of Christ as the recipient of the New Covenant. Therefore, the Gentiles’ “share in the promise and covenants comes in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, not by some incorporation into Israel.”3

Whatever the theological reason, these scholars have drawn attention to a vital truth. Christ is the key to understanding the biblical covenants. The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to analyze the New Covenant, (1) emphasizing that Israel will be the recipient of the blessings of the New Covenant in the future millennial kingdom, and (2) highlighting the relationship of the church saints to the New Covenant through Christ.

THE NEW COVENANT PROMISED TO ISRAEL

The Characteristics of the New Covenant for Israel

An enormous problem arises in approaching the New Covenant in the Old Testament. The promises of the New Covenant direct themselves to Israel, and that leaves non-Israelites on the outside looking in. In the one passage in the Old Testament using the expression “new covenant,” the Lord tells Jeremiah,4 “Behold,
days are coming . . . when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31, emphasis added). In parallel passages, the parties involved are always the Lord and the nation of Israel. Some blessings relate to the Gentile nations, but even these are “spill-over” blessings from Israel.

Why the concern that this covenant is to be made with Israel? Because, the covenant is amazing in what it offers. It presents the solutions to all of life’s deep problems, including cleansing from sin and an intimate relationship with the God of the universe. Any reasonable person would want to become a part of this covenant. Specifically, then, what is this covenant like?

**New**

First of all, the New Covenant really is a new covenant, not a renewed old covenant. Jeremiah states that it will be “not like” the Mosaic Covenant (Jer 31:31). Gerhard von Rad writes,

> What is important and towers right above any previous prediction, lies in the prophecy of a new covenant which Jahweh intends to make with Israel. This is clearly something quite different from Jahweh’s saying that days were coming when he would again remember his covenant which he made with Israel. No, the old covenant is broken, and in Jeremiah’s view Israel is altogether without one. What is all important is that there is no attempt here—as there was, for example, in Deuteronomy—to re-establish Israel on the old bases. The new covenant is entirely new, and in one essential feature it is to surpass the old [that is that Jahweh is to give his people a heart to know Him (Jer 24:7)].

Bernhard Anderson adds, “But Jeremiah’s oracle cannot be understood as reactualization of the past sacred history. He speaks of a new covenant, not a covenant renewal, and thereby assumes a radical break with the Mosaic tradition.” Even the word for “new” has some significance. Brevard S. Childs presents a study of Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Hebrew meanings of “new” and “renew,” and concludes that newness in the OT expresses both new in time and new in quality. “The new covenant . . . is not simply a renewal of the Sinai covenant as occurred in the yearly
festivals." The whole point of these verses," writes H. D. Potter, "is that they are a deliberate contrast to Deuteronomy, not a complement to it, or a restatement of it."

**Everlasting and Irrevocable**

The new covenant is also desirable because it is everlasting and irrevocable. The Mosaic Covenant depended on the ability of the people to keep their part of the contract. They had sworn, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" (Exod 24:7). As Kline points out, "On this occasion . . . the oath was sworn by the people of Israel, not by the Lord." But the New Covenant, like the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants made with Israel, was declared everlasting and irrevocable, based on the promise of the sovereign, faithful God of the universe. Thus the nation would possess the promises of the covenants forever. Through Jeremiah, for example, the Lord insisted that His relationship with Israel was as firm as the existence of the universe:

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 the offspring of Israel also shall 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 searched out below, then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done," declares the LORD (Jer 31:35-37).

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10Kline, *By Oath Consigned* 17. Concerning such a treaty, Klaus Baltzer explains, "The parties to the treaties are the great king and his vassal. The latter can have the rank of a 'king' or merely of a 'lord' . . . Under certain circumstances a collective entity like the 'people of the land' can be party to a treaty; the phrase probably refers to the important men. Finally one of the parties may be an entire nation" (Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formula*, trans. David E. Green [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976] 17).

11According to the prophets, the New Covenant, once inaugurated, would be an everlasting covenant (Jer 32:40; cf. Isa 55:3; 61:8; Ezek 16:60; 37:26). As explained in the other essays in this issue, God began His marvelous covenant program with a series of promises to Abraham and his heirs. These promises as made by God are clearly irrevocable. Concerning the covenant rite described in graphic detail in Genesis 15, Delbert R. R. Hillel, professor of New Eastern Studies at the Johns Hopkins University, writes,

What makes this ancient account eerily impressive is the bold way in which it depicts Yahweh as swearing to Abraham. Abraham makes all the preparations for a covenant ceremony; he splits up animals and arranges the parts for the swearing of an oath. Then he falls asleep, and Yahweh, as a smoking oven and a flaming torch, passes between the parts. The author is discreet; he does not flatly say that Yahweh invokes a curse on himself. But the vision he has related makes the literal restatement unnecessary, and the imagination of the reader can supply: "Just as this heifer is cut up, so may I . . ." (Delbert R. R. Hillel, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1969] 103).
The New Covenant

The Provisions of the New Covenant for Israel

More than anything else, it is the provisions of the New Covenant that make it so welcome. The Lord promises to prosper Israel with an abundance of physical blessings, including the gathering of the people to the land (Jer 31:8-11, 15-17), productivity (Jer 31:12), expressions of joy (Jer 31:13-14), increase in herds and flocks (Jer 31:23-24), and rebuilding of cities (31:38-40). The spiritual provisions include a transformed heart of flesh, forgiveness of sins, and a consummated relationship with the Lord. Ezekiel adds that a permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit will accompany the law within the heart: “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances” (Ezek 36:27).

Transformation

The spiritual provisions of the New Covenant are thus transformation, forgiveness, and relationship. For some OT scholars, the key provision of the New Covenant is the new heart (Jer 24:4-7; 31:31-34; 32:37-41; Ezek 11:17-21; 36:22-32). Yahweh promises, “I will give them a heart to know me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with their whole heart” (Jer 24:7). Gerhard von Rad insists that one who neglects this feature will “never grasp the characteristic feature of the salvation envisaged by Jeremiah, for here is his prophecy of the new covenant compressed into one sentence.” He continues, “[W]hat is here outlined is the picture of a new man, a man who is able to obey perfectly because of a miraculous change of his nature.” Raitt argues similarly,

From creation until the end of the judgment preaching it was assumed that man is fully responsible for his own sin, and that natural man is wholly capable of the complete obedience which God requires. But in the era which deliverance inaugurates this is no longer assumed. The shift is subtle, but far-reaching in its significance... Jeremiah

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12The matter of the promised Holy Spirit coming to transform and indwell the New Covenant saint (Ezek 36:27) is too large to delve into here, though His ministry to the church saints will be a subject later in the essay. Geerhardus Vos comments, “...[T]he Spirit appears as the source of the future new life of Israel... also as the pledge of divine favor for the new Israel, and as the author of a radical transformation of physical conditions in the eschatological era, and thus becomes characteristic of the eschatological state itself” (Geerhardus Vos, “The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit,” Biblical and Theological Studies [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912] 219). For a discussion of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a New Covenant promise, see Larry D. Pettegrew, The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1993) 7-14, 27-45.


14Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology 212.

15Ibid., 213-14.
and Ezekiel despaired that unaided or unimproved human nature could ever meet what God expected. And in neither case was this a momentary despondency. Rather, it was an ongoing, painfully sober realism about the possibilities and limits of the capacity for goodness within human nature.16

It is true that Old Testament saints were expected to keep the Old Covenant. Moses, after prophesying about a future time when the Lord would bring the nation back and circumcise their hearts (Deut 30:6), explains to the people that keeping the Mosaic covenant in the interim was not impossible: “For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. . . . But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it” (Deut 30:11, 14). But could a natural man be wholly capable of the complete obedience that God required? In theological terms, does this mean that the Old Covenant saint was not regenerated and the New Covenant saint is? Or, does Moses’ statement in Deut 30:11-14 mean that the Old Covenant saint was regenerated, able to keep the law, but just chose not to? Homer Kent answers these questions well:

This does not mean that no Jew under the Mosaic Covenant had a transformed heart. What is being stated is that the New Covenant itself would provide this for every participant. Such was not the case with the Mosaic Covenant. Even though it was obviously possible to know God and have a transformed heart during OT times, the old covenant itself did not provide this. Many Jews lived under the provisions of the Mosaic Covenant and still died in unbelief. The New Covenant, however, guarantees regeneration to its beneficiaries.17

Thus von Rad and Raitt seem to miss an important distinction. Moses and the earlier writers were not teaching that a natural man was wholly capable of complete obedience to God. Instead, Moses taught that it was possible for an Old Testament saint with a new nature to keep successfully (though not perfectly) the provisions of the Old Covenant. Some saints such as Daniel did. Unfortunately, many Old Testament Israelites lived under the Old Covenant and were not regenerated, so they could not keep its requirements. Ronald Pierce writes,

In contrast to the old-covenant model in which entrance into the community was through physical birth, the new-covenant community will be formed by spiritual birth. To state it differently, in contrast to Old Testament Israel where the remnant is sometimes represented by only ten percent of the nation (e.g. Isa 6:13), the new-covenant community will include only believers because that will be the criterion for entrance.18

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16Raitt, *Theology of Exile* 176 [emphasis in the original].
18Ronald W. Pierce, “Covenant Conditionality and a Future for Israel,” *JETS* 37/1 (March 1994):34.
Forgiveness

For those in the New Covenant, God promises to forgive their iniquity and not to remember their sin (Jer 31:34). According to the Book of Hebrews, this is a better provision than was found under the Old Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, the ongoing sacrifices were “a reminder of sins year by year” (Heb 10:3). But the New Covenant even “provided an expiation for the guilt of those who lived under the Mosaic covenant” (Heb 12:22-24).19 This in itself shows the inferiority of Old Covenant forgiveness.

In addition, Raitt suggests five ways that new covenant forgiveness was superior to Old Covenant forgiveness. First, in the OT the normal understanding was that punishment was “mitigated rather than swept away. For example, in Numbers 14:20, God says, ‘I have pardoned (salah), according to your word,’ but the verses following (14:21-23) describe the level of punishment which will be exacted.”20 Especially, when it came to serious sins, there was an atoning “in the sense of postponing their punishment.”21

Second, though God regularly did forgive, “a heavy cloud of uncertainty always hung around whether or not God would respond favorably to a heartfelt petition for forgiveness” (Exod 32:30, 32; Jer 14:7-10). But “there is absolutely no uncertainty about whether God will forgive in the new era. . . . [H]e moves to forgive on his own initiative.”22 Third, God’s forgiveness in the OT “is held in sharp tension with God’s readiness to punish.”23 In other words, God is ready to forgive and ready to punish. The Lord proclaims,

The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forges iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations (Exod 34:6-7).

Fourth, Raitt argues that under the Old Covenant, forgiveness was “contingent upon repentance as a prerequisite” (1 Kgs 8:46-53), but repentance is

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19 Kent, “New Covenant and the Church” 295. Concerning Hebrews 12:22-24, Kent adds, “These were OT saints with whom Christians share a common salvation. They are called ‘spirits’ because they are not yet united with their bodies in resurrection, but their spirits have been made perfect because Christ’s sacrifice has provided expiation (11:40). Thus the New Covenant has relevance for OT believers as well as the NT ones” (296). In the soteriological provisions of the new covenant, therefore, there is one people of God.

20 Raitt, Theology of Exile 185-86.

21 Daniel P. Fuller, The Unity of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 374. Fuller has a fine explanation of how the sacrificial system worked under the Old Covenant and how “second-level forgiveness” was provided by appealing to God’s ḫĕṣèḏ (hesed) (373 ff.).

22 Raitt, Theology of Exile 186.

23 Ibid., 187.
not mentioned in the OT passages describing the New Covenant.24 Fifth, the hope for forgiveness under the Old Covenant is “more often denied the community Israel than it is granted.”25 Raitt lists for evidence Exod 23:21, Deut 29:20, Josh 24:19, Hos 1:6; 8:13, et. al. Though Raitt may have exaggerated the contrasts in places, most of his points are well taken. Above all else, the shed blood of the Son of God provided the means of final and permanent forgiveness. New Covenant forgiveness of sins is of a different nature than forgiveness of sins under the Old Covenant.26

Consummation of Relationship

The New Covenant formula is, “I will be your God and you will be my people” (Jer 24:7; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek 11:20; 34:30; 36:28; 37:23, 27). This formula, often called the Bundesformel, was expressed under the Mosaic Covenant as well (Deut 26:17; 29:13) and even in connection with the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:24). In an overall review of the history of Israel in the OT, however, at least two problems kept this relationship from being consummated. First, the kings were generally less than enthusiastic about God, and second, the majority of the people were not spiritually qualified.27 But the prophets predicted a future kingdom without the defects of the historical kingdom. In that future kingdom, a perfect mediatorial king, the Lord Jesus Christ, will rule (Isa 42:1-4), and the people will all have experienced the new birth (Ezek 11:17-20). The Lord thus promises that those in the New Covenant will be changed from the inside out, and thus “they will really be My people and I will really be their God.”28

The Lord expresses His pleasure in the future consummation of His relationship with Israel in one of the most delightful passages in the OT. After telling Israel that He would pour out His Spirit on their descendants, the Lord expresses the pride they will have in having Yahweh as their God: “This one will say, ‘I am the LORD’; And that one will call on the name of Jacob; And another will write on his hand, ‘Belonging to the LORD,’ and will name Israel’s name with honor”

24Ibid., 188. Actually, Raitt seems to exaggerate this contrast of repentance. Repentance is not missing in new covenant passages. One of the passages that Raitt uses to prove his point about the Old Covenant emphasis on repentance, Deut 30:1-10, actually is pointing toward the New Covenant era. Moreover, when John the Baptist, the forerunner of the messenger of the New Covenant, appeared, he preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2), and that inquirers must “bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt 3:8).

25Ibid., 188-89.

26Raitt observes that the six New Covenant passages in Jeremiah and Ezekiel which contain explicit expressions of forgiveness “never borrow the stylized language of the formula in Exod. 34:6-7 and never echo or anticipate the cultic formulation of Leviticus [as Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35]. In every case one has the impression that what one finds is an ad hoc formulation which is a distinctive saying for a unique moment in history” (Ibid., 191, emphasis in the original).


28Raitt, Theology of Exile 199-200 [emphasis in the original].
The New Covenant

With similar pride, the Lord says about Israel, “I will be their God, and they will be My people.” “In the fulfillment of this ancient longing, we approach the realization of the kingdom of God within history.”

A lingering question remains. Why is God so concerned about His relationship with Israel? What is special about this nation that leads God to make such wonderful promises to its people? The basic answer is that the Lord has identified Himself with the nation to the extent that His reputation and honor are at stake. So He says,

It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD (Ezek 36:22-23).

From the very beginning of Israel’s election, Yahweh made clear that He “did not set His love” on Israel because it was inherently better or larger than other nations, for the Israelites “were the least of all peoples” (Deut 7:7; cf. Ezek 16:1-14). The Lord set His love on the Israelites because He sovereignly chose to love them (Deut 7:8). Through the Abrahamic Covenant, God identified Israel as “a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6). To consummate His relationship with Israel, God promises to bring the nation into the salvation and blessings of the New Covenant.

The NT reaffirms that Yahweh’s promise-covenants with Israel are irrevocable. Paul asks an important question in the early part of his letter to the Romans. Since the nation had rejected its Messiah, “[W]hat advantage has the Jew? . . . If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?” And he answers, “May it never be!” (Rom 3:1-4). Later in the letter he adds that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved (11:25). The bottom line is that “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (11:29).

Ibid., 200.

Though the New Covenant is most fully developed by the writing prophets, the concept is not new with them. Moses, even as he was explaining the “Old Covenant,” looked forward to a time when the Lord would bring the nation back from its scattering over the “ends of the earth” (Deut 30:4), “prosper” them (v. 5), and “circumcise” their hearts (v. 6). See John MacArthur’s note on Deuteronomy 30:6, The MacArthur Study Bible (Nashville: Word, 1997) 293. Also see Dennis T. Olsen, Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 127.
The Blessings for Gentiles through Israel

Even the blessings promised to Gentiles were routed through the nation of Israel. From the beginning of the covenant program, God promised Abraham that in him and his seed, all the nations of the earth would be blessed” (Gen 12:3; 22:18). Additionally, when the New Covenant is fulfilled with Israel in the future kingdom, the prophets promise that Gentiles will receive “trickle down” blessings:

Also the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the Lord to be His servants, everyone who keeps from profaning the sabbath, And holds fast My covenant; even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar, for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples (Isa 56:6-8).

So, in the Old Testament, there was hope for non-Jews. This hope dimmed, however, when Israel was led by its leaders to reject the Messiah. Jesus laments, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!” (Matt 23:37-38). Christ even pronounced a curse on the Jews who had rejected Him (Matt 12:30-31). Thus the nation was under a curse, and the Gentiles, without an intermediary nation, had no access to the blessings of the New Covenant. Paul writes, “Therefore, remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, . . . remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:11-12). The situation was indeed desperate.

THE MESSIAH IDENTIFIED WITH ISRAEL

The only hope for Gentiles and cursed Jews, as it turns out, was for a mediator who could not only enter into the New Covenant Himself, but could also enable others to enter into it. This mediator would no doubt have to be a Jew, one who in some way epitomized the nation and represented it in faith and righteousness. At the same time, He would have to have a special relationship with Gentiles. Was there such a person?

31 The OT prophets, including John the Baptist, say nothing about the church—Jew and Gentile together in one body on equal footing (cf. Eph 3:1-7). The church was a mystery which had been “hidden in God.” When the New Covenant is fulfilled with Israel, God’s program will once again feature nations of faith, not an international organism, and Israel will be the civil and religious center of the world (Isa 2:2-4; Zech 14:16-19).
As God’s Son

Interestingly, in the OT, the Messiah is identified with Israel, sometimes almost interchangeably. This is apparent with the covenantal equivocation on the term “son” for both Israel and the king of Israel. For example, the Lord tells Moses to say to Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Israel is My son, My first-born’” (Exod 4:22). Such language has covenant overtones. In McCarthy’s words, “We have, then, an idea of father-son relationship which is essentially that of the covenant.” Fensham adds, “In Hosea, e.g., Israel is described as son. . . . [T]he tradition of Israel as “son” foreshadowed the special role of Israel among the nations of the world.”

But “son” also designates the king. In the Davidic Covenant, David, along with his descendants, is titled “son” (2 Sam 7:14). In the commentary on this covenant in Psalm 89, David calls God “my Father” (Ps 89:26). In another great kingdom Psalm, the Lord speaking to the Messiah, proclaims, “Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee.” “Son” is thus a covenant name for Israel and the Messiah/King. It is not surprising, therefore, when Matthew applies the term “son” to the Messiah and writes that at the time Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Egypt it fulfilled the saying, “Out of Egypt did I call my Son” (Matt 2:15).

As God’s Servant

The term, “servant” also applies to both the Messiah/King and the nation. This is apparent in the Servant songs of Isaiah. Who is the servant? In some texts, the servant is Israel. The Lord says, “But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, Descendant of Abraham My friend, You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its remotest parts, and said to you, ‘You are my

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35Fensham adds that “when we approach the New Testament, where ‘Father-Son,’ and ‘God-Christ’ often appear, a whole new world of interpretation becomes possible” (ibid., 135).

36King Ahaz, in fact, calls himself both a servant and a son to Tiglath-pileser, showing that a covenant relationship had been established (2 Kgs 16:7). Among other things, this shows “that the Hebrews were well aware of the employment of a concept such as ‘son’ in a treaty sphere” (ibid., 129).

37See the helpful five-part study on the Servant songs by F. Duane Lindsey in BSac, beginning in the January-March issue, 1982, 12. The term, “servant,” can be used for high court officials and dignitaries, even for kings. Moses and David, for example, are called the “servants of the LORD” (Exod 14:31; 2 Sam 7:5).
servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you” (Isa 41:8-9).\(^38\) In other songs, the servant is the Messiah, someone who will bring Israel back to the Lord. The prophet records, “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations” (Isa 42:1; cf. 49:6 and 53:11). The Servant, therefore, is the Messiah. And it would seem that He represents and personifies the nation.

**As God’s Covenant**

Even more interesting is the fact that the Servant/Messiah is designated as the personified covenant: “I will appoint you as a covenant to the people. As a light to the nations” (Isa 42:6).\(^39\) And again, “I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people” (Isa 49:8). We learn first, in these passages that the Servant would have an impact on both the Jews and the Gentiles. In both 42:6 and 49:8, “people” refers to Israel.\(^40\) In 42:6, “nations” could as well be translated as “Gentiles.”\(^41\) The “light” is expanded in various passages to mean justice (42:1-4), salvation (49:6), and righteousness (51:1-6). When the Messiah was born hundreds of years later, the old prophet Simeon applies this passage to Christ: “A light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel” (Luke 2:32). Paul later applies Isa 42:6 to his ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47).\(^42\) This blessing on the Gentiles is not a surprise because the Abrahamic Covenant included the provision that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham.

The personification of the covenant by the Servant is also remarkable. Up to this point one might have thought that the Servant was only a mediator like Moses.

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\(^{38}\)See Robert A. Pyne’s discussion of the relationship between Messiah and Israel in “The ‘Seed,’ the Spirit, and the Blessing of Abraham,” *BSac* 152 (April-June 1995):211-22. Pyne points out that the “seed” (descendant) of Abraham in Isa 41:8 is physical Israel (215). On the other hand, it is the “unique relationship between the nation and the Messiah” that may allow for the identification of Christ as the seed in Galatians 3:16 (ibid.). Also see Robert Thomas’ helpful chapter, “The Mission of Israel and of the Messiah in the Plan of God,” *Israel, the Land and the People*, Wayne House, ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998) 261-95. Thomas writes that “a unity binds the individual Servant to the corporate servant” (264).

\(^{39}\)Knight proposes, “A covenant for mankind may be translated in more than one way: (1) ‘I have made thee into the people of the (new) covenant.’ . . . (2) ‘I have made thee to become the means of my making covenant with (all) mankind’” (George A. F. Knight, *Deutero-Isaiah* [New York: Abingdon, 1965] 75).


\(^{42}\)Thomas, “Mission of Israel” 272.
was for the Old Covenant. It is true that the Servant, as a mediator, was to deliver Israel from bondage (Isa 42:7; 49:8-12) and mediate the covenant which was to be established between the Lord and His people (Isa 54:1; 55:3; 59:21; 61:8). Moreover, Hebrews says that Christ was the mediator of the New Covenant, and superior to Moses (Heb 8:6) or any of the kings of Israel. But in the Servant songs one learns that the Messiah would be more than a mediator. As Odendaal points out, “He is the impersonated, incarnated covenant. We may regard him, in other words, to be the one who is able so fully to represent the ‘ām in the covenant, that he himself can be considered to be the incorporated covenant.”

Like the Messiah/Son, the Messiah/Servant who is given as a “covenant to the people” must be in the royal Davidic line (Isa 55:3). Odendaal continues,

Such a one only, according to the history of revelation, could be described as the incarnated covenant, i.e., the mediator and the representative of the covenant. As the one chosen by Yahweh to be his vice-regent in his kingdom, the king as covenant-head has a relation both to Yahweh and to the people as defined by the covenant. As covenant representative he can therefore also be called “Israel” (49:3), because in himself he comprehends all the hopes, privileges, and responsibilities of Israel, and as Messianic King he leads Israel to the consummation of its calling in the history of salvation.

As Abraham’s Seed

The New Testament also provides evidence that Jesus represents Israel.

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43VanGemen notes that at Mount Sinai, “Israel reacted with terror to God’s revelation and demanded that Moses be their mediator (Exod 20:18-20; Deut 5:4-5). Moses served in this capacity by giving Israel the law of God (Exod 20:22-23; 19). The acceptance of Moses in his mediatorial office is confirmed by God’s response to Moses’ request to see his glory (33:17-18)” (Willem VanGemeren, The Progress of Redemption [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988] 138).

44According to the writer of Hebrews, the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant. In addition, while the author treats Moses as a covenant mediator, “he never calls him a μεσοφόρος and reserves this distinction for Jesus” (Susanne Lehne, “The New Covenant in Hebrews,” JSNT Supplement Series 44 [Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990] 22).

45Walton, following Gerald Gerbrandt, argues that the king of Israel was viewed as the mediator of the Mosaic covenant. The king’s responsibility was to be sure that the Lord was being properly represented, including being sure that the covenant was being kept by the people and remaining “a subordinate instrument for the Lord’s military leadership” (John H. Walton, Covenant [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994] 68-69. See further McClain, Greatness of the Kingdom 91-119).

46Dick H. Odendaal, The Eschatological Expectation of Isaiah 40–66 with Special Reference to Israel and the Nations (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970) 131. Lindsey suggests that there is a metonymy of effect here, that the Servant is “one who in some way is a cause, source, mediator, or dispenser of covenant realities or illuminating benefits” (“Call of the Servant” 25).

Paul proclaims that Christ has replaced the Old Covenant with Himself: “Therefore, let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col 2:16-17; cf. Matt 5:17). Moreover, Paul describes Christ as the seed of Abraham, the personification of corporate Israel (Gal 3:16). Longenecker observes,

The apostle is not just forcing a generic singular into a specific mold. . . . Rather, he is invoking a corporate solidarity understanding of the promise to Abraham wherein the Messiah as the true descendant of Abraham and the true representative of his people, and the Messiah’s elect ones, as sharers in his experiences and his benefits, are seen as the legitimate inheritors of God’s promises.

Both the Old and New Testament writers point to a faithful and righteous supermediator representing and personifying the nation. He is the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

THE MESSIAH IDENTIFIED WITH THE CHURCH

Not Yet with Israel

In the opening pages of the NT, Israel is still the intended recipient of the provisions of the New Covenant. Jeremiah had prophesied that Yahweh would “forgive their iniquity, and their sin,” He would remember no more. In anticipated fulfillment of this promise, the angel announcing the birth of Christ tells Joseph to name his son Jesus, “for it is He who shall save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). In Zechariah’s prophecy at the birth of his son, John, Zechariah blessed “the Lord God of Israel,” not only because He would save them from their enemies (Luke 1:71), but also would “give His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins” (1:77).

John the Baptist, Himself the forerunner of the messenger of the New Covenant (Mal 3:1; 4:5-6; cf. Mark 9:11-13), taught that it was useless to have the Abrahamic Covenant if one did not have the New Covenant: “Do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Matt 3:9). John’s baptism also implied a renunciation of dependence only on circumcision. Fuller comments, “Since baptism was a requirement for a proselyte (a Gentile converting to Judaism), a Jew who submitted to John’s baptism was acknowledging that as far as salvation was concerned, he was in the same category; his connection with

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48Richard Longenecker, Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 124. It is important to note that Christ replaced the Old Covenant with Himself, but He did not replace Israel. He represents Israel under certain circumstances.
Abraham as symbolized by circumcision was of no value whatsoever.” In New Covenant language, John also preached “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3). Moreover, John was the first to teach that Christ, in fulfillment of the Father’s promise, would be the one to pour out the Holy Spirit (John 1:33; cf. Acts 1:4-5; 11:16).

Jesus Christ, in His presentation of the kingdom to Israel, made the New Covenant the means of entrance. In order to enter the kingdom, one had to have the New Covenant transformation which Jesus called being “born again” (John 3:3). Jesus, in fact, upbraided Nicodemus for being a teacher of Israel and not understanding this important point (John 3:10).

Christ presented Himself as a covenant to the nation. But as mentioned above, that generation of Jews rejected its Messiah, and so the Servant has not yet consummated the covenant with the nation. These covenant prophecies will ultimately be fulfilled with a spiritually revived Israel (Zech 12:10-14) in the Day of the Lord events which culminate in the millennial kingdom.

Already with the Church

Covenant Inauguration

The Terminology. Though abandoned by His nation, Christ finished His New Covenant work. Before ascending to heaven, He cut the New Covenant by His death and initiated a beautiful ordinance (Luke 22:20). What occurred at the last Passover meal was quite amazing. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. writes,

There is here that which might legitimately be called an act of arrogant audacity, if one bears in mind the situation. The celebration of the Passover was the celebration of the mighty deliverance of the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt. . . . What presumptuous confidence and boastful audacity to call upon the members of the nation that possessed “the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises” (Rom 9:4) to transfer their worship, as they might have thought, from the God of their fathers to Jesus of Nazareth, and to lay aside their ancient covenants for a new covenant, to replace the annual celebration of the impressive ritual of the Passover for a simple feast of remembrance in bread and wine.

After His ascension, Christ inaugurated the New Covenant by pouring out the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The New Testament thus becomes a New

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49 Fuller, Unity of the Bible 369. Fuller adds, “It was also fitting that the church which was in a continuity inaugurated by John the Baptist should adopt as this sign the rite of baptism by which he had signified to disobedient Israel that it had no more favor before God than did Gentile sinners.”

Covenant document. The New Testament writers, in fact, use the expression “New Covenant” more often than the Old Testament prophets did. In the epistles, lest there be any question whether the New Covenant relates to the church, the Apostle Paul restates the Lord’s teaching about the blood of the New Covenant in his communion instructions to the local church at Corinth (1 Cor 11:25). Paul next identifies himself and his fellow ministers as “servants of a new covenant” (2 Cor 3:6). Scott Hafemann argues that Paul’s contrast in 3:3 and 3:6, “when viewed against the background of Exodus and Ezekiel, is twofold.”

On the one hand, Paul affirms that the age characterized by the law as the locus of God’s revelatory activity is over. Thus, the Corinthians owe their relationship to Christ not to the revelation of God in the law, but to God’s work in changing their heart through his Spirit. Conversely, the conversion and new life of the Corinthians are evidence that the new age has arrived, i.e., the age of the ‘fleshly heart’ prophesied by Ezekiel.52

In the Book of Hebrews, Christ is called the “mediator of a better covenant” (Heb 8:6), which is identified as the New Covenant that has replaced the first (Mosaic) covenant (Heb 8:7-13). The writer of Hebrews also employs the parallel OT term, “the eternal covenant” (Heb 13:20).

The Provisions. The specific terms “New Covenant” and “everlasting covenant” do not exhaust NT references to the New Covenant. Clearly the provisions of the New Covenant are also operative, beginning with the inauguration of the New Covenant on the day of Pentecost.53 Peter insists, that in initial fulfillment of the promised Holy Spirit, Christ, “having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, . . . poured forth this which you both see and hear” (Acts 2:33). Actually, all the teaching about the Holy Spirit in the New Testament (especially about the “promise of the Spirit” [Eph 1:13; Gal. 3:14])54 is evidence that the New Covenant has been inaugurated.55

The new level of forgiveness of sins promised in OT prophecies of the New

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51Interestingly, by leaving out the article, Paul follows Jeremiah’s prophecy precisely (“I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” [Jer 31:31]).

52Scott J. Hafemann, Suffering and Ministry in the Spirit (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 222.


55Carl Huch writes, “The new covenant comes with ‘batteries included.’ . . . The Spirit internalizes the New Covenant so that the people of God are motivated to do God’s will. By contrast, the old covenant stood over the people of Israel like a judge, demanding obedience, but providing no enablement” (All Things New 116).
Covenant also pervades the NT. "Above all things," writes Leon Morris, "the new system that Jesus had established meant the forgiveness of men’s sins. . . . His blood avails to put them in right relationship to God." Morris notes that the remedy for sins, in the Book of Hebrews alone, is prevalent: 1:3; 2:17; 8:12; 9:15, 26, 28; 10:12, 17, 18, 26. Morris concludes, “The effect of all this is to stress the completeness with which Christ has dealt with sin. Whatever needed to be done He has done, fully, finally. Sin no longer exists as a force. . . . Christ has made it null and void. He has broken its power.” The “entire New Testament teaching on forgiveness" in fact, is “an extended exposition of the blessing of the New Covenant . . .”

The New Testament documents thus should be looked at as instruction on how to live out the New Covenant in the present age. Edward Malatesta, for example, presents a convincing case that John writes 1 John as a New Covenant document, explaining the existing provisions of the New Covenant. Malatesta writes, “The composition of Jer 31 (LXX 38), 31-34 highlights three elements of the New Covenant: an interiorization of the Law, knowledge of God, and forgiveness of sins. We shall see later that 1 Jn associates these same three elements in a Covenant context.” Other NT books plainly unfold the teachings of the New Covenant.

Thus, not only the terms for the New Covenant but also the provisions of the New Covenant are highly visible in the NT. NT Christians benefit in marvelous ways from this covenant that was promised to Israel.

**Covenant Participation**

So here is the tension. In the first part of the essay we emphasized that the New Covenant was promised to Israel. In the second part of the essay we emphasized that the New Covenant is operative and that members of the church are benefiting from it. How does the church get to benefit from the New Covenant that was made with Israel? For non-dispensationalists, this is not much of a problem. They have some tensions with the Old Testament teaching about the New Covenant being made with Israel. But the church in the New Covenant is not a problem since in their system, the church essentially replaces Israel. Dispensationalists, who

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55Ibid., 301.
56Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 203.
believe that God has separate programs for Israel and the church, have suggested various solutions to this problem. These include two new covenants (one for Israel and one for the church), or one covenant for Israel with application of the blessings to the church, or that the church has only new-covenant-like blessings.\textsuperscript{62} The best solution is that the church participates in the New Covenant, but the New Covenant will not be finally fulfilled until Israel comes into a right relationship with God at the end of the Tribulation. The church does not participate in the land blessings, and may not have full benefit of the spiritual blessings because the king is not yet here on earth ruling. But the church really does participate in the New Covenant provided by Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{63} Still, “participation,” though it explains the “what,” does not explain the “how.” How do church saints participate in the New Covenant?

\textit{In Christ.} Though the Servant/Messiah was rejected by the covenant nation, and though the Old Testament promises will not be fulfilled until the eschaton, the Servant/Messiah has already begun to be the mediator of the New Covenant. Hope remains, therefore, for Gentiles outside of the covenants and promises and Jews related to a nation under the curse of the unpardonable sin to participate in the New Covenant. To do so, they would have to be able to establish an intimate relationship with this Servant/Messiah. Is this possible?

This is exactly what has happened to believers in this dispensation. Paul, after explaining the bad news that the Gentiles were “strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12), proclaims the good news: “But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). The answer to the question as to how church saints participate in the New Covenant is thus found in being “in Christ,” the personified New Covenant. Believing Jews in this dispensation also


\textsuperscript{63}The New Testament employs several graphic pictures to explain the relationship of the church to the New Covenant. For one, Paul explains that the Gentiles were grafted into Israel’s covenant program. Paul writes, “But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches” (Rom 11:17). Thus “there may be an adding in to the promises of God, in this case, the Gentiles grafted in to the covenant program. On the other hand, God’s original promise cannot be changed, and in this passage, ‘a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved’ (Rom. 11:25-26)” (Penney, “Relationship of the Church to the New Covenant” 475). Other concepts and figures that need to be explored in the context of the New Covenant include adoption, the vine and the branches, and the union between the shepherd and his sheep.
have been united with Christ. Jesus makes “the two into one new man” (Eph 2:15). With some qualification, one can say that the phrase, “in Christ” is a near-technical phrase describing church saints. The phrase occurs “83 times in the Paul corpus . . . not including the equivalent phrases using a pronoun (‘in him/whom’) defined by the context. It usually has the form ‘in Christ’ or ‘in Christ Jesus.’ The addition of the “in him/whom” phrases brings the total to more than 130. Outside Paul’s writings, the only occurrence is in Peter’s epistles (1 Pet 3:16; 5:10, 14).

To be a technical designation, the phrase must be ἐν Χριστῷ [ Ἰησοῦ (en Christi [Eisou], “in Christ [Jesus]”) without the article (or “in him/whom”). Even then, a few “in Christ” phrases describe something other than believers in Christ, as in Philippians 2:5 where Paul exhorts readers to have the same attitude that was “in Christ.” Nonetheless, at least 75 “in Christ” phrases plus many “in him/whom” phrases refer to the wonderful position church saints have. It is only through being “in Christ” that church saints participate in the New Covenant. They are elect “in Christ,” “and because of his unique relationship with the father, they are heirs together with Christ (1 Cor 3:22-23).”

Spirit Baptism. But how does one get into Christ? Clearly it is through the baptism of the Spirit at the time of conversion. Even more intimately, Paul explains that all who were baptized into Christ have “clothed” themselves “with Christ” (Gal 3:27). Dunn writes, “To be baptized into Christ is complementary to or equivalent to assuming the persona of Christ. In both cases [Spirit baptism and putting on Christ] some sort of identification or sense of bound-up-with-ness is implicit.” Through such intimacy, church saints, whether Gentiles or Jews, inherit what Christ inherits and are sons of Abraham because Christ is (Gal 3:29).

CONCLUSION

This essay has emphasized that the relationship of Christ to the New Covenant and the church to Christ does not in any way negate the future fulfillment of the New Covenant with Israel. The Lord made the New Covenant with Israel and presented it to Israel as a foundation of the messianic kingdom program. But the nation rejected the Messiah and His kingdom. Thus the New Covenant will not be fulfilled with Israel until the Day of the Lord events when the nation in repentance

64Dunn identifies this participation in the New Covenant ahead of time as the “eschatological now.” “Paul’s conversion . . . was a breakthrough from one age to another, in some sense a ‘rescue from the present evil age’ (Gal. 1:4)” (James D. G. Dunn, The Theology of Paul the Apostle [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998] 179-80).

65Ibid., 396.

66VanGemeren, Progress of Redemption 404.

67Dunn, Theology of Paul 405.
accepts the One whom it previously considered to be “stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isa 53:4; cf. Zech 12:10-14). Before that happens, Gentiles outside God’s covenant program and Jews under the shadow of a curse are blessed to be able to participate in the New Covenant. This they can do through Spirit baptism into Christ at the time of conversion. Though the Servant/Messiah came to His own people, “His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name . . .” (John 1:11-12).
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS ON THE BIBLICAL COVENANTS

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Earlier pages of this issue of The Master’s Seminary Journal contain articles on the biblical covenants. The following bibliography represents the collected research of the authors and some additional sources that were consulted, but not cited in the articles. Its five sections are (1) Reference Works, (2) Systematic Theologies, (3) Monographs and Multi-Author Works, (4) Journal Articles, and (5) Unpublished Materials. The listing is not exhaustive, but will serve as a foundation for readers desiring to pursue the study further. Included also are articles and entries in some standard reference works that will be a starting point for those to whom the study of the biblical covenants may be new.

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**Unpublished Works**

BOOK REVIEWS


This is the first in a series of books called the Contours of Christian Theology which purposes to offer a systematic presentation of most of the major doctrines. The goal is not to duplicate the many doctrinal books that have been written, but to complement them. This first book devotes most of its space to the personal, trinitarian subsistence of God, rather than His nature, because the organizers felt that other volumes in the series would cover more fully issues regarding His nature. One of the distinctives of this book is its emphasis on the Eastern Orthodox understanding of the Trinity. Bray notes three reasons for this emphasis: (1) Eastern Orthodoxy’s intrinsic importance, (2) its affinity with the evangelical outlook, and (3) its phenomenal rise in interest.

The work begins with a survey of the historical development of theology from the ancient Greek and Roman context. It is from these two main influences that the conservative and liberal traditions have emerged. Though these traditions do not possess the authority of the Bible, yet one cannot speak about God without acknowledging their contribution to theological understanding. Then the author addresses two main aspects of the theology of God, His nature and His person. God is one and completely different and unique from His creation. Therefore His nature, which consists of the proofs for both His existence and His attributes, is indescribable because “His nature surpasses anything of which we have direct experience” (53).

It was in the OT that God clearly revealed Himself as one God, but the Christian church had to go beyond the oneness of God alone because of the “deeper revelation it had received in Jesus Christ” (151). They therefore developed a trinitarian understanding of God. It is this trinitarian belief that set Christianity apart from Judaism and Islam. However, two alternative to this doctrine emerged in history. One was Unitarianism, which is the absolute oneness of God, and the other was Binitarianism, a duality in which both the Father and the Son have their rightful place. Biblically though Christianity is trinitarian, and they needed to develop a framework “which would allow them to express their belief that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were equally God” (153). The other alternatives had focused the manifestation of the nature of God in one particular person of the Trinity, albeit, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It was the Protestant Reformers who
fundamentally differed in their theology from anything that had gone on before, notwithstanding Augustine. They understood all the great doctrines of the faith—justification by faith, assurance of salvation, election—only against the background of a trinitarian theology. It is therefore different from Roman Catholic theology in several ways: (1) God’s essence is secondary; (2) the persons of the Trinity are totally equal; (3) knowledge of one of the persons means knowledge of the other two simultaneously; (4) being created in God’s image is not understood as being created either in the image of the Trinity or in the image of Christ; and (5) the persons of the Godhead possess distinctive attributes that they share with believers (199-211).

As the author concluded the book, he sought to construct a new theological confession of the Trinity that would stand both in the historical tradition, and at the same time respond to the needs of this age. With that he suggested the following elements: “1. It must at all times be rooted and grounded in living faith. 2. It must accept that the historical Scriptures are a theological unity, and interpret them accordingly. 3. It must challenge the modern world in the light of the Bible, not adapt the Bible to the thinking of the modern world. 4. It must put God at the centre of its concerns” (228-29).

Bray has done a commendable job in formulating a theological understanding of the personal, trinitarian existence of God. His discussion of the Eastern Orthodox position is quite helpful, and his conclusions emphasize the authority and priority of the Scriptures. The work is worthy of the attention of anyone desiring to further his/her concept of the trinitarian doctrine.


Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

Both of these volumes have been reissued with slight (Yamauchi) to moderate (Bruce) revisions. Bruce’s volume appeared first in 1963 and then reprinted with the addition of thirty-six illustrations and three maps in 1969 (originally published by Eerdmans). In the present volume, David Payne makes several moderate but helpful revisions. In order to enhance the book’s marketability in international circles, Payne occasionally seeks to use simpler and less formal English. The use of headings greatly adds to the readability of the text. He updates a number of ANE personal names, adds some footnotes referencing relevant works published since 1969, and updates the bibliography. In fact, the “For Further Reading” section is entirely redone (although it has only 21 works cited as opposed to 31 included in the 1969 edition). In contrast to the tendency of contemporary OT scholars to deny the historicity of biblical events, Payne adds footnotes that give
greater attention to evidence of historicity and leaves the door open for an early date of the Exodus (something Bruce did not do). The one change this reviewer laments is the deletion of the illustrations and maps.

Economic considerations apparently caused the reissue of Yamauchi’s volume. Since hardback editions of this size often cost over forty dollars, a paperback edition (still pricey at $29.99) makes a great work on the interrelationship between Persian history and the Bible more affordable. The only content change made in this new release of Yamauchi’s outstanding work (a review of the initial edition appeared in TMSJ [1991] 2:218-19) is the addition of a helpful list of maps and illustrations (579-80).

For both these books, if one already owns an older edition, the revisions in these later editions probably do not warrant purchasing the newer edition. However, both volumes deserve a place on the shelf of any OT scholar’s/pastor’s library.


Ever since the church father Tertullian threw down the gauntlet and posed the question, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and Church?” (Tertullian, “On Prescriptions Against Heretics” 7.22), Christian higher educators have attempted to define the relationship between college and church, between learning and faith, between reason and revelation. Christian colleges and universities have identified with the tension that exists between the intellectual traditions represented symbolically in the ancient worlds of Athens and Jerusalem.

Denise Lardner Carmody’s *Organizing a Christian Mind: A Theology of Higher Education* is an addition to the corpus of literature that explores the dynamic between educator and theologian. Carmody is presently Bernard J. Hanley Professor and Chair of the Religious Studies Department at Santa Clara University in California. A prolific writer, Carmody’s recent works include *Christian Feminist Theology: A Constructive Interpretation* (Blackwell, 1995); *In the Path of the Masters: Understanding the Spirituality of Buddha, Confucius, Jesus and Muhammad* (co-authored with John Carmody; M.E. Sharpe, 1996); and *Serene Compassion: A Christian Appreciation for Buddhist Holiness* (co-authored with John Carmody; Oxford University Press, 1996).

*Organizing a Christian Mind* purports to be a theological essay focusing primarily on the relationship between faith and learning. The original impetus for the text was John Paul II’s views of education espoused in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. As such, the text addresses principally to a Catholic audience, yet Carmody clearly states that other “mainline Protestant, Evangelical, and Orthodox Churches” (ix) can
adapt the structural framework to their academic communities.

Following a brief introduction and rationale that explores foundational issues related to both higher education (teaching, research, and publication) and theology (existence of God and the Christian faith), Carmody discusses four major themes that impact higher education, particularly on a curricular level: human nature, physical nature, politics, and divinity. Each section concludes with both practical and theoretical implications to higher education. Finally, education is “revisited” and conclusions are drawn.

Unsatisfied with the theological vision implied by a survey of the literature on the subject, *Organizing a Christian Mind* is a response to a perceived gap in the theological-educational discussion. By the author’s own admission, her theological training is limited (ix). The work is primarily a personal essay that reflects scholarly musings and reflections rather than a rigorous theological or philosophical treatment. Therefore, methodological considerations are minimal. Biblical interaction and exegetical discussions are notably absent. The volume reflects a blend of Catholic Thomist theology (15-16), feminist ideals (“We can imitate God who makes her sun to shine, her rain to fall . . . ” [17, emphasis added]), and an integrative appreciation of multicultural values, particularly the theological usages of Eastern religious thought (129), the last two being evidenced in the author’s recent publications.

Several observations are noteworthy for the potential reader. Carmody’s assessment of many of the tensions that plague college professors and administrators are laudable, particularly those described in the opening sections on education. This reviewer has felt many of the same tensions in balancing the demands of scholarship and education within a perceived pastoral context. Furthermore, Carmody’s concluding sectional discussions of practical and theoretical implications for higher education are appreciated. Asking the “So What?” question is critical to the dialogue as much related literature is devoid of any application and borders on the irrelevant.

Readers expecting a biblical or formal theological treatment will be disappointed. Carmody’s inclusive approach to theology results in a largely generic look at theological themes. The text generally avoids formal theological definition, and as a result, a fuller rationale, methodology, or apologetic for the maintained argument. The text proper lacks documentation or bibliographic citation. In-text references assume a working familiarity with the quote, individual, or citation under consideration. The text does have a good index to assist in cross-referencing and quick identification of selected areas of interest.

Carmody’s *Organizing a Christian Mind* offers the potential reader personal reflections and scholarly musings on broad religious and generic theological themes related to higher education. Those interested in the faith-learning dialogue from a non-evangelical perspective might consider this work. Readers interested in a more formal, evangelical treatment of the subject might consider two works that pre-date *Organizing a Christian Mind* and bear interesting titular similarities: David W. Gill’s *The Opening of the Christian Mind: Taking Every Thought Captive to Christ* (InterVarsity, 1989) and W. David Beck’s [ed.] *The
Opening of the American Mind: The Integration of Biblical Truth in the Curriculum of the University (Baker, 1991).


Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-92) is widely regarded as the greatest preacher in the history of the English-speaking church. He was typically a “textual” preacher, not a systematic expositor of the Bible. In fact in his enormous written corpus Spurgeon produced only two biblical commentaries: his seven volumes on the Psalms and a brief commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, which his wife and personal secretary actually completed after his death.

Spurgeon’s sermons were published weekly and compiled in annual volumes. Tom Carter, who previously edited a compilation of Spurgeon quotations in Spurgeon at His Best (Baker, 1988), has brought together the little-known biblical expositions of Spurgeon. Spurgeon often gave these brief verse-by-verse expositions, which appear interspersed with the sermons in volumes 38-63 of The Metropolitan Pulpit (MTP), on a weekday gathering or as an “aside” on a Sunday service.

In this book the editor has assigned titles to the expositions not originally from Spurgeon (9) and has also edited the Victorian English of Spurgeon to update it, as well as substituting the New International Version for the King James Version of Spurgeon’s day (ibid.). There are expositions on 31 passages of Scripture, ranging from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. They were selected by the editor as the “great chapters” of the Bible. He admits that the selections are subjective on his part, but nonetheless this compilation is a delight for those who enjoy Spurgeon. The expositions are not purely exegetical, but they demonstrate, as one friend stated, that “his exegesis was seldom wrong. He spared no pains to be sure of the exact meaning of the text” (Spurgeon, Autobiography 2:346). The researcher of Spurgeon will have one complaint. Carter has failed to give the original MTP citation for each exposition, a small but annoying omission. Despite this flaw the reviewer enthusiastically recommends this work.


The sixth installment in the Faith and Scholarship Colloquies, the editors
have brought together four short essays on the impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) on NT studies.

Joseph A. Fitzmyer discusses the DSS and Christian origins. He helpfully reminds the reader that the DSS are not singular or unified documents but rather a large number of “scrolls and fragments found at eight or nine different locations” (2). Fitzmyer discusses methodology of utilizing the DSS in terms of NT studies and their comparative value to other writers such as Philo and Josephus, highlighting their importance as “firsthand” accounts of Palestinian Judaism (6). Fitzmyer also briefly discusses certain Pauline expressions and their possible background in DSS fragments and includes an interesting summary of the relationship of 7Q4-10 and Mark 6:52-53.

John Collins presents an interesting discussion of Messianism in the DSS and particularly a review of 4Q285 and the question of a “dying messiah” and the conclusions of Wise and Eisenmen. This subject has been of interest to NT scholars because the traditional interpretation of Jewish backgrounds has been that the notion of a Messiah who would die was foreign to Jewish thought in the NT era. David Noel Freedman follows with an article on prophecy in the DSS. He points out that the Qumran community believed that they were living in “the last days” (48), and that lacking “a true prophet in their midst to give them direct revelation from God” (49), often re-interpreted the OT to fit their own current situation, this being done by an “authoritative interpreter” (ibid.). Freedman’s article is quite helpful and written in his usual readable style.

Charlesworth himself concludes the book with an interesting discussion of the DSS and the Christian faith. He talks about some of the perceived problems of the DSS and Christian theology, such as the conspiracy imagined because of the tortuously slow process in publication (66). He points out that the DSS have “revolutionized our understanding Christian origins” (72), especially in terms of background information. In the small number of pages in this book the reader will be rewarded with four stimulating essays and an update on the current thinking in DSS scholarship.


Reviewed by Douglas Petrovich, The Master’s Seminary alumnus teaching at Novosibirsk Bible Institute, Novosibirsk, Russia.

Within the last few decades, Christian scholarship has witnessed a resurgence in the study of NT textual criticism, but lamentably evangelicals have had but a small part in this upswing. Central to this resurgence is the return to in-depth study of the manuscripts that underlie standard Greek Bibles. Accordingly, Comfort and Barrett have produced transcriptions of the earliest manuscripts, all of which date from A.D. 100-300.
Philip Comfort is Professor of Greek and New Testament at Trinity Episcopal Seminary and visiting professor at Wheaton College. He also serves as senior editor of Bible reference at Tyndale House Publishers. David Barrett is editor of Bibles at Tyndale House Publishers, where he is overseeing a new translation of the Old Testament Apocrypha.

This large reference volume is the natural outworking of Comfort’s praxis of textual criticism, which he fully develops in his earlier volume *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament*. There, Comfort states that the earliest and best manuscripts are considered to be representative of the original until proven otherwise (see *Quest* 130). In the present volume, he relates his methodology to papyrus manuscripts as being “among the most important witnesses for reconstructing the original text of the New Testament,” and to the fact that their value derives from “the date when they were written” (14).

Because they conclude that the greatest contribution to the establishment of the original text is found in the oldest manuscripts, Comfort and Barrett invite their readers to examine the wording of these texts for themselves. “Since it is exceedingly difficult for most individuals to observe the actual manuscripts or even see photographs, let alone collect the *editio princeps* [definitive critical edition] of each manuscript, our goal has been to publish a fresh transcription of these manuscripts in one volume” (13).

The book essentially has two sections: a brief introduction and the transcriptions. The introduction contains informative sections on the dating of manuscripts and orthographic analysis, adding instructive palaeographic background. Each transcription is prefaced with a description of the manuscript’s contents, date, provenance, housing location, bibliography, physical features, and textual character. Some descriptions of the dating of manuscripts represent the latest research analyses, and the bibliographies provide up-to-date, useful information for studying the manuscripts personally.

The greatest asset of *The Complete Text* is that it successfully allows pastors and Bible students trained in Greek to interact directly with first-hand sources. For, as Dr. William Barrick noted in a recent article (*TMSJ*, Spring 1998, 25), the expositor has a vital role in preserving what the ancient manuscripts contribute to an accurate knowledge of the Old and New Testaments, and to do this, he must identify the text’s original statements.

The obvious question that arises is the accuracy of the transcriptions. Comfort and Barrett admit that though they tried to provide accurate collations, their work may need emendation (15). To address the question of errors, the reviewer randomly collated 7 leaves from a total of 6 manuscripts cited in *The Complete Text*. After collating, he found no errors in their text, though at times the editors were generous in where to begin brackets—meaning that occasionally at the edge of a lacuna [i.e., blank spaces], letters with only a partial stroke visible were not bracketed as illegible but considered discernible. However, since the publication of their volume, they have recognized nine errors in transcription in their book (see “TC-list” on the on-line journal *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* at
http://scholar.cc.emory.edu/scripts/TC/TC.html), with more forthcoming.

The editors do not document their collation procedures, and herein may be the source of impending criticism. Large-scale collation efforts such as the International Greek New Testament Project (IGNTP) have incorporated stringent standards in their projects, such as collating each manuscript independently three times, the third one by an experienced collator. Comfort and Barrett have participated in the IGNTP, but they do not confirm how closely they followed such standards in their own production. Time will tell how extensive the errors are, but the few that have been found to date should not deter one from purchasing their book.

A final concern is that their transcriptions do not document disputed or questionable readings. On the whole, however, this monumental work is a welcome addition to the fields of textual criticism and exegesis, and it should serve as a valuable tool to those whose practice is to interpret biblical texts only after a careful examination of the primary sources that underlie them. This Bible student will gladly consult The Complete Text when studying his Greek New Testament.


In his standard reference work on the early history of American higher education, Donald Tewksbury noted, “We might go through the whole list of American colleges, and show that, with here and there an exception, they were founded by religious men, and mainly with an eye to the interests of the Church” (Donald G. Tewksbury, The Founding of American Colleges and Universities before the Civil War, with Particular Reference to the Religious Influences Bearing Upon the College Movement [Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1956] 56). The influence of religion, and notably Protestant Christianity, on American higher education is recognized in the broad corpus of historical literature. However, this relationship has been less than cordial, frequently divisive, and in this century, openly hostile.

Merrimon Cuninggim’s Uneasy Partners: The College and the Church offers a survey of the status of church-college relationships in the waning years of the twentieth century, and a prognosis of future association in the new millennium. It offers some historical perspective, brief analysis and assessment of the status quo, and prescriptions for new directions in church-college relationships. Cuninggim brings both faculty and administrative perspective to the discussion.

His book is personal and reflective rather than a rigorous historical or policy-analysis treatment of the subject. After a brief summary of the history of the church’s role of the church in American higher education, Cuninggim offers three changes of relationship, roughly following the standard shift in the nineteenth century from the liberal arts college to the research university, and accompanying
shifts in academic secularization. He draws comparisons between advocates of secularization (the “secularists”) and the opposing “neoconservatives” or what might be considered the evangelical avant garde. Definitional tensions exist within the treatment. At times, the term “church-related” college might better be “religiously-oriented,” although historical realities of Protestant influence dictate the former phrase. To achieve broader appeal, terminology utilized in the book tends towards inclusive dialogue rather than carefully formulated definitions based upon theological or ecclesiastical categories. Though the author recognizes the tension of his subject and attempts some definitional qualification (42-45), perimeters are generic enough to be inclusive.

Uneasy Partners recognizes the value of the church-related college within American higher education, particularly in an age of increased, and at times militant, secularization. The author extends an apologetic for honest recognition of the contributions that these institutions make to the American educational system, a contribution that is often overlooked in an age of government-funded research and expansive state “multi-versities.” Institutions that have a religious mission do contribute to the higher education community socially, educationally, and culturally.

Unfortunately, the author resorts to unnecessary pejorative commentary when he draws conclusions concerning the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). He observes that (1) most of the Coalition’s colleges are not strong in academics, (2) most of those outside that self-anointed group [emphasis added] are not apostate, and (3) most of the church-related colleges do strive for excellence and faithfulness (119). Such undocumented and unqualified assertions betray authorial bias, seriously reduce the scholastic credibility of the book, and cultivate inaccurate generalizations. Such derogatory commentary used by an acknowledged scholar is unfortunate.

Recent trends within the Southern Baptist Convention to reassert denominational control over its colleges illustrate the tensions raised in Uneasy Partners. A future edition should address the reassertion of the church within its own academic institutions. Issues of theological and denominational integrity are often argued at the price of academic freedom, frequently pitting clerics with academics. The issue of academic freedom in juxtaposition with theological and denominational integrity is a major issue that lurks in the muddy waters of this hotly contested area. The title of the work, Uneasy Partners, is appropriate.

A future edition might also address the role of nondenominational colleges and universities in American higher education. When Cuninggim speaks of the “Church,” he apparently means some sense of formally sponsored organizational or denominational tie that defines his usage of the term. Numerous American church-related colleges fail to have formal denominational partners, yet provide academic services to existing religious constituencies.

The relationship between the church and college has historically been a dynamic one. Cuninggim’s Uneasy Partners: The College and the Church adds to the existing corpus of literature on the subject. Apart from occasional pejorative commentary and the non-cognitive musings of the author, the book addresses a
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neglected though worthy aspect of American higher education: the church-related college.


Philip Davies is Professor in the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield, England. In Scribes and Schools he attempts to reconstruct the process of the Jewish canonization of the Old Testament. He readily admits that his approach is primarily sociological (15, 35-36, 41, 54), non-theological (14, 37), and subjective (2, 5, 70, 84). Davies sketches the history of early classical education and its relationship to scribes, archives, and libraries (17-35). In the final chapters of the book, he discusses the contributions of both the Dead Sea Scrolls (152-68) and the rabbinic period (169-84) to the discussion of Jewish canonization. The sociological distance between the elite and the peasant becomes one of the author’s supports for his theory of the canonical process (15). Indeed, it is one of the reasons why he concludes that the “scriptural canon cannot and does not represent an amorphous ‘Israel’ but a set of elitist portraits” (41). Who were the elitists who canonized the OT? According to Davies, they were the Levite scribes in the Jerusalem temple (131-34).

Davies’ sociological investigation into the origins of the biblical canon is accompanied by a redefinition of the terms. Firstly, he supports numerous canons within the corpus of Scripture rather than a single OT canon (38, 40). Secondly, “Bible” is not synonymous with “canon” since there was no Jewish Bible until the Middle Ages (42). Therefore, the use of the term “biblical” in the discussion of the canonization of the OT is “inappropriate” (42). It becomes quite apparent that the author does not believe in the authenticity and inspiration of the OT. He announces that “no scholars believe that the ten commandments were given as written to Moses on Sinai” (3). In fact, Davies declares that ancient Israel is a creation of a later society and that presenting Israel as a society occupying Iron Age Palestine is a figment of the imagination (3). In addition, “the Judean canon’s account of Samaria [cannot] be taken as reliable” (70). According to Davies, 1 Chronicles 23–27 is “pretty clearly a fictional account of the ancient monarchic administration” (79). Likewise, the “story of the finding of the law scroll under Josiah . . . is a complete fiction” (98-99). Simply put, Davies does not accept the historical reliability of the OT as we have it. He even dares to accuse those who think differently of a “bias about dating” (77).

Given his lack of respect for the historicity or integrity of the OT, it is no surprise that the author of Scribes and Schools proposes a process of canonization which has an equal disrespect for the text: “canonizing does not mean a respect for
the fixed text of a scroll, but quite the opposite: to reinforce the canonicity of texts by making them fit better the use for which they are being preserved” (113). In Davies’ opinion, making the texts more fitting involved scribal embellishment of the texts (116). Therefore, the book of Jonah is nothing more than a scribal creation inspired by an allusion to the prophet Jonah in 2 Kings 14:25 (118-19). It is but one of the “readable works of fiction” (Daniel, Esther, Ruth, Judith, and Tobit) “written largely for pleasure” (142).

How is it that such fictions were allowed a place in the canon? Davies considers two possibilities: (1) Those books were widely employed in the educational curriculum of the scribal schools; or, (2) their inclusion was intended as a means of loosening the elitist’s control of the canon and to “sanction a wider range of literature held in the temple libraries” (150-51). Canonization of any portion of the OT came about when it was “regarded as being of contemporary relevance” (124). Davies does not think any OT book in its present form dates from even the period of the monarchy (80). He dates everything to at least the Persian period with Deuteronomy being the first book to be written (85).

Before the reader gets very far into Scribes and Schools, he learns that the author does not hold to inspiration, inerrancy, divine revelation, or the miraculous. The author’s decidedly anti-theological stance becomes quite apparent in his otherwise insightful discussion of the canonical views of James Sanders and Brevard Childs (49-53).

Davies’ book is a perfect example of what happens when the OT is deconstructed, removed from its identification with the mind of God, and rebuilt according to the mind of man. It is an exercise in humanistic thinking which assumes that man is the sole authority in defining the content and history of the Word of God.


This book is the first volume to be published in the “Encounter Biblical Studies” series of textbooks especially designed for Bible courses in Christian colleges. The publisher and authors have sought to produce a basic-level NT survey text that reflects a high level of evangelical scholarship, written to be understood by today’s college freshman, pedagogically sound, and visually oriented (12). They have achieved these goals with excellence in this work.

Every chapter begins with an outline of its contents and a statement of its objectives, the tasks the reader should be able to perform after reading the chapter.
The main content of each chapter includes boldfaced key terms that are defined in a glossary at the end of the book (395-406), sidebars that contain primary sources quotes and contemporary concerns, and focus boxes that present practical application of the material. Explanatory charts conclude with a summary statement of its content, review questions with answers in the back of the book (407-8), and suggestions for further reading.

Fourteen of the book’s twenty-four chapters introduce the reader to the books of the NT. A summary of basic evangelical conclusion concerning authorship, date, place of writing, destination, outline, and purpose introduces each biblical book. That is followed by a more extensive discussion of the major themes of the book. The other ten chapters deal with matters such as historical background, canonicity, the study of the Gospels, the life of Christ, and the teachings of Jesus and Paul.

Although this textbook contains much valuable information for the beginning NT student, two cautions need to be sounded. First, the authors view the church in continuity with the OT people of God; for them, the church is the new Israel (21, 203, 266). Second, the book waffles on issues where there is evangelical diversity, particularly when dealing with historical criticism. The history and assumptions of historical criticism are well stated. However, the application of critical methodologies to the study of the New Testament is endorsed if practiced in what the authors call a historical-theological approach. Yarbrough writes, “At a more advanced level, scholars and serious students make use of a number of critical methods and measures designed to arrive at the proper interpretation: textual criticism, source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, literary criticism, canonical criticism, sociological criticism, and structuralism. These modes of analysis are normally just one step in a larger process of arriving at the right understanding of a text” (161).

Included with each textbook is an interactive CD-ROM that serves as a supplemental resource to the text. Designed by Chris Miller, Associate Professor of Bible, and Phil Bassett, Associate Professor of Education, both of Cedarville College, the interactive CD-ROM is a unique and innovative addition to the Encountering text series.

Happily, the designers shunned the “Windows Only” temptation and rendered the CD accessible in both the Windows and Macintosh platforms, utilizing Macromedia’s Shockwave and Apple’s QuickTime technologies. The CD operated extremely well in several different machines ranging from a Macintosh G3 (266 mhz) to a Power Mac 6100 and from Pentium III (300 mhz) down to an older P-100 (utilizing CD-ROM’s ranging from 4x to 24x speeds). The CD supplements the text in several ways: (1) movie clips of site locations and interviews with the authors on various topics; (2) Hypertext (HT) formatted pages with outlines and main points, often verbalized; and (3) maps, diagrams, and pictures.

Though innovative and extremely easy to navigate, the CD-ROM nevertheless was observed to have several poor qualities. The first and perhaps the most noticeable defect relates to the overly simplistic summaries contained in the
various windows. For instance, in the section covering the Book of Revelation a button appears entitled “eschatology,” presumably dealing with the eschatology of the Apocalypse. However, that button takes you to a page that simply lists “The Suffering Servant: Trial” and “The Ruling Sovereign: Triumph,” which apparently is deemed to suffice as a summation of the eschatological issues of the book. As another example in the section of introductory material, a button exists for the discussion “Why Study the New Testament.” Upon entering that page, the student will encounter three reasons: (1) To avoid the tyranny of preformed personal opinion; (2) To avoid misguided reliance upon the Holy Spirit; and (3) To enable historical-theological interpretation. Valid reasons, but clearly superficial, lacking any reference to knowing God and His will for life (2 Tim 2:15; 3:17) as a reason for study. The reference to “historical-theological” interpretation instead of “historical-grammatical” interpretation should not go unnoticed. A student who simply scans the CD material without consulting either the text or other resources, may be able to pass the overly simple quizzes provided for the benefit of an instructor, but the reviewers doubt they will come away with a thorough working knowledge of the NT.

A couple of technical problems also arose. Again, in the section on the Book of Revelation, the blue HT numerals, which when clicked upon display the respective lines of the book’s outline, do not line up properly with each line in the outline. In the glossary areas, the audio pronunciations of technical terms are extremely well-done, but in the written definition there is amazingly no HT link to the “see also” references that are contained in the definition.

The authors have also prepared an additional companion to the main text: Readings from the First-Century World. The reason given for this volume by the authors is that “nothing comparable exists to serve the needs of younger college students taking basic NT survey, history, or background classes” (10). The authors admit that this collection is not comprehensive (11); however, it serves as an excellent addition to the text. Unlike the text, the Readings book lacks all of the visual features, containing only a few black and white photos. The Readings provide the student with an introduction to a wide-range of extra-biblical literature and background material that is certain to pique the interest of the motivated student. As expected from any work in which Elwell is involved, the indexes in both works are thorough, well-designed, and accessible.

This initial offering of the Encountering series seems to be an encouraging beginning to a long-term project. It delivers everything it promises, albeit perhaps too expensively, and for the most part delivers it well. For those who cut their teeth on Tenney, Gromacki, or even Gundry, the diet of the Encountering the New Testament may seem a little on the “lite” side, but it is certain to take a prominent place in many Bible colleges across the country.

Steven Garber. The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief & Behavior
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In a recent survey of college freshman, only 40.8% considered the "development of a moral philosophy of life" as an objective that was essential or very important during their time in college or university ("Attitudes and Characteristics of Freshman, Fall 1997," Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac 45/1 [August 28, 1998]:22). Tragically, it is frequently within these formidable years that college students formulate a "world view" that will mark them the rest of their lives. The de facto "moral philosophy of life" of the university or college culture will offer its relativistic siren cry to these young people, many of whom will be shaped by it without the awareness of its influence.

Garber's *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief & Behavior during the University Years* is a challenge to consider the importance of these foundational and formative years in shaping an individual’s “moral philosophy of life.” Steven Garber is on the faculty of the American Studies Program sponsored by the Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities. The popularity of the text among Coalition college faculty indicates Garber has struck a nerve regarding the meaning of collegiate education in the relativistic and fragmentary flux of modern university culture.

The volume builds around eight chapters that address seminal challenges to students in the modern university. The author begins by asking the student to answer the simple question “Why do you get up in the morning?” The answer reveals one’s motives, life purpose, and world view. Though it is a simple question, the accompanying response will both define and determine how one’s views will play out in the post-collegiate era. Recognizing the importance of this four-year window, Garber hopes to reshape and reconsider the aforementioned answer. Garber’s thesis is, “The years between adolescence and adulthood are a crucible in which moral meaning is being formed, and central to that formation is a vision of integrity which coherently connects belief to behavior . . .” (20).

Subsequent chapters address probing questions concerning the relationships between belief and behavior, between telos and praxis. Clearly, the author desires the reader to see beyond lectures and textbooks to the real heart of the intellectual issues that swirl around a college campus and define purpose and life. Questions concerning the meaning of education, morals, and “world view” surface and are discussed.

The text is rich with the literary and cultural musings. Some who have read the work felt the volume of literary quotes and cultural references is, at times, distracting from the central message, or in some situations, overshadows or confuses an understanding of the point. Ironically, biblical citation is largely absent, in spite of the plethora of other literary sources. Illustrations from the author’s own experiences in working with college students appear in abundance, giving the work a personal and human dimension.
The book claims, “Professors, campus ministers, parents, youth pastors and others who are concerned with college students face an immense challenge. How do you help Christian students during one of the most eventful and intense periods of their lives learn to connect what they believe about the world with how they live in the world?” Garber offers some direction amid the fragmentation of the contemporary college. Students should consider their education carefully, should face the reality of “world view” construction, and look beyond degrees to purpose and meaning in life, rather than to some materialistic fulfillment through career attainment that comes only with a college degree.

This reviewer felt that *The Fabric of Faithfulness* might be digestible to a college faculty rather more than an eighteen-year-old college freshman. The popularity of the book among the Coalition faculty and its use as a discussion tool seem to support this notion. Students in the later years of the college experience might benefit, but students starting their college program are seldom attuned to the pending realities that they will face.

*The Fabric of Faithfulness* is a welcome interaction with the issues and challenges that confront today’s university students as they correlate belief and behavior. For the 40.8% of entering college freshman who desire a “moral philosophy of life” and the 59.2% who will get it regardless of conscious effort, those who work with this generation must look beyond lectures, textbooks, and examinations to the formation of the students’ world view.


“Whom does the Holy Spirit call to leadership ministries in the church?” This is the central question of the book. The authors’ belief is that the sovereign Spirit calls both women and men to positions of leadership in the church, and that both women and men are gifted to fulfill those responsibilities. “Consequently, to deny women the opportunity to obey the Spirit places us in the position not only of acting unjustly toward women but, more important, of standing in opposition to the work of the sovereign Holy Spirit” (16). In order to clarify their position, the authors address the question of women in ministry from three perspectives: church history, Scripture, and Christian theology.

In the first two chapters D. Kjesbo seeks to show that history demonstrates a pattern that when church renewal and revival came, the Holy Spirit gifted women as well as men for leadership positions. It is only over time when the church became institutionalized that women became excluded. “Women served together with men in the early years until the institutionalization of the church transformed leadership into the sole prerogative of men” (39). A. Köstenberger in his review of this book
(JETS [September 1998]) states, “At this point Kjesbo provides no evidence but merely assumes an egalitarian reading of the NT” (516). She states that prior to the 300s and 400s the leadership was essentially patriarchal; however, with the advent of a number of revival movements, such as the monastic movement, the Wesleyan revival, or other North American revivals, women have played a key role in leadership. Women also played a key role in the formative years of a new denomination, later to be replaced by men as the denomination became more organized.

In the next two chapters S. Grenz focuses on the biblical data from both the Old and New Testaments. It is unfortunate, though, that he begins his study with God’s relationship with Israel, and not Genesis 1–3, which is the formation of man and woman. He acknowledges that “taken as a whole, the Old Testament bears witness to a strong patriarchal social order, where males dominated public and private life” (64). Yet to prove his point that egalitarianism existed, he emphasizes the few women who were exceptions in the OT, i.e., Deborah and Miriam. In the Gospels, Grenz notes that because Jesus countered the cultural norms of the day and talked with women, healed women, and seemed to be close to several women (Mary, Martha, and Mary Magdalene), the assumption must be that women were also involved in the leadership community. In the early church he mentions several women, such as Tabitha, Priscilla, the four daughters of Philip the evangelist, and Phoebe, but applies the same assumption: “The fundamental egalitarianism of the new reality Jesus established means that in principle every aspect of the church’s ministry is open to believers without regard to these long-standing distinctions” (97). Therefore, according to Grenz’s interpretation of Gal 3:28, which is the theological center of his teaching, all believers enjoy an equal status, and the expression “in Christ” transcends racial, socioeconomic, and gender distinctions. Grenz spends a great deal of time (15 pages) discussing the foundational passage related to women, 1 Tim 2:11-15, and though mentioning several views, he concludes with the statement, “Even though scholars have not come to a consensus on the issue, the discussion of the biblical texts to date has led to one significant conclusion. In view of the practice of the early church, the burden of proof now rests on those who would bar women from full participation with men in all dimensions of the gospel ministry” (140-41).

The last three chapters emphasize the theological aspect of women in ministry. In these Grenz notes that “a biblical understanding of creation, the community of Christ and the ordained offices all lead to the conclusion that women ought to be full participants with men in all dimensions of church life and ministry” (143). His conclusion is that both male and female concepts form the picture of God, indicating both men and women in partnership in all aspects of ministry. Grenz also expresses the conviction that the Persons of the Trinity are mutually dependent on one another, that the Father is dependent on the Son and the Spirit. However, the Scriptures strongly state a subordination, that the Spirit is subordinate to the Son and the Son is subordinate to the Father. Finally, regarding ordination, he states that ecclesiology results in an egalitarian view of the ordained offices
because pastors are not a special class of Christians who mediate God’s grace to the people. Rather, they “are persons chosen by God and recognized by the church as having the responsibility to lead God’s people in fulfilling the mandate Christ has given to the entire church” (186).

Grenz’s and Kjesbo’s development of an egalitarian theology of women in ministry will prove significant in the continuing debate. Yet their research relies primarily on secondary sources in the historical section, and in the biblical and theological sections they seem to survey others’ views rather than expressing their own. Köstenberger offers the following conclusion: “Although the authors attempt to give their work an inductive flavor, the procedure is actually deductive. In fact, the book may best be described as an effort to provide an apologetic for the egalitarian position. . . . Overall, the authors’ effort to impose an egalitarian grid of gender roles on the entire sweep of biblical history and teaching must therefore be judged a failure” (518-19).


The subject of “calling” or vocatio (vocation) has frequently failed to foster the attention within the Christian community it rightly deserves. William Perkins, one of Cambridge’s leading sixteenth-century Puritan theologians, commented, “. . . [F]ew men rightly know how to live and go on in their callings so as they may please God . . .” (William Perkins, “A Treatise of the Vocations or Callings of Men with the Sorts and Kinds of Them and the Right Use Thereof” (1603), *The Works of William Perkins*, ed. by Ian Breward [Appleford, Abingdon, Berkshire, England: Sutton Courtenay, 1970] 446). Other treatises such as Richard Steele’s classic *The Religious Tradesman* (Harrisburg, Va.: Sprinkle, 1989) occasionally find their way back into print. More recent publications, such as Paul Helm’s *The Callings* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1987), have kept the discussion smoldering, but often find only limited readerships within the Christian community.

Os Guinness adds to the dialogue in his recent and more popular work *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life*. A long-time associate of Francis Schaeffer and L’Abri Fellowship, Guinness is currently Senior Fellow of the Trinity Forum. A prolific writer, Guinness has many notable titles to his literary credit including, *The Dust of Death, God in the Dark, Dining with the Devil, No God but God*, and *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*. His assessment of modern culture is always insightful, and his analysis of the frustration many feel within their own careers is accurate and quickly identified by the average reader.

His latest book is a devotional meditation rather than a formal academic analysis. Guinness divides the work into twenty-six short essays on varying themes connected with the concept of the “call.” He has designed each section to be read
daily as a meditation, with opportunity for personal reflection. Each of the sections is rich with literary and cultural material from a plethora of sources. The material frequently introduces the topic and engages the reader’s imagination as Guinness bridges into the issue at hand. Each section concludes with several probing questions to challenge readers to reflect on the topic as it relates to their lives.

Three initial reactions shaped this reviewer’s impression of the work. Though the book’s readability is laudable, the format of individual sections tends toward fragmentation. Greater interrelationship and interaction between sections would have been desirable. Second, many quotes cited by Guinness challenge the reviewer’s thinking, yet little citation data or documentation is offered. This results in frustration as attempts to further document and contextualize the quote are difficult at best. Third, greater biblical interplay was expected. Guinness cites William Perkins as a key influential figure in the formation of his ideas (248), yet he deviates from Perkins’ work in this regard.

In addition to individual benefits gained from a reading of the book, its devotional format lends itself to a small-group setting or a reading discussion group. Evangelism-minded individuals might consider the text for a neighborhood study. Christian and non-Christian alike often share the issues of meaning and purpose in one’s career. In this regard, The Call is a practical discussion bridge. Guinness assumes a familiarity with a broad range of literary and cultural sources.

His influence and voice within conservative evangelicalism has been colored by his signature on the recent Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Gift of Salvation (ECT II-1997) document (Christianity Today [December 8, 1997] 38) and as a past signatory on the original ECT statement (1994). Receptivity to Catholicism would seem incompatible with Reformation and Puritan thinking in general, to say nothing of how that affects one view of “calling.” Many conservatives within the Reformed tradition will feel a tension between the usage of William Perkins classic Puritan treatise on “vocation” by Guinness on one side and avoidance of expressed concerns by Perkins in his treatise regarding “the Reformed Catholic” on the other. Potential readers familiar with Guinness’ affirmation may find his credibility to speak from a Reformed posture compromised.

This volume offers the reader an insightful and easy-to-read devotional on a critical, often neglected aspect of Christian living. Though questions regarding Guinness’ broader theological activities have affected his voice among some conservatives, his writings continue to challenge and provoke thought.


W. Hall Harris III is professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological
Seminary. This work results from his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Sheffield. Every preacher is delighted when he discovers a comprehensive work on a problem-text in a biblical book that he is teaching or will be in the future. This volume should be a welcome resource for any pastor who anticipates preaching through Ephesians and having to deal with Ephesians 4:7-11.

The author has provided an extensive bibliography for further study. He has also included helpful indexes of authors and subjects. The volume is well researched and written in a most readable style.

In the appendix (198-204), “The Question of Authorship and Its Impact on This Study,” the author reviews the debate over the authorship of Ephesians from the 18th century through the end of the 20th. The author affirms Pauline authorship of the epistle (203).

He first acknowledges that the almost unanimous view in the early church was that Eph 4:9-11 referred to the belief that Christ, in the three days between his burial and resurrection, descended to the underworld and participated in various activities there. He also acknowledges that there are many who in recent years have believed that Christ’s descent referred to Christ’s coming from heaven to earth at the Incarnation. Harris discusses these two views in the first two chapters (1-63). The remainder of the book (64-197) discusses a third alternative offered by the author. He reasons that the descent occurred after the ascent and exaltation of Ephesians 4:8 and referred to the descent of Christ as the Spirit who distributed gifts (gifted leaders to His church).

One does not have to agree with the author’s conclusion to derive value from his thorough research. This reviewer found the book quite thought-provoking and complete in its coverage of the subject. It will be a welcomed help in any pastor’s library.


Anyone expecting *Archaeology and the Old Testament* to be an archaeology textbook will be disappointed, but those in search of a historical survey of the OT, coordinated with archaeological illustrations, will be delighted. For archaeological links to the OT, Hoerth draws upon thirty years of teaching at Wheaton College, where he also served as director of archaeology. He also coedited *Peoples of the Old Testament World* (Baker, 1994) with Gerald L. Mattingly and Edwin M. Yamauchi and authored “The Egyptian Game of Hounds and Jackals” (140), to be published by the British Museum in *Board Games in Perspective*, ed. I. L. Finkel. Hoerth has also participated in numerous archaeological excavations.

This is the companion volume to *Archaeology and the New Testament*, by John McRay (Baker, 1991). Hoerth’s volume should be considered an updated and
improved replacement for volumes such as Merrill F. Unger's work of the same title, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Zondervan, 1954), and R. K. Harrison's *Old Testament Times* (Eerdmans, 1970). The purpose of this volume is “to acquaint the beginning student in Old Testament studies with the reasons for this interest in archaeology and with some of the specific benefits that the discipline brings to the biblical text” (9). Frequent references are provided to significant journal articles in such periodicals as *Biblical Archaeologist* (*BA*, renamed *Near Eastern Archaeology* in 1998) and *Biblical Archaeology Review* (*BAR*). Out of 104 articles listed in the “Additional Reading” section at the conclusion of each chapter, *BA* and *BAR* have 44 references apiece. Out of 340 journal articles listed in the “Reference List” (423-36), Hoerth cites *BAR* 159 times, *BA* 73 times, *Israel Exploration Journal* 24 times, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 22 times, and *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* (*PEQ*) 16 times. The remaining 46 citations are from 27 journals. This popularizing direction is also exhibited in the 32 references to the writings of Hershel Shanks in the “Reference List” (433-34).

The volume is strategically illustrated with over 250 charts, black and white photos, drawings, and diagrams. This compares with 14 maps and 29 charts (no photos or drawings) in Walter C. Kaiser’s *A History of Israel* (Broadman and Holman, 1998), which is also a historical survey of the OT (see the review of this volume elsewhere in this issue of TMSJ). Unfortunately, Hoerth usually does not cite sources for the illustrations, making it difficult to trace them to their original publication and context. The illustrations include the following ones of particular interest: a chart of the evangelical viewpoints of the patriarchal chronology (57), an artist’s reconstruction depicting a minimal breach in the walls of Jericho (to illustrate Hoerth’s opinion that there was no major collapse of the city walls, 210), a photo of a decorated ivory horn from 13th-century Megiddo (perhaps similar to that used by Samuel to anoint David, 254), and an archaeologically consistent artist’s conception of Goliath’s armor and weaponry (256).

The first chapter (“Archaeology: What It Is, What It Does, What It Does Not Do,” 13-30) is informative but cursory. A fuller treatment of the methods and science of archaeology would benefit the volume. Chapter 2 (“Mesopotamia before Abraham,” 31-55) is the most dependent upon archaeological evidence for its content. The remainder of the volume (56-422) is a running account of the historical record in the OT. Hoerth’s interpretive position is consistently evangelical. From time to time his tone is polemical, as when he writes: “It is telling that the liberal focus has presently shifted from the question of date to theorizing over how much, if any, of the exodus and conquest narrative is to be believed!” (181). He dates Abraham’s birth at 1952 B.C., Israel’s sojourn in Egypt from 1660-1447 B.C. (215 years rather than 430), and the Exodus in 1447 B.C. (57, 60, 156, 158).

Hoerth’s style of writing is transparent and sometimes personal. In his discussion of the Noahic flood he comments: “The bitterness that sometimes surrounds arguments for and against flood geology make archaeologists happy they are of another discipline” (191). He is also capable of admitting that archaeologists and Bible scholars sometimes “simply do not know” (228) the answers to significant
questions.

Overall the volume is generally well referenced. However, it has significant omissions. In the discussion of dates for Abraham it does not mention (in the text or in the “Reference List”) Eugene H. Merrill, “Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology” (Bib Sac 137/547 [1980]:241-51). “Additional Reading” at the end of Chapter 7 (“Joseph and Moses in Egypt”) lists only one reference (164). At least four other sources would have benefitted the reader: Gleason L. Archer, “An Eighteenth Dynasty Rameses,” JETS 17/1(1974): 49-50; Charles F. Aling, “The Biblical City of Ramses,” JETS 25/2 (1982):129-37; Harold W. Hoehner, “The Duration of the Egyptian Bondage,” Bib Sac 126/504 (1969):306-16; and James R. Battenfield, “A Consideration of the Identity of the Pharaoh of Genesis 47,” JETS 15/2 (1972):77-85. With all of the references to works by Shanks, it is puzzling that Hoerth omits Jerusalem: An Archaeological Biography (Random House, 1995) from “Additional Reading” (276) as well as from the “Reference List” (434, which includes publications up to 1998). The following are representative of omissions on archaeology: Avraham Negev, ed., The Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land, 3rd ed. (Prentice, 1990); Ephraim Stern, The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land, 4 vols. (Simon/Carta, 1993); Walter E. Rast, Through the Ages in Palestinian Archaeology: An Introductory Handbook (Trinity, 1992); Keith N. Schoville, Biblical Archaeology in Focus (Baker, 1978), and D. J. Wisemans, ed., Peoples of Old Testament Times (Oxford, 1973). In addition, a variety of statements lack references to sources that would provide the reader with a paper trail. Examples of such omissions include the following: the Ugaritic contribution to understanding Prov 26:23 (18), the Kitchen quote (22 n. 10), Islamic claims of descent from Ishmael (104 n. 3), and the description of iron chariots (231 n. 9).

In explaining some difficult texts, Hoerth unnecessarily resorts to late scribal glosses (59). This is how he prefers to treat the phrase “in the land of Rameses” in Gen 47:11 (156 n. 14, 166 n. 1). Such treatment seems at odds with the accusation he makes against critical scholars: “To accept the biblical account is now said to be naive” (215). It also contradicts his own principle that it is not sound practice to emend “the biblical text to make the identification fit” (225). In addition to the matter of scribal glosses, Hoerth waffles on the issue of recent creation (199) and offers "poetic license" as a possible explanation for the long day of Josh 10:12-13 (214).

The evangelical stance of Archaeology and the Old Testament, its many illustrations, and its persistent reference to popular sources make it especially suitable as a textbook for a historical survey of the OT in evangelical Bible colleges and seminaries. Those who have more than a minimal background in archaeology will still find it refreshing in its approach and stimulating in its polemics.

Henry Holloman. The Forgotten Blessing: Rediscovering the Transforming Power
Here is the ripened fruit of the author’s more than 30 years in teaching, most of these at Talbot School of Theology. Dr. Holloman is Professor of Systematic Theology. This volume is part of the Swindoll Leadership Library series, under the general editorship of Charles Swindoll, President of Dallas Theological Seminary.

Much in the book gives the impression of long reflection, seasoned sifting, and adept analogies to help users apply points in practical holiness. Holloman shows ability to summarize biblical truths and stress God’s sufficiency for daily holiness. He favors the view that every Christian experiences spirituality in some degree, “but Scripture designates only some Christians as ‘spiritual’” (8). He equates the spiritual Christian with the spiritually mature Christian (8, 223-24), one who has a thorough pattern of life which “imitates Jesus’ character, choices, communication, and conduct” (8).

Several charts offer comparisons. For instance Table I (6-7) compares in ten points three types of sanctification, which the author calls positional (from initial salvation forward eternally), progressive in the daily, practical life, and perfective in the next life in total holiness, without sin.

Both the Spirit and the Word are indispensable to proper growth (76). God’s Word is the map for Christians (Ps 119:105), and God’s Spirit is the guide (Rom 8:14). Whatever does not match up with the Scripture needs to be refused.

Chapter 10 offers beneficial lists of steps to have a vital relationship with God’s Word. The appeal for continual nourishment and obedience is well-taken, so are the practical helps on how to do things according to Scripture. Chapters 6–7 give much helpful thought on the Spirit’s vital role in sanctification.

The distinction between the saved who are “general disciples” and those who are “special,” i.e. more vital (mature) disciples (134), will puzzle some readers. The discussion suggests that only those in the second category do eleven things associated with the area of “effective discipleship”—deny self, take up one’s cross daily, keep following Christ (Luke 9:23), relinquish all possessions to Christ, continue in Christ’s Word, practice prayer according to God’s teaching, abide in Christ, love God supremely, love one another, serve others, and make disciples of others (134-38). Some say that all the genuinely saved do these in some degree, even though they have aspects of inconsistency since they are not yet sinless, the saved being at various stages of growth. Holloman agrees with the latter, but could clarify better here.

Good summary chapters in The Forgotten Blessing show how other facets of Christian experience relate to sanctification, such as prayer, handling adversity, and winning in spiritual warfare.

This book is crafted to bring many vital things to the reader’s attention and give help in seizing the blessing daily, not forgetting or slighting a holy life. For the many benefits it offers, this reviewer recommends the book because it can be a
spiritual tonic to others as it has been for him.


The relationship between Christianity as a religion and the civil government of the United States is one of constant turmoil, high emotion, and seemingly endless litigation in the court system. In this book the editor (himself a professor of both theology and law) has brought together a series of essays by lawyers and theologians discussing some of the most pertinent issues in the current discussion. In the introduction House states that “the American experiment was built on the acceptance of law from two sources, both reflecting adherence to divine law. The first was the law of nature, generally known as natural law. The second was the law of Scripture” (9). He then points out, “[A]t the heart of America’s constitutional government lies a third source: the common law tradition” (ibid.). The articles arise from a series of lectures given at the 1993 National Association of Evangelicals meeting. The essays examine “the past influence of Christianity on the laws, determined ways in which Christians should relate to current laws, and proposed ways Christians might influence future laws” (11).

This book is not for the faint of heart. The reading is often ponderous, and those who have not waded through legal briefs and tightly wound argumentation may very well abandon the effort. However, that would be to their detriment as the various essays contain a wealth of well thought out and, for the most part, well articulated positions on the various issues of the Christian’s relationship to civil authorities. Herbert W. Titus’ introductory chapter, “God’s Revelation: Foundation for the Common Law,” is an excellent presentation of the place of Christian theology in relation to the formulation of America’s civil law. He convincingly demonstrates that “America’s founding fathers embraced a philosophy of law and government explicitly based on God’s revelation in nature and the Holy Scriptures” (41). Other noteworthy chapters are John Eidsmoe’s “Operation Josiah: Rediscovering the Biblical Roots of the American Constitutional Republic,” D. F. Kelly’s “The Religious Roots of Western Liberty: Cut Them or Renew Them?” and Edmund Clowny’s “The Kingdom, The Church, and the Gospel in an Age of Pluralism.”

A couple of the essays are disappointing. The chapter on “The Abiding Value of Biblical Law” is far too brief to cover the issues adequately, and the author’s use of “law” as it relates to the OT seems overly broad. The editor’s own chapter on civil disobedience will likely strike many as running headlong into Romans 13 and 1 Pet 2:13-17.

At the end of the book there is a “Summary Statement” signed by the participants in the conference and introduced in the book by Carl F. H. Henry.
This book is recommended as a balanced and thorough discussion of issues that currently are engaging many areas of theological, judicial, and legislative thought and action. It will be especially helpful to pastors and other church leaders who are thinking through these issues, as the call to political action by Christians becomes more fervent with the approaching national elections.


The discipline of OT theology has experienced something of a renaissance in recent years, particularly among evangelical authors. After depending on Geerhardus Vos’ magisterial *Biblical Theology* (1948) and J. Barton Payne’s *Theology of the Older Testament* (1962) for over a generation, several evangelical professors have published excellent works in this field. Walter Kaiser’s *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (1978), William Dyrness’ *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (1977), Elmer Marten’s *God’s Design* (1981), Zuck’s, Merrill’s, and Bock’s *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament* (1991), and John Sailhamer’s methodological *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* (1995) are examples of excellent contributions in the last twenty years.

Paul House, formerly of Taylor University and now at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has made a major contribution to the discipline that is still searching for that elusive “center.” While thoroughly familiar with those who have gone before him, evangelical and otherwise, House offers some fresh ideas and suggestions for “doing” OT theology.

In his opening chapter, he surveys the history of the study of OT theology. He outlines its development under four rubrics: (1) Beginnings: From Gabler to Wellhausen: 1787-1878; (2) The Dominance of Historicism: 1878-1920; (3) The Reemergence of Old Testament Theology: 1920-1960; and (4) The Growth of Diversity: 1960-1993. Since it took several years for his manuscript to be published, House adds an Appendix: “Old Testament Theology since 1993” (548-59), in which he tries to bring this chapter “up-to-date.” Previous works such as *Old Testament Theology: Its Heritage and Development* by Hayes and Prassner (1985) and the fourth edition of Gerhard Hasel’s *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (1991) have covered this historical ground well.

One major criticism in this section is House’s failure to acknowledge the contribution of the already mentioned classic, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* by Geerhardus Vos (1948). He does include Vos in his extensive bibliography (615-35), yet earlier he only acknowledges him obliquely in one footnote (175).

Both the search for a “center” of OT theology and the methodology one employs appear to be the big issues in this discipline. House, like many recent
writers, does not attempt to solve the question of a “center” or organizing principle for viewing divine revelation in the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., Kaiser’s “promise”). He does, however, espouse and apply the “Canonical Approach” as his working methodology. In this regard, he acknowledges the seminal methodological contribution of Brevard Childs, especially his Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context (1986) and Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible (1992).

In his appendix House also acknowledges Sailhamer’s methodological work as “the first evangelical proposal for utilizing a canonical approach to Old Testament Theology” (551). He also wishes that Sailhamer’s work had appeared earlier. If so, it “would have helped sharpen and shape my own methodology more than any other” (551).

House’s own methodology, therefore, “adopts a canonical approach to Old Testament Theology” (56). By “canonical” he means that his “analysis is God-centered, intertextually oriented, authority-conscious, historically sensitive, and devoted to the pursuit of the wholeness of the Old Testament message” (57). He explicates further these five principles (56-57), and believes that his methodology, although not flawless, is valid on historical, canonical, and literary grounds.

How then does House go about “doing” his OT Theology? He proceeds in the next twenty-four chapters to explain how God revealed Himself in the successive canonical books, following the order of the Hebrew canon. He handles each book individually with Kings, the “Twelve,” Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles taken together (as they are in the Hebrew canon). For each book, he assigns a title that begins with “The God Who . . .” For example, the theology of Genesis is about “The God Who Creates,” Isaiah is about “The God Who Saves,” Esther is about “The God Who Protects the Exiles.”

Each chapter then further expounds that main theme by other relative clauses about God that basically outline the book’s theological context. For example, the Book of Judges is “The God Who Disciplines and Delivers.” The subsections of that chapter concern: (1) The God Who Tests Israel’s Faithfulness (1:1–3:6); (2) The God Who Responds (3:7–16:31); and (3) The God Who Releases Israel (17–21).

Consonant with his own “canonical” concerns, House also inserts at appropriate places a “Canonical Synthesis” in which he deals with a theological problem in the book as it relates to previous revelation in the canon, as well as its future connection with the NT. See, for example, “Deborah and Prophecy” (221) and “The Cost of Sexual Depravity” (275).

The author evidently believes that the underlying theme (or center) of OT revelation is “The God Who Speaks and Acts.” As a matter of fact, that could probably be used as a subtitle for the book. Against those who have suggested that “God” is the center of OT theology, the criticism has been that such a “center” is simply too general and too broad to encompass the whole of OT revelation. House’s formulation, however, makes a good case for it, by tracing it so effectively in a canonical context.

This well-written and creative treatment should receive serious consideration
for use in OT theology courses. It could be employed also as a meaty theological survey of the OT for seminary students or perhaps for "honors" college students. Pastors can also find immense help from House if they are working through an OT book with their congregations and classes. House has not written the last word on this subject, but who has? Those who want to understand better the messages and the message of these thirty-nine ancient but ever relevant books should give his work careful consideration.


In addition to the customary introductory material (preface, abbreviation list, table of contents, etc.), a "concordance of divergent versification" (xxii-xxvii) provides a list of instances where the versification of the Hebrew Bible is different from that of an English Bible (the NRSV serves as the point of comparison). A statistical appendix and five indexes conclude the third volume. The appendix provides detailed information arranged in eight tables that delineate the frequency of Hebrew words, total number of words in OT books, distribution of *hapax legomena*, distribution of parts of speech, and frequency of verb stems. Its five indexes add greatly to the value of these three volumes. The Hebrew and Aramaic words considered by this set are indexed in two different ways. The first index arranges the Hebrew and Aramaic words in accordance to their appearance in the set. The main word/entry appears followed by the derivatives treated under that entry (like a detailed table of contents). The second index arranges the Hebrew and Aramaic words in alphabetic order (and according to the numerical sequence of Strong’s numbering system) and provides the page number where that word appears. The next two indexes refer to the location for English glosses (the basic translation of a given Hebrew word) and modern authors cited in the articles. The final index of Scripture references—an amazing 131 pages in length—adds to the usability of the set.

Each article/entry has a heading and five content sections. The heading offers a single Hebrew entry along with the Strong’s number, and pages where this
word receives treatment in the following reference tools: The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (BDB), the English edition of Koehler and Baumgartner’s Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (HALOT), the Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT), the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT), and the New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDOTTE). Where English translations for German reference works were not completed at the time of the publication of TLOT, the original German reference work is cited (HALOT—HAL; TDOT—ThWAT). This feature aids the Bible student in accessing other important reference tools. The first two sections of the entry deal with root and derivation, statistics (distribution of the main word in the OT books, sometimes in a helpful table). The next section considers the meaning and history of meaning of the main entry word. This part often gives attention to grammatical and syntactical issues, primary and secondary meanings, synonymy, and the historical development of a given word’s meaning. The fourth section, normally the longest, considers the theological usage of the word (and its derivatives) under consideration. The final section considers postbiblical usage, i.e., how that word or its NT counterpart finds usage in Judaism, NT, or early Christian literature (always referring to the relevant section of the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament [TDNT] and often to other relevant articles/essays).

In addition to adding a number of helpful features that were not included in the original German edition (new index arrangement for Hebrew and Aramaic words, Scripture reference index, and the citation of other relevant lexical sources), the English edition includes updated bibliographic references (new editions published since the 1970’s and English translations of German sources that have appeared since that time). No revision of the content of each entry was attempted.

The clear citation of other relevant reference works, the consistent framework of each article, and the helpfully arranged statistically information represent a few of TLOT’s unique redeeming qualities. In comparison to other theological wordbooks, TLOT is much less expensive than the yet incomplete TDOT (9 volumes at this point), less expensive than NIDOTTE, and more expensive than TWOT. From a theological perspective, the articles in TLOT were written by liberal scholars, but that perspective comes through much more rarely than in TDOT entries. As far as the depth of the articles, TLOT is more thorough than TWOT, but less thorough than TDOT and NIDOTTE. TLOT directly covers the smallest number of Hebrew words of the four primary theological wordbooks (it covers a number of related terms in the body of each entry). Although this reviewer regards NIDOTTE as the best theological wordbook for the average Bible scholar, the information in TLOT deserves careful attention when one is performing any word study.

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Colman M. Mockler Distinguished Professor of Old Testament and President of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has written a fine volume dealing with the history of God’s chosen people. After an introductory section, Kaiser covers Israel’s history from the time of Abraham through the Hasmonean Kingdom in the Intertestamental Period. Throughout his volume Kaiser demonstrates a special desire to respond to the skeptical claims of the “biblical minimalists” who discount much historicity of the OT accounts. His approach is “to take the Bible on its own terms, just as we have taken all the epigraphic materials from the ancient Near East as reliable—until they were proven to be otherwise” (xii). Kaiser devotes 47 pages to introductory matters (compared with 9 pages in Wood, A Survey of Israel’s History and 5 pages in Merrill, Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel). His first chapter deals with “The Current State of OT Historiography” where he critiques critical approaches to Israel’s history and sets forth his own approach. Kaiser highlights five modern fallacies practiced by “minimalists” as they reconstruct Israel’s history, and he provides an overview of five major approaches to evaluating the historical worth of written and material evidence for Israel’s history (Traditional school, Albright/Wright/Bright Baltimore school, Alt/Noth school, Norman Gottwald school, and non-pan Israelite tribal confederation school). The next two chapters in this introductory section overview the geographical and archaeological context of ancient Israel.

The majority of the book plows through the history of Israel in accordance with the major chronological periods (nine sections). Due to space limitations, only select conclusions are cited. Kaiser appears to be ambivalent concerning the location of Ur (55-57). He suggests that the bondage of Israel in Egypt began under the Hyksos (81; contra Merrill). He accepts the face value meaning of large numbers (102) and cites a landslide as the cause of the stopping of the Jordan River in Joshua 3 (141-42). He accepts the early date of the Exodus from Egypt (104-111). Kaiser provides a helpful summary of the four main theories of how the Israelites entered and settled the land (144-54; conquest, peaceful infiltration, peasants’ revolt, pastoralist groups). In the midst of his treatment of the Divided Monarchy, Kaiser introduces the reader to the foundation for establishing a chronology for OT events (292-300) (something neither Wood nor Merrill do).

An appendix of chronological charts, a glossary of key terms (16 pages), a brief bibliography, and indexes (author, subject, and scripture) conclude this volume.

In general, Kaiser’s volume has a more polemical tone than either Wood or Merrill. At times his interaction with modern scholarship crowds out a more synthetic exposition of Israel’s history. For example, the chapter on the patriarchs focuses on the background and historicity of the patriarchs. It gives no attention to the patriarchs as individuals. Some factual errors (24, the depth of the Dead Sea at the northern end is almost 2600’ below sea level, not 1300’; 69, the butler, not the baker, remembered his promise to Joseph) and a number of proofreading glitches (15 [extra line], 63 [incorrect quotation mark], 113 [“live” should be “life”], 133 [missing word], 214 [missing “of”], 308 [extra space], 354 [unnecessary “but”], and
In spite of these quibbles, Kaiser’s book on Israel’s history provides an important and needed perspective. Although the polemical tone sometimes overshadows the other parts of the book, he helps the reader realize the issues that are at stake in the realm of OT history. Beyond that, he provides a conservative response to those important issues.


Ladurie’s brilliant microhistory of Thomas and Felix Platter, two generations of the Platter family in the religious, social, and political ferment of sixteenth-century Europe epitomizes Ralph Waldo Emerson’s words, “... [T]here is properly no history, only biography.” *The Beggar and the Professor* is not a mere biographical sketch, nor is it inventive history. It is a tapestry of political, social, and religious history woven around the lives of two unique individuals in Reformation Europe.

The rich archival and autobiographical materials on the lives of Thomas, Sr., Felix, and Thomas Platter, Jr., have precipitated numerous explorations by historians and scholars over the last several centuries. The story of Thomas and Felix Platter is one of social and religious mobility in sixteenth-century Europe. Readers interested in church history in general, and the Reformation particularly, will find *The Beggar and the Professor* fascinating for its historical detail. Ladurie offers the reader more than biographical documentation or family history. He contextualizes the Platters into the political, theological, cultural, geographical, and social milieu that defines sixteenth-century Europe.

Beginning with Thomas Platter, Sr., Ladurie traces the chronologic transformation of the elder Platter from a peasant beggar wandering Europe, to that of a respectable professor and leading citizen of Basel, Switzerland. Following the discussion of Thomas, Sr., Ladurie chronicles the life, and particularly the education, of Thomas’ son Felix as a young medical doctor. Anecdotal illustrations provide color to the rich history that surrounds the narrative of both men. The reading is both informative and entertaining.

Though historical contextualization and evidence of scholarship are superb, several points of concern arise. Readers interested in Reformation history will enjoy the accounts of the elder Platter serving as a messenger for Zwingli (32), the Platters’ various meetings with John Calvin (68-69, 160), and the publishing of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by the family printing business. However, readers will notice that the author is less than tolerant of the “intolerant” Reformers and resorts to his own form of literary iconoclasm in the book. Ladurie refers to
Calvin as the “. . . future dictator of Geneva” (68) and comments that Thomas, Sr.’s faith “. . . had come a long way from the fanatical iconoclasm of his youth, a period in which he had suffered from the infantile disorder of hysterical ultradogmatic orthodoxy. By now his religious convictions no longer blinded him or confined him to an ideological dungeon” (149). References to Thomas, Sr., being seeped in “. . . Joshua-styled iconoclasm and fanaticism” (374 n. 3) and other similar statements abound throughout the narrative. Such pejorative apothegms may be amusing to certain historians less sympathetic to the Reformation, but the language diminishes the objective credibility of Ladurie’s history and cheapens the quality of this otherwise excellent work. Many readers who appreciate the contributions of the Protestant Reformation will find such comments intellectually irritating and personally distasteful.

_The Beggar and the Professor_ lacks a preface by the translator which might assist the reader in understanding translational decision-making. The author’s preface provided is rather brief for a work of this magnitude. A fuller preparatory treatment would add significantly to setting expectations and informing readers of the historical methodology employed by the author.

Ladurie concludes the text with a reference bibliography that highlights the rich sources utilized in this text. Following other historians, a fuller “bibliographic essay” which discusses the existing literature and reviews source materials in a narrative format would be a welcome addition. Also, a more detailed elaboration on the use of previous translations and historical works would assist the English reader in discerning whether the author is relying on primary archival sources or previous historical treatments. _The Beggar and the Professor_ is well-notated and supplemented with photos, maps, and sketches. The book includes an index for locating areas of interest.

Finally, Ladurie challenges contemporary notations of social stratification (325-326). However he fails to elaborate in his discussion. This reviewer would tend to agree with the author’s observations, but the subject is worthy of a fuller treatment, especially given the ramifications of social mobility exhibited by the Platter family. Researchers grounded in qualitative research techniques would quickly raise questions concerning the ability to generalize the Platter’s experience and regard it as normative.

Aside from certain authorial swipes at Protestantism, this work is a fascinating narrative providing the reader with color and perspective lacking in many modern histories. Readers interested in the social and cultural context of sixteenth-century Europe will find the book delightful reading and illustrative of the potential of good historical narrative.

This updated edition of *The Saviour and the Scriptures* fulfills the need to have a basic book on the inerrancy of the Scripture in one’s library. Lightner, Professor Emeritus of Theology at Dallas Seminary, takes a strong stand on inerrancy. He writes, “The author believes firmly in the total inerrancy of Scripture. He believes, without any qualification, that the words of the entire Old And New Testaments in the original autographs are the inspired words of God.” To demonstrate the doctrine of inerrancy from the teaching of Christ, Lightner writes chapters on the use, the origin, the inspiration, and the authority of Scripture in the Savior’s teaching. In addition, the book has chapters on contemporary denials of inerrancy in neo-orthodoxy, neo-liberalism, and new evangelicalism.

One of the helpful features of this updated edition is an appendix on *Sola Scriptura*. Lightner shows that the framers and signers of the document, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” “failed to take seriously the two most basic issues over which the Reformers and the Roman Church differ—*sola scriptura* and *sola fide*.

The book is clearly written, well-outlined, and easily read. For pastors or Sunday School teachers, it could certainly be the basis for an important series of sermons or Sunday School lessons on the doctrine of Scripture. For any Christian, it will help clear up the questions concerning God’s holy Word that infect the modern church.


As one of the *literati* of the premodern age, Thomas Carlyle observed in 1828, “. . . [I]n every man’s writings, must lie recorded—what sort of spiritual construction he has . . .” (“Goethe,” in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* [Boston: Dana Estes & Co., 1869] 1:242.). In doing so, Carlyle recalls that literature becomes a mirror of an author’s soul—a reflection of his or her world view. In this regard, Bruce Lockerbie offers the reader a fine exploration of the spiritual and philosophical underpinnings of the literary icons that have shaped and defined the present era.

D. Bruce Lockerbie is presently chairman and CEO of Paideia, Inc., a comprehensive consulting firm serving various non-profit institutions in the public sector. As an educator, Lockerbie served for thirty-five years as both an administrator and faculty member at the prestigious Stony Brook School in New York with the late Frank Gaebelien. He has been a prolific lecturer and author with such notable titles as *Thinking and Acting Like a Christian* (Multnomah), *A Passion for Learning: A History of Christian Thought on Education* (Moody), and *The Cosmic Center: the Supremacy of Christ in a Secular Wasteland* (Multnomah). His knowledge of the world of modern literature, coupled with an avowed Christian world view, makes *Dismissing God* a particularly welcome volume.

Originally given as a series of four lectures on Christian life and thought
at Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary in Denver, Colorado, *Dismissing God: Modern Writers’ Struggle Against Religion* is an expansion and further articulation of those earlier discourses. The book offers a survey of the literary contributions of a select group of modern authors, with particular attention to their perspectives on religious belief. Those views range from mild ambivalence concerning God to caustic disbelief and hostility. The text is easy to read, well-written, and replete with illustrations to supplement the author’s analysis. Beginning with Matthew Arnold, Lockerbie explores the religious belief (or lack thereof) of such luminaries as Melville, Crane, Twain, Yeats, Hemingway, and Nietzsche. The text offers a good introduction and biographical survey in each chapter, but some familiarity with each author under discussion is helpful. In the concluding chapters, the author shifts from a detailed literary analysis and criticism of a select author to a general philosophical critique of Nihilism and a discussion of the literary aftermath of the Holocaust. Though such a shift does not detract from the quality of the work, this reviewer felt that the change caused the author to hurry through his twentieth-century survey.

Christian thinkers who are analyzing and engaged in a dialogue concerning modern culture and its accompanying literature will find *Dismissing God* a welcome contribution. This reviewer found himself wishing for a sequel that might include other literary notables absent in *Dismissing God*, such as Poe and Steinbeck, or a counterpoint work that embraced authors whose writings demonstrate their religious belief and the relationship between their writing and faith, such as Lewis, Donne, or Milton. At several points, the deeply personal and sensitive struggles articulated by the various authors impacted the reviewer, particularly in the opening chapters. The volume offers a well-articulated analysis of the modern writers’ world view in relationship to God, but one cannot help feeling compassion for the deeply spiritual questions that precipitated the poetry or prose under discussion.

This book will benefit the casual reader, and will be of particular benefit to those in Christian or home school environs that desire an informed critique of the modern authors who largely shape the literary canon. The text would particularly benefit Christian students in their later years of secondary education or as a survey text in an introduction to literature course at the collegiate level. Coupled with Gene Veith’s *Reading Between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), *Dismissing God* offers an important critique of the modern literary world and its accompanying world view. In an age of pulp literature and deconstructive methodologies, Lockerbie reminds the reader that an author’s world view will break forth in his/her literature. If Carlyle’s premise is accurate, knowledge of the author’s belief is indispensible to a proper understanding of his/her literary world view. *Dismissing God* provides such a perspective.

This volume represents the third and final volume in a three-volume series of commentaries on the Minor Prophets. It includes commentaries on Zephaniah and Haggai by J. Alec Motyer, Zechariah by Thomas E. McComiskey, and Malachi by Douglas Stuart. McComiskey, who edited the series and contributed one of the commentaries in the present volume, completed work on this volume just prior to his death in 1996.

After a brief introductory section, each commentary has easy-to-follow sections headed by the author's analytical outline (normally to the second level). Parallel columns of translation (the author's personal translation and the NRSV) introduce each new section of the outline. The interpretive comments fall into two sections: Exegesis (at the top of the page) and Exposition (at the bottom of the page). The exegesis section gives attention to word meaning, grammatical and syntactical issues, and significant textual problems. It includes the Hebrew terms under consideration (followed by the author's translation in parentheses). The exposition section attempts to amplify the conclusions reached in the exegesis section with a view to sermonic use. Here the Hebrew terms are transliterated, and related theological and hermeneutical issues receive attention. Usually, the exposition section receives more space than the exegesis material.

Each of the commentaries in this series and in the entire set are well done, easy to read, and balanced in approach. Motyer and Stuart give more attention to rhetorical features while McComiskey places more emphasis on biblical theology. Stuart's commentary on Malachi emphasizes the coherence between Malachi's message and that of Deuteronomy, includes the second largest bibliography (12 pages; Waltke's bibliography for Micah is the largest bibliography [15 pages]), and represents the fullest commentary of the series (the most pages of commentary per verse).

Although this volume was published in 1998, it appears that some of the contributions were completed long before that time. Motyer cites no reference works later than 1988 in his Zephaniah commentary and 1987 in his Haggai material. McComiskey's and Stuart's bibliographies cite nothing later than 1993 and 1994, respectively. Some gap between the research and publication dates is unavoidable, but such a long gap is regrettable.

Besides the Expositor's Bible Commentary's one-volume on Daniel and the Minor Prophets (vol. 7), the Word Biblical Commentary's two volumes (vols. 31-32), and the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary's five volumes on the same corpus (vols. 22-25), the present volume is part of the only completed set that deals with the Minor Prophets from an evangelical perspective. Although not the most technical set, the present volume and the set as a whole represents the fullest treatment of the Minor Prophets that also gives attention to sermonic issues. Its combination of attention given to technical and expositional issues makes it one of the best sets on this part of the Old Testament.

If anyone should wonder what wives of graduate students do in their spare time, they might want to consider the example of Keiko Muraoka. While Takamitsu Muraoka was writing his doctoral dissertation at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, his wife, Keiko, converted 30,000 page/column references in the indexes of *A Concordance to the Septuagint and the Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament*, edited by Edwin Hatch and Harry A. Redpath (published 1897-1906). In 1971 the Muraokas submitted Keiko’s 508 legal-size pages of manuscript to a number of publishers who repeatedly turned the work down. About the same time Emar Camilo Dos Santos’s handwritten manuscript, *An Expanded Hebrew Index for the Hatch-Redpath Concordance to the Septuagint*, was published (Jerusalem: Dugith, 1973). In 1997 Baker Book House showed an interest in Muraoka’s manuscript in conjunction with a proposed reprint of Hatch and Redpath. The Santos index was no longer available and involved no critical interaction with the Hatch and Redpath Hebrew-Greek equivalents. Muraoka revived his wife’s manuscript and proceeded to develop the project beyond what she had produced (7).

The current index “represents a partial and critical revision of Hatch and Redpath” (7). He researched especially those passages that Hatch and Redpath had marked with an obelus (†), indicating that there was some degree of doubt about the identification of the Greek and Hebrew, or that the readers should examine the passage for themselves (8). Also, Muraoka undertook to refine the Septuagint text employed by Hatch and Redpath. He relied heavily on the Göttingen edition’s textual-critical apparatus while also considering the textual decisions evidenced by the editions of Rahlfs and the Cambridge Larger Septuagint (8). In the realm of the Hebrew text, Muraoka expanded and revised Hatch and Redpath’s utilization of the Cairo Geniza fragments (8).

Muraoka’s index begins with a concise but carefully arranged explanation of the background and purpose of the index (7-8) and how to use it (8-10). The lexemes of Hebrew and Aramaic are listed alphabetically in a user-friendly format in which each Hebrew or Aramaic stem is listed separately and each Greek equivalent has its own entry in alphabetic order below the Hebrew or Aramaic (13-160).

Hatch and Redpath’s own index has vexed several generations of students by its listing of only page and column references in the main concordance for each Greek equivalent. It is not possible to know what Greek terms it is citing without turning manually to those page/column references to locate the term. Such an exercise is time-consuming. Muraoka’s index, by contrast, makes the necessary information immediately available. Consider the following examples for the Qal stem of שָׁפָל (šāfāl) and פָּדָה (pāḏāh), the verbs meaning “he redeemed”:

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This index will prove to be a tool of great value to all students of the Septuagint. It is the reviewer’s hope that it will replace the older index when Hatch and Redpath is reprinted.

Takamitsu Muraoka is Professor of Hebrew at Leiden University and an internationally recognized Septuagint scholar. He is also the reviser and translator of Paul Joüon’s *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, vols. 14/I and 14/II in Subsidia Biblica (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1996).

The author of this volume grew up in the Church of Latter-day Saints (LDS), left when she was sixteen, returning to the church three more times before becoming a Christian at the age of fifty. She wrote this book to help four groups of people: Christians interested in understanding Mormonism, Christians desiring to witness to Mormons, former Mormons who are making the transition into Christian churches, and questioning or disaffected Mormons. The contents draw on interviews conducted by the author with three categories of people: former Mormons who are now Christians (13), traditional Christian pastors (5), and Mormons who are not fully-believing, active members (7).

After a helpful (though brief) chapter comparing traditional Christianity with Mormon beliefs, the author devotes three chapters to issues within the Mormon church that vex or frustrate its followers, causing some of them to leave the LDS church. One chapter surveys some of the non-Christian alternatives chosen by those who leave Mormonism (e.g., New Age beliefs, agnosticism, etc.). The next three chapters detail the testimonies of those that have left Mormonism for Christianity and trace some of the major challenges they faced in making that transition. The final chapter seeks to provide Christians with some guidelines to help their efforts at evangelizing Mormons. The book concludes with four appendices, endnotes, a helpful glossary of key terms used in Mormonism, and a brief bibliography.

This volume helped the reviewer to understand Mormonism (not just its beliefs but its world view) better. It also gave the reviewer a better understanding of the challenges of witnessing to Mormons. In light of the invasive impact Mormonism has on the families of its adherents, evangelizing Mormons offers unique challenges. Finally, the world view shift that accompanies anyone’s experience in coming to Christ emphasizes the need for discipling the new believers and grounding them in the truths of God’s Word (to help them sort out God’s truth from the mixture of truth and error they had learned).


How refreshing to see a new work on the Gospels that takes them as historically credible documents! This English translation of Professor van Bruggen’s 1987 work in Dutch is now available as the first of six works on the Gospels that he will eventually publish with Baker. The author’s remaining volumes in the series will be one dealing with the person and teaching of Jesus and a set of four commentaries on the four Gospels, the last of which treating the Gospel of John and written by P. H. R. van Houwelingen rather than by van Bruggen.

The first chapter of *Christ on Earth* reviews a wide variety of possible sources for information about the life of Christ. It concludes that the four canonical Gospels are the most reliable sources because they trace their origins to people who
either participated personally in the life of Christ on earth or had direct contact with
witnesses who saw and heard Jesus.

The author’s second chapter addresses the question of whether or not the
four Gospels are harmonizable and therefore historically trustworthy. He briefly
discusses source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism and points out how
their negative answer to the question of historical trustworthiness belies the known
facts about the origins of the Gospels (84-85). His conclusion is that the Gospels are
capable of harmonization and that accepting their reliability as historical in character
is absolutely essential: “The character of the Gospels is such that they can be read
as sources of historical information provided by eyewitnesses and [they] even
demand such a reading” (85).

Chapter 3 deals with “The Periods of Jesus’ Life on Earth,” stating first a
rationale for dividing His life into periods. Two advantages for such divisions are
(1) the provision of an organizational structure into which to fit the data of the
Gospels and (2) the aid of such divisions in defining unique characteristics of each
Gospel. All four contain markers useful in identifying periods. With the periods in
mind, one can avoid incorrectly equating stories that belong in separate periods. The
periods identified by van Bruggen are “From Birth to Baptist,” “From Jesus’
Baptism to John’s Arrest,” “The Galilean Period and the Gospel of John,” “The
Journey from Galilee to Jerusalem,” and “The Period of Jesus’ Death, Resurrection,
and Ascension.” The author concludes this chapter with a brief section on the
chronology of Christ’s life in which he assigns 5 B.C. as the date of Christ’s birth
and A.D. 33 as the year of His crucifixion.

Most of the book’s remaining chapters deal with various periods of Jesus’
life: Chap. 4 with His birth and youth, Chap. 6 with John the Baptist and Jesus,
Chaps. 8–10 with His ministry in Galilee, Chap. 11 with His ministry in Perea and
Judea (i.e., from Galilee to Jerusalem), and Chaps. 12–13 and 16–17 with the events
of Passion Week. Eleven helpful tables at the conclusion of the volume offer
summary harmonizations that coincide with these chapters. Interspersed among
those chapters are chapters discussing tangential issues such as “Jesus’ Brothers and
Sisters” (Chap. 5), “The Galilean Period in the Gospels” (Chap. 7), “Was the
Sanhedrin Allowed to Carry Out a Death Sentence?” (Chap. 14), and “The Plan to
Kill Jesus by Cunning” (Chap. 15).

At the conclusion of Chap. 7 van Bruggen devotes several pages to
“Narrative Sequence and the Synoptic Problem.” His focus is upon the argument
from order that is usually used to support the literary dependence of one Synoptic
Gospel upon another. After surveying various sequential peculiarities of the three
Gospels, he concludes that evidence of this type opposes the idea that Matthew and
Luke are secondary sources dependent on Mark in a literary way.

Though it is easy to raise minor points of disagreement regarding such
matters as why van Bruggen did not see Jesus’ six-month ministry to the Twelve as
a separate period or how he can advocate an A.D. 33 crucifixion date in light of
Jesus’ age stated in Luke 3:23, Christ on Earth has so many commendable and
positive instructive features regarding the life of Christ that this reviewer cannot
refrain from giving the book his unreserved recommendation. In defense of historicity, it offers plausible harmonizations for many alleged discrepancies between parallel Gospel accounts of the same events, such as the cleansings of the Temple (135-37), the healing of the blind in Jericho (202-5), and the Triumphant Entry (207-8).


The present volume is one of five chronological and background chart books published by Zondervan (the others deal with theology, church history, New Testament, and philosophy). This edition of the OT chart book represents a significant revision of the original volume published in 1978, adding forty-two new charts and eighteen revised charts. Walton divides the charts (total of 93) into four subject categories: sections of the canon, ancient Near East, Bible study, and miscellaneous. The first section covers the customary divisions of the OT (Pentateuch, historical books, poetic literature, and prophetic literature) and devotes a section to Genesis and a section to the battles of the OT. The ANE section encompasses history and chronology, archaeology, and literature and religion. The Bible study section deals with text and language issues (including an interesting chart on principles for word studies), comparison charts (e.g., creation, sons of God, chronological systems, flood, Jephthah’s daughter, etc.), and overviews of certain theological topics (e.g., messiah, angel of the LORD, Satan, etc). The final section (misc.) provides a chart that enables the reader to quickly calculate the distance between major cities and to determine the significance of OT weights and measures. A thorough subject index concludes the volume and greatly adds to its value.

This collection of charts provides a great resource for any student of the Old Testament. The visual arrangement of important material will almost always help the student of God’s Word or his audience to understand better the meaning of the text they are studying.


The author, the well-known New Testament scholar of Asbury Theological Seminary, has produced a massive commentary on the Book of Acts. The author’s purpose for producing yet another commentary on Acts is stated as “the rhetorical
dimension of Acts has not been much explored in recent commentaries on the book, in part because of the waning influence of classical studies on biblical studies in this century. Nor for that matter has sufficient attention been paid in commentaries to how similar Acts is to other ancient Hellenistic historiographic works" (x).

The author claims that the outstanding bibliography he provides is “not intended to be exhaustive” (xiii), but it does cover 37 pages and is one of the most comprehensive that this reviewer has encountered. There is a fine index of authors and Scripture, but remarkably no subject index. The work is massively footnoted, and though not numerous, helpful pictures, maps and charts are incorporated. The reviewer’s main criticism in terms of formatting would be directed toward the publisher who simply shortchanges the customer by placing this massive a work in a paper binding. In fact, the review copy already had the spine split in several places. Most would gladly pay the extra cost for a hardcover binding which would remain serviceable for years instead of months.

The author begins the work with over 100 pages of introductory material. He covers every aspect of introduction, with lengthy discussions of “Acts and the Question of Genre” (2-39) and Luke-Acts as rhetoric (39-49). One of his key points is that “ancient historical works were meant to be heard primarily and read only secondarily, and this meant that considerable attention had to be given to the aural impression a work would leave on the audience” (41). Thankfully, the author does an admirable job of demonstrating that the goal of the “aural impression” should not leave one to believe that Luke either invented material or simply put disconnected events or speeches together to fabricate a point. He points out that ancient historians with whom he compares Luke were careful with factual information (49). The author also presents a useful time-line of the events in Acts, starting with an AD 30 crucifixion and Paul’s death at the hands of Nero between AD 65-68 (although strangely, despite the extensive bibliography, he does not reference either Harold Hoehner’s doctoral dissertation on Chronology of the Apostolic Era or his book Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ). He affirms two Roman imprisonments for Paul (contra Paul Jewett) and, with some disclaimer, accepts Pauline authorship of the Pastorals, working the historical events detailed there into the period between the release from his first Roman imprisonment and his final arrest and execution.

In the commentary portion the author further develops his idea of “Acts as Rhetoric,” spending a great deal of time with the various speeches, trials and other official pronouncements that Luke records. He develops the background of these attempts to demonstrate how they fit into the overall scheme of Luke’s rhetoric. In this regard the author is often forced into some rather subjective speculation on the text, but never outrageously so. He has numerous asides, which he labels as “A Closer Look” on various aspects of background subjects (e.g., “Gentile God-fearers,” “Travels and Travails in Antiquity,” “Justice, Citizenship and Appeals in the Provinces,” etc.), which are quite helpful and well documented.

This is a commentary that will be of great benefit to those studying the Book of Acts. It contains a wealth of information, interesting observations, and stimulating thought. The student or pastor will want to supplement this volume with
something more exegetically driven (such as Cranfield’s two volumes on Acts in the International Critical Commentary series), but the author has enriched the field of study on the Book of Acts with this fine production.


The author, a rabbi, has produced an eminently readable introductory text on Judaism during the NT era. He presents information about the various personalities, political, social, and religious division within Judaism, as well as a sort of “extended glossary” of various Jewish subjects (e.g., the festivals, 97-103) with their relevance to NT backgrounds.

This work has many excellent points to commend it. The summations of the relationship of the Jewish people to the various Gentile political power structures around them (i.e., Hellenism and the Roman Empire). The summary of the Maccabean era is also quite useful for the beginning student. The author provides an excellent annotated bibliography and the subject index is quite serviceable. He is obviously well read, yet the work seems somewhat flawed in that it has no footnotes or citations, and even in the long block quotes the citations are often not complete.

A reader needs to remember one key issue: the author is not sympathetic toward Christianity or the NT. Regarding the NT he states, “When using the New Testament as a source for the life of Jesus, we must note that it was written by people who did not know Jesus personally. . . . [T]he gospel writers themselves were not especially interested in the details of the life of Jesus” (111). The author believes that the NT is essentially at the same level of the Mishnah and Talmud (7), and that the writers were basically preparing “documents of faith” (111) and had no real desire to be historically accurate.

This book is useful because it exposes the reader to a thoroughly Jewish perspective on NT studies. However, the rejection of the NT as a credible source of information (much less as an inspired and inerrant source) should alert readers to view this book and its material cautiously.