

INTRODUCTION TO NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY

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New Covenant Theology (NCT) is a relatively new system which, though not yet well defined, attempts to combine strengths of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology and to eliminate the weak points of the two. Its founders have come from Reformed Baptist circles who reacted against key tenets of Covenant Theology in rejecting such doctrines as the Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace. The movement has a strong emphasis on study of the Scripture in attempting to derive a biblically based theology. For the most part, NCT's origins have been local churches rather than academic circles. Though its growth continues to be substantial, it has come about mostly through the channel of the Internet rather than works published through major evangelical publishing houses. Leaders of NCT include John Zens, John G. Reisinger, Fred G. Zaspel, Tom Wells, and Steve Lehrer. Among various programs promoting NCT are Providence Theological Seminary, Sound of Grace Ministries, The John Bunyan Conference, and In-Depth Studies. The progress of NCT's growth is most obvious in the number of churches that have adopted the movement's approach to Scripture, but the impact on mainstream evangelicalism has been minimal because of a lack of exposure through mainstream publishers, a lack of full endorsement by a noted evangelical scholar, its doctrinal differences from well-known historic documents of Covenant Theology, its newness historically, and its failure to produce a published systematic or biblical theology. NCT's most notable peculiarities include a rejection of Covenant Theology's superstructure, its granting of priority of the NT over the OT, its rejection of OT ethical standards for Christians, and its rejection of infant baptism and the distinction between the visible and invisible church.

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The Hall of Fame Baseball player and "noted philosopher," Yogi Berra,

once said, “When you come to a fork in the road, take it.”¹ In a nutshell this perhaps summarizes the developing theological system known as New Covenant Theology (hereafter NCT). While relatively anonymous within the larger sphere of evangelicalism,² NCT has nonetheless been experiencing slow but steady growth both in numbers and influence since its inception in the late 1970s.³

NCT is described by most of the leaders within the movement as an attempt to “find a middle road” between traditional Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology. As NCT leader Fred Zaspel notes,

We are not satisfied with the simple “one covenant—two administrations” idea of Covenant Theology. In our judgment this results in a rather “flat” reading of Scripture which fails to appreciate the advance, the distinctively “new” character of this Messianic age. Nor are we satisfied with the over-compartmentalizing tendency of Dispensational Theology.⁴

Another NCT leader, John G. Reisinger states most firmly,

Dispensationalism drives a wedge between the OT and the NT and never the twain shall meet as specific promise (OT) and identical fulfillment (NT); and Covenant Theology flattens the whole Bible out into one covenant where there is no real and vital distinction between either the Old and New Covenants or Israel and the church.⁵

Reisinger also states,

As New Covenant Theologians, we believe that historic Dispensationalism, as a system is not biblical (even though it contains truth and is held by many godly men) simply because its basic presuppositions are either wrongly assumed or wrongly deduced from their theological system. We are also convinced that Covenant Theology, as a system, is just as unscriptural for the same reasons (even though it has truth and many godly exponents). Until recently most people felt that one had to believe one or the other of

¹Yogi Berra (with Dave Kaplan), *When You Come to a Fork in the Road, Take It!* (New York: Hyperion Books, 2002). See also Yogi Berra (with Dave Kaplan), *What Time Is It? You Mean Now?* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2003).

²As of this time there are no articles in any standard theological reference work detailing NCT. Even the most recent edition of the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Walter A. Elwell, ed., 2d ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997, 2003]) has no reference to the movement.

³“Inception” is used here somewhat loosely. As this article will discuss, NCT is perhaps better described as a convergence of the works of several different individuals that has begun the process of evolving into a coherent and cohesive theological system; however it is fair to say that NCT has yet to arrive at either destination.

⁴Fred G. Zaspel, “A Brief Explanation of ‘New Covenant Theology’” (online at www.biblicalstudies.com/bstudy/hermenutics/nct.htm, accessed 3 Feb 2007).

⁵John G. Reisinger. *Abraham's Four Seeds* (Frederick, Md.: New Covenant Media, 1998) 19.

these two systems.⁶

This article presents an introduction and overview of NCT. It will examine this movement in the following areas: *The Persona and Personalities of NCT*, *The Programs and Progress of NCT*, and *The Peculiar Positions of NCT*. It will also interact briefly with some of the positions that NCT has carved out and examine briefly whether or not this “third way” has actually been forged.

I. The Persona and Personalities of NCT

Though examining the persona before the personalities responsible for the movement may seem to be a reversal of the investigative process, understanding the persona and the sphere in which NCT is evolving will make the role of individual personalities much more coherent.

A. The Persona of NCT

To begin, at its theological core NCT began within the Reformed Baptist movement. Although NCT rejects the key distinctive of the Reformed Baptist position, namely the cardinal features of Covenant Theology, all the foundational or first-generation contributors to NCT and many who have since identified with it have their roots in Reformed Baptist circles. It is a reactionary movement against the key aspects of Covenant Theology, that is, the Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace. Seemingly, it also is a reaction against a real or perceived dilution of traditional Baptist distinctives that the adoption of Covenant Theology has brought into Reformed Baptist circles, such as the adoption of Covenant Theology’s positions on a “visible” and “invisible” church. Reisinger calls this a “theological creation that allows a congregation to deliberately and consciously include both believers and known unbelievers in its membership.”⁷

On a positive note, NCT is not heterodox or cultic at any level.⁸ Mainstream NCT adherents and organizations must be viewed as fellow Christians operating within the larger sphere of evangelicalism. It is characterized by and large as a movement dedicated to an Acts 17:11 approach to studying the Scripture and

⁶Ibid, ii.

⁷Ibid., 109.

⁸As with all groups or movements, exceptions always occur. Many on the Internet affirm or identify themselves with NCT but have odd or extreme views. For instance, one proponent of NCT states on his Web page concerning Charles H. Spurgeon, “Indeed, this Covenant Theology misuse of law reveals that Spurgeon knew absolutely nothing about the gospel, flowing oratory notwithstanding.” Elsewhere in his site he labels Spurgeon a “false teacher.” Gary Anderson, “Spurgeon: Prince of Law Preachers” (On line at www.newcovenanttheology.com/spurgeon.html, accessed 7/20/2007). In his section on “Dispensationalism,” he also states, “Dispensationalism is no less a false gospel than is Covenant Theology” (on line at www.newcovenanttheology.com/dispensation.html, accessed on 7/20/2007). This kind of thought, fortunately, does not represent mainstream NCT.

developing theology from the text.⁹ By its own claim, it is a movement that seeks to examine the Scripture and develop a biblically based theology. As Volker states, “One must always base his interpretation on the use of Scripture in context and not by imposing his theological system on the text.”¹⁰ Douglas Moo, in the foreword to Wells’ and Zaspel’s book *New Covenant Theology*, acknowledges the same approach by NCT and calls their work “a fine representation of this new biblical theology tradition.”¹¹

An additional, and important, aspect of the persona of NCT is that it represents largely a “grassroots” movement centered in the local church. What this means is that NCT is not a movement that began in seminaries or the academy and worked its way “down” into the churches. It began in local churches and has slowly moved its way up in the academic world.

The final, and most important, feature of the persona of NCT is that it is a “theology of the Internet.” It is no coincidence that the development and growth of the Internet and the development and growth of NCT have paralleled each other. Though individuals within NCT have produced a large amount of written material, so far it has all been self-published. NCT authors and materials are not represented in the catalogues of any mainstream evangelical publisher. The rather isolated works of different individuals in varied locations, operating for about a 20-year period, simply would not have coalesced into an organized movement without the vehicle of the Internet to bring them together.

B. The Personalities of NCT

Among NCT’s many proponents, at least five have been responsible for the creation and initial propagation of NCT. They are individuals whose written contributions to the movement have been foundational and defining. The first four can be viewed as the “fathers” of the movement, and the last represents the new or second generation of NCT.

Jon Zens is not a prime mover at this time within NCT, but he really started the movement. Zens is one of the elders at Word of Life Church in St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin. He has a B.A. from Covenant College and an M.Div. from Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. He was a pastor in Reformed Baptist churches in Nashville, Tennessee, and Malin, Oregon. He has published his own journal,

⁹Which, of course, is not to say that those of the Covenant Theology and Dispensational theological systems would not affirm the same.

¹⁰Geoff Volker, “Foreword” to *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered*, by Steve Lehrer (by the author, 2006) 14.

¹¹Douglas J. Moo, “Foreword,” in *New Covenant Theology*, by Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel (Frederick, Md.: New Covenant Media, 2002) xiii.

formerly called *Baptist Reformation Review* and now called *Searching Together*.¹² His major contribution to NCT was an article in his journal, “Is There a Covenant of Grace,”¹³ written in 1977. It was Zens who appears to have coined the term “New Covenant Theology” in 1981 in a compilation of articles from his journal, where he stated, “[I]t is my prayer that we will seek only the glory of Christ as we work towards a New Covenant Theology.”¹⁴ Zens has published over 100 articles and several books; however, except for two articles, all were published in his journal. This is not a criticism of Zens, but an observation of a tendency common to NCT.

The next and probably the most significant and influential individual in NCT, is John G. Reisinger. Reisinger describes himself as evangelist and Bible conference speaker. He graduated from Lancaster Bible College and studied at Bucknell University. He founded and operates *Sound of Grace Ministries* (online at www.soundofgrace.org) and New Covenant Media, the main publishing outlet for NCT materials. Both ministries operate under the auspices of the Grace New Covenant Church of Walkersville, Maryland. Reisinger is a prolific author and speaker, and in many respects has been the “face” of NCT for about 20 years. His book, *Abraham’s Four Seeds*,¹⁵ is a seminal work for NCT. Two other important works of Reisinger are his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, *But I Say Unto You*,¹⁶ and his discussion of the Ten Commandments, *Tablets of Stone*.¹⁷ Reisinger, now 83, resides in Rochester, New York, with much of his direct-ministry oversight having been passed to others.

Fred G. Zaspel serves as the pastor of the Cornerstone Church of Skippack, Pennsylvania, and is now probably the most widely acknowledged leader within NCT. For many years he was pastor at the Word of Life Baptist Church in Pottsville, Pennsylvania (his brother, Paul Zaspel is now the pastor). Zaspel has studied widely, at Bob Jones University, Denver Seminary, Valley Baptist Theological Seminary, and has his Th. M. from Biblical Theological Seminary in Hatfield, Pennsylvania. He has two M.A. degrees along with his Th.M. and is a Ph.D. candidate. His Th.M. thesis at Biblical Seminary¹⁸ in 1994 formed the basis of several chapters in his major contribution to NCT literature, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition,*

¹²The name change from *Baptist Reformation Review* to *Searching Together* occurred in 1981 with Volume 11, No. 3. The publication maintained continuity by continuing the same number sequence.

¹³Jon Zens, “Is There a Covenant of Grace?” *Baptist Reformation Review* 7/3 (1977):45–53.

¹⁴John Zens, *Studies in Theology and Ethics* (Malin, Ore.: BREM, 1981), 1.

¹⁵See note 5.

¹⁶John G. Reisinger, *But I Say Unto You* (Southbridge, Mass.: Crowne Books, 1989).

¹⁷Reisinger, *Tablets of Stone* (Southbridge, Mass.: Crowne Publications, 1989).

¹⁸Fred G. Zaspel, “The Status of Mosaic Law in This Messianic Age: A Theological and Exegetical Analysis of Matthew 5:17-20” (unpublished Th.M. Thesis, Biblical Theological Seminary, Hatfield, Pa., 1994).

Defense, which he co-authored with Tom Wells.¹⁹ Zaspel was also the author of a pivotal article, "Divine Law: A New Covenant Perspective."²⁰ This article, along with the books by Reisinger, were the impetus for the most significant published response so far to NCT and its view of the OT law from a Reformed Baptist leader.²¹ Zaspel speaks regularly at NCT conferences, is active in Internet discussion groups, and is very influential in NCT circles.

Tom Wells, the co-author of *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* with Zaspel, has been a pastor at The King's Chapel in West Chester, Ohio, for 28 years. Though having a lower profile than the others mentioned, he is highly respected within the movement, has authored several books, and is a regular conference speaker for NCT events.

Representing what might be called the "second generation" of NCT, Steve Lehrer is one the pastors at New Covenant Bible Fellowship in Tempe, Arizona. He has an M.A. in Theology from Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California. Along with Geoff Volker and Michael Feather, his ministry has produced the most recent literature and has an extensive presence on the Internet. For several years, Lehrer was the editor of *The Journal of New Covenant Theology*, which was published in printed form from 2003 to 2005 and then was transferred to an online publication. His recent book, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered*,²² has been a major work within NCT. His church and ministry also produced *The New Covenant Statement of Faith*,²³ a 20-page document which is the first real detailed positional statement to give at least an outline of a systematic theology from an NCT perspective.²⁴

A number of other important individuals function within NCT, but these five are the most notable, at least in terms of public ministry

¹⁹Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* (Frederick, Md.: New Covenant Media, 2002).

²⁰Fred G. Zaspel, "Divine Law: A New Covenant Perspective," *Reformation and Revival* 6/3 (Summer 1997):145–69. At one time *Reformation and Revival* journal, operated by John H. Armstrong, was a leading outlet for NCT thought, but Armstrong's theological perspective continued to evolve and his journal no longer reflects NCT thought.

²¹Richard C. Barcellos, *In Defense of the Decalogue: A Critique of New Covenant Theology*. (Enumclaw, Wash/: WinePress, 2001).

²²Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (by the author, 2006).

²³The Elders of New Covenant Bible Fellowship, "The New Covenant Confession of Faith" (online at <http://www.ncbf.net/PDF/confession.pdf>, accessed 2/3/2007).

²⁴Some within NCT have criticized the work of Lehrer and his associates for some of its doctrinal positions, however.

II. The Programs and Progress of NCT

NCT, because of its persona, has been somewhat slow to develop, and its influence, although growing, is not widespread. All of its written works have been through its ministry-based publishing efforts and on the Internet through organizational Web pages. However, many churches have begun to adopt the tenets of NCT, and NCT groups have several organized programs that are reaching into the larger evangelical world. Four of these programs are particularly noteworthy.

A. NCT Programs

The most recent and, for the growth of the movement, perhaps the most important is Providence Theological Seminary. Located in Colorado Springs, it is a new school with the following purpose:

The doctrinal reason for PTS can be summed up in the three phrases: New Covenant Theology (NCT); the Doctrines of Grace; and Baptist Ecclesiology. The latter two areas are taught in other Christian institutions of higher learning. But the first area of emphasis, NCT, is not widely and openly taught in the American evangelical educational system. Not to be detached from holiness of life, the focus of NCT is upon Christ as revealed in the whole counsel of God inscripturated in the 66 books of the Holy Bible. Instruction is grounded upon the exegetical, biblical-theological and systematic teaching of principles of biblical interpretation (hermeneutic). The hermeneutic is based upon the way that the Lord Jesus and the writers of the New Covenant Scriptures understood and explained the fulfillment of the final revelation of God's eternal redemptive purpose. In brief, this is what is meant by the term New Covenant Theology.²⁵

The president of the faculty, Gary D. Long, received his Th.D. from Dallas Seminary in historical theology (1972) and has been an important theological writer for NCT. The school is small and lists only three faculty members, but it represents the first attempt to train pastors within the framework of an NCT perspective.

Sound of Grace Ministries (online at www.soundofgrace.com/) is the Internet window into the ministries and works of John G. Reisinger and others. The New Covenant Media Bookstore and other resources are located at this site, along with a schedule of other conferences. The Sound of Grace Web page provides links to a vast amount of free and high quality audio and written resources as well as links to likeminded ministries. Also published and available at this site is the *Sound of Grace* e-journal.

Perhaps the key ministry for NCT as far as reaching into the evangelical world has been The John Bunyan Conference (online at www.bunyanconf.com/). This is an annual Bible conference which has been in operation for 23 years. The conference has a number of NCT leaders as speakers, but it often has other noted

²⁵Providence Theological Seminary, "Programs and Purpose" (online at www.ptsc.org/ptsc/generalinfo.htm, accessed 5/10/2007).

evangelical scholars who do not embrace NCT. In the past, conference speakers have included S. Lewis Johnson, D. A. Carson, Douglas Moo, Jerry Bridges, Russell Moore, and Bruce Ware. The conference was begun by John Reisinger and in 1994 Fred Zaspel became the host.

Begun as a campus ministry at Arizona State University in 1983, In-Depth Studies (online at www.ids.org) is something of an umbrella ministry operated by Steve Lehrer, Geoff Volker, and Michael Feather. The website has articles, audio files, and information about their NCT-based ministry (conferences, publications, etc.). This represents the most sophisticated Internet presence for an NCT ministry. Along with the features already mentioned, it has interactive study programs, a regular blog, and a SKYPE live teaching feature. This ministry operates in conjunction with New Covenant Bible Fellowship Church of Tempe, Arizona.

B. *NCT Progress*

The progress of NCT can be seen in the number of churches that are counted as adherents or partners.

Reisinger's *Sound of Grace* ministry lists a church, "provided it believes and teaches the necessity of the New Birth, Believer's Baptism and the Doctrines of Grace as understood within the Reformed Baptist tradition and does not unkindly disparage those churches and brethren who have fellowship with *Sound of Grace* or who promote New Covenant Theology."²⁶ His ministry lists over 100 churches in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, and Australia. Lehrer's ministry counts about five churches affiliated with them and additional ministries in nine European and Eastern European countries, all of whom embrace NCT.

Despite the emergence of a seminary dedicated to NCT, the overall progress of NCT into the mainstream of evangelicalism has been significantly hindered by several factors alluded to above. Those factors include:

- A lack of publications by mainstream evangelical publishers. The tendency for NCT writers thus far has been either to self-publish (individually or in their small publishing ventures) or to make materials available on the Internet. A lack of distribution by large publishing houses often causes their materials to go unnoticed and thus not widely interacted with. College, university, and seminary libraries frequently do not have NCT materials in their collections. For example, only 12 schools list Reisinger's *Abraham's Four Seeds* in their collection. Only 19 schools list having the Wells and Zaspel book, *New Covenant Theology*. Only 3 schools list having Lehrer's, *New Covenant Theology: Questions and Answers*. To give a comparative example, George Eldon Ladd's *A Theology of the New*

²⁶Sound of Grace Church Directory (online at www.soundofgrace.com/directory.htm, accessed 1/20/2007). All the churches listed do not necessarily embrace NCT, but a large percentage of them do.

Testament,²⁷ is currently held by 718 different academic libraries.²⁸

- A lack of any noted evangelical scholar or leader willing to affirm belief in NCT as a system. Though noted theologians such as D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo have made affirmative statements about some NCT works and spoken at their conferences, no high-profile evangelical leader has publicly embraced NCT as a system.
- Theologically, NCT is obviously acceptable only in a church that is not bound by a confession such as the *Westminster Confession*, the *London Baptist Confession*, or a local doctrinal statement that would affirm Covenant Theology. Also, any church that firmly embraces a Dispensational perspective would not find NCT compatible with its doctrinal statement.
- The relative newness of the system and lack of precedent in church history.
- However, the key issue that has been holding NCT back from advancing further is a lack of a published systematic or biblical theology that at least a significant percentage of NCT adherents would embrace.²⁹ Though a general agreement on the basic concepts of NCT exists, a clearly articulated theology has not been forthcoming. When asked what the *sina qua non* of NCT is, Zaspel replied, "I'm not sure NCT can be reduced to that level."³⁰

NCT proponents have been active and innovative in their use of the Internet and their self-publishing efforts have been impressive, given their resources. The addition of a theological seminary with NCT as a core belief is also immensely beneficial to the movement, as are their conference ministries. The future progress of NCT is likely connected to the development of a completely coherent and cohesive biblical system that has broad support of those currently identified with NCT. A clear, agreed-upon definition of what exactly NCT is (and is not) has, to this point, been elusive.

III. The Particular Positions of NCT

NCT is not a monolithic system and some expressions of it are less cohesive than others. As previously noted, NCT began as a reaction on the part of some Reformed Baptists against the basic tenets of Covenant Theology, namely the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. At the same time, the formulators of NCT were not willing to take the other traditional road, namely, Dispensational Theology. Since all of the NCT formulators have come from a background of Covenant Theology (primarily as stated in the Reformed Baptist tradition and the 1689 London Confession), most of their work has been in arguments against the

²⁷George Eldon Ladd. *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973, 1993).

²⁸Based on a search of the OCLC *World Cat* Online database of Library catalogues in the United States, Canada, and Europe, search performed on 7/10/2007.

²⁹See also Barcellos, *Defense* 7-8.

³⁰Fred Zaspel, a telephone conversation with this writer on 9/7/2004.

tenets of that system and the inconsistencies between the traditional Baptist distinctives and Covenant Theology.

NCT has been characterized as being to Covenant Theology what Progressive Dispensationalism is to Traditional or Classic Dispensationalism. However, this assessment is not accurate. Despite its differences with the traditional or classic position, Progressive Dispensationalism still retains a measure of the core Israel-church discontinuity with the resulting ecclesiological and eschatological schemes essentially intact. On the other hand, NCT entirely abandons all the distinctive fundamentals of Covenant Theology, so that no connection remains or is possible.³¹

NCT is not a unified movement, but Wells sums up nicely the main goal of all NCT proponents when he states,

We do have a decided goal, however. It is to join together three things: the logical priority of the NT over the Old, the logical priority of Lord Jesus over his godly predecessors, and the logical priority of the theology of the text over our own theologies and those of others.³²

Following Wells, despite some variation in how different NCT proponents elucidate their views and some differences of opinion on some points; by and large, NCT is characterized by the following.

A. The Rejection of the Superstructure of Covenant Theology

First and foremost, NCT is founded on its central precept that the covenants of Covenant Theology: the Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace are unbiblical and are to be rejected. Reisinger states the overall objection, “Covenant Theology flattens the whole Bible out into one covenant where there is no real and vital distinction between either the Old and New Covenants or Israel and the Church.”³³

Many Covenant theologians begin their theological process with the Covenant of Redemption. Regarding this covenant Zens states,

But, further, why must the “covenant” concept be called into service to describe the “eternal purpose” of God in Christ? Why not be satisfied with the Biblical delineation? As far as I can tell, the Bible nowhere calls the pre-creation commitments in God-

³¹Though Progressive Dispensationalism takes some hermeneutical paths that are different from Classic or Traditional Dispensationism, it still retains the essential features of Dispensationism. NCT, on the other hand, abandons both the superstructure and most of the key outworkings of Covenant Theology while retaining a common hermeneutical approach as does Covenant Theology.

³²Tom Wells, “The Christian Appeal of a New Covenant Theology,” in *New Covenant Theology* (Frederick, Md.: New Covenant Media, 2002) 22.

³³Reisinger, *Four Seeds* 19.

head—among themselves or to elect sinners—a “covenant.”³⁴

Lehrer also declares, “[W]e do not believe it is wise to refer to God’s plan to save a people in eternity past as a ‘covenant.’”³⁵ Regarding this particular covenantal construct, Lehrer makes the following observation, which becomes the cornerstone of most NCT arguments against Covenant Theology:

The reason we should only use the word “covenant” to describe events in Scripture that are actually called covenants is because of the importance of the word “covenant” in Scripture and the place of prominence the concept has in our theological systems. The danger of calling something a covenant that Scripture does not refer to as a covenant increases the likelihood of making something a cornerstone of our theology that in fact is not an emphasis in Scripture. This of course would lead to an unbalanced and unbiblical theological system.³⁶

Regarding the Covenant of Works, Lehrer notes, “NCT disagrees with those who hold to a Covenant of Works with Adam.”³⁷ The “New Covenant Confession of Faith,” on which Lehrer collaborated, Article 20 on “The Law of God” states, “There is no record in Scripture of God making a Covenant of Works with Adam.”³⁸

Finally, regarding the pivotal Covenant of Grace, Wells and Zaspel state, “[N]evertheless, it now seems clear that a mistake has been made in speaking of this purpose as ‘the Covenant of Grace.’”³⁹ Also, Zens asks the rhetorical question, “But it must be asked, where is ‘covenant of grace’ revealed in the Bible?”⁴⁰

Regarding the “covenants” of Covenant Theology, Reisinger makes the NCT position absolutely clear when he states,

We agree that the Bible is structured around *two* covenants. However, the two covenants that you keep talking about, namely, a covenant of works with Adam in the garden of Eden and a covenant of grace made with Adam immediately after the fall, have no textual basis in the Word of God. They are both theological covenants and not biblical covenants. They are the children of one’s theological system. Their mother is Covenant Theology and their father is logic applied to that system. Neither of these two covenants had their origin in Scripture and biblical exegesis. Both of them were invented by theology as the necessary consequences of a theological system.⁴¹

³⁴Zens, “Is There a Covenant of Grace?” 48.

³⁵Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 37.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 40.

³⁸The Elders of New Covenant Bible Fellowship, “The New Covenant Confession of Faith” (online at www.ncbf.net/PDF/confession.pdf, accessed 2/3/2007).

³⁹Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* 45.

⁴⁰Zens, “Is There a Covenant of Grace?” 52.

⁴¹Reisinger, *Four Seeds* 129 (emphasis in the original).

Whatever NCT is or may yet become, beyond dispute, without this distinctive rejection of the superstructure of Covenant Theology, New Covenant Theology as a theological construct would not exist.

B. The Priority of the New Testament over the Old Testament

Even though NCT rejects the structure of Covenant Theology, it nonetheless retains the basic hermeneutical concept of the system. As previously quoted from Wells, this is “the logical priority of the NT over OT.”⁴² This is the driving force in NCT’s interpretation of Scripture. According to Lehrer the OT is to be read and interpreted “through the lens of the New Covenant Scriptures.”⁴³ For Lehrer and other NCT writers, even the OT context is superseded by the New Covenant Scriptures. As he states,

It seems that to understand the work of Christ (which is the New Covenant) as applying to ethnic Israel because the Old Covenant context demands it, makes a fundamental mistake in biblical interpretation. The mistake is reading the New Testament through the lens of the Old rather than the other way around.⁴⁴

NCT authors have a tendency across the board to utilize the phrase, “New Covenant Scriptures” instead of New Testament, which Lehrer explains in the following manner:

I say New Covenant rather than New Testament Scriptures because the Gospels are a swing period in which Christ is under the Old Covenant, which was still in effect (Galatians 4:4) while simultaneously announcing the New Covenant. Therefore, the New Covenant Scriptures that serve as our sieve are the teaching passages of the epistles. They are no “more inspired” but they serve as the authoritative guide for the life of the believer today. This guidance includes authority over interpreting and applying truths found in the Old Testament Scriptures to our lives today.⁴⁵

This approach is the same as Hyper-Dispensationalists who teach that only certain portions of the NT are applicable for the believer today, as Blaising notes, “They relegate water baptism (and for some the Lord’s Supper) along with much of the Book of Acts and the general epistles to the intervening dispensation rendering them not directly relevant for the church today.”⁴⁶

Wells and Zaspel also affirm the same hermeneutical principle. As they

⁴²Wells, “Appeal” 22.

⁴³Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 202.

⁴⁴Ibid., 176.

⁴⁵Ibid., 202.

⁴⁶Craig L. Blaising, “Dispensation, Dispensationalism,” in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 345. See also, Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1989) 523-24.

discuss their formulation of NCT, they first affirm,

The justification for works on NCT seems to be at least fivefold. First, it has seemed to some of us that if the New Testament is the apex of God's revelation, then we ought to read the earlier parts of Scripture in its light. The point seems self-evident, but for some of us it was nevertheless hard to arrive at.⁴⁷

They also state, "[T]he critical point here is this: NT revelation, due to its finality, must be allowed to speak first on every issue that it addresses. This point, of course, is a logical point."⁴⁸

This hermeneutical model is clearly in keeping with historic Covenantalism and is fundamentally flawed. Lehrer provides an excellent example of this when he states regarding Jer 31:31,

God says that He will make this New Covenant with physical Israel and Judah. If you read the verses that surround this text as I wrote it out above, it is crystal clear that this New Covenant, in its Old Testament context, is promised to the geo-political nation of Israel at some point in the future.⁴⁹

He then goes on to explain that this is not the proper way to interpret the text, but rather it must be remembered that the "New Covenant Scriptures" make it clear that "the promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah that was made to the *picture* of the People of God is actually fulfilled in the *real* people of God (all believers, both Jews and Gentiles) through the work of Christ on the cross."⁵⁰ Of course, this hermeneutic means that Israel could not possibly have understood *any* significant portion of the OT. Though they may have thought the promises of Jeremiah 31 applied to their nation, that was not true.⁵¹ It also flies in the face of Neh 8:8, where Ezra the scribe presented the portion of the OT to a Jewish audience "so that they understood the reading." If the NCT hermeneutic is true, then Ezra could not possibly have accomplished this; and Nehemiah, in his inspired and inerrant account of the event, only thought that he did.

C. The Rejection of the Old Covenant as Ethically Binding on Christians

Another major concept in NCT is that the Mosaic Law (Old Covenant) has no theological, legal, ethical, or binding influence on the Christian in the New Covenant era. The traditional divisions of the Law into Moral, Civil, and Ceremonial

⁴⁷Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* 1.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 7–8.

⁴⁹Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 170.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 174 (emphasis in the original).

⁵¹For further analysis of a portion of Jeremiah 31, see Dennis M. Swanson, "The Expansion of Jerusalem in Jeremiah 31:38-40: Never, Already, or Not Yet," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 17/1 (Spring 2006):17-34.

(as understood by Covenant Theology) also have no biblical warrant.

The Mosaic Law was given to an unbelieving people and serves only to condemn. This is also important to recognize. Israel in the OT were, by and large, an unbelieving people. They have no future and no promise, and never did! In many ways Israel only serves as a bad example. As already noted, for NCT Israel is only a “picture of the People of God.”⁵²

Regarding a practical outworking for the Christian life, NCT affirms that the Christian is required to obey only the “Law of Christ,” that is, those issues of conduct that have been detailed in the New Covenant Scriptures. That causes some ethical problems for NCT. Many prohibitions in the OT are not repeated in the NT. The most common example is the prohibition against marrying one’s own sister. Since all states in the United States have specific laws against sibling marriage, NCT affirms that the principle of Romans 13 applies to the Christian, including the requirement to be submissive to the governing authorities. However, if no civil law were in place, as Lehrer is forced to admit, “[I]t seems that if you and your sister are both believers and you live in a country that deems marriage between siblings to be a lawful practice, then your marriage would be holy in God’s sight.”⁵³

D. Other Distinctive Positions of NCT

Along with the rejection of the superstructure of Covenant Theology, several other important features of Covenant Theology are rejected. Infant baptism, Sunday as Sabbath, along with tithing, are viewed as remnants of the Old Covenant system that some Christians have mistakenly carried over into the New Covenant era. Additionally, the concept of the “visible” and “invisible” church, as used by Covenant Theology, is a “theological creation that allows a congregation to deliberately and consciously include both believers and known unbelievers in its membership.”⁵⁴ Lehrer and others in NCT also reject the Doctrine of the Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ; calling it a “Sacred Cow of Covenant Theology.”⁵⁵ This position is not universally held within NCT, though, and others, such as Gary D. Long and Gregory A. Van Court of the Providence Theological Seminary, have

⁵²Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 174. In terms of eschatology, no unified millennial position exists among NCT adherents. Though amillennialism is certainly dominant, premillennialism and post-millennialism are also represented. Long has created what he calls, “New Covenant Non-Premillennialism” (Gary D. Long, *Context: Evangelical Views of the Millennium Examined* [by the author, 2002]). However, NCT has unanimity that there is no future for the nation of Israel as a distinct entity. All OT promises to Israel are fulfilled in the church, the “real” people of God.

⁵³Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 155.

⁵⁴Reisinger, *Four Seeds* 109. Sunday as Sabbath and the concept of the “visible and invisible” church also puts NCT at odds with most Reformed Baptists.

⁵⁵Steve Lehrer and Geoff Volker, “The Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ” (online at www.ids.org/pdf/classic/imputation.pdf, accessed on 5/10/2007).

been critical of Lehrer on this point.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Other articles in this series will examine in closer detail the key aspects of NCT, but it is clear that the movement represents an honest attempt to examine the Scripture and apply it properly to the life of believers. However, although much about NCT is commendable, we can readily affirm much is dubious at best. Even Wells and Zaspel admit that the outworking of NCT has many questions and that “it is too soon to know how these difficulties will be reconciled.”⁵⁷ NCT is attempting to create a “third way” between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology, but they have not as yet reached that goal and with Yogi Berra are still standing at that fork in the road.

⁵⁶Gregory A. Van Court, “The Obedience of Christ: A Response to Geoff Volker and Steve Lehrer” (online at www.ptsco.org/ptsco/theobedienceofchrist.pdf, accessed on 5/10/2007).

⁵⁷Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* 4.

NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY AND THE OLD TESTAMENT COVENANTS

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Though New Covenant Theology (NCT) has positive aspects such as an insistence on a biblically based theology, several aspects of the system are not so positive. For example, in pursuing a middle course between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology, its theologians rely on a strained view of Dispensationalism and adopt an interpretive methodology called supersessionism. A noteworthy omission in NCT's listing of covenants is the Davidic. To a degree, NCT agrees with Dispensationalism on the Noahic and Abrahamic Covenants, but the system fails to grasp the thematic continuity of the OT covenants. Instead, NCT stresses discontinuity as the defining characteristic of a covenant because of the biblical contrast of the Old and New Covenants, and follows a redemption, fulfillment, and kingdom hermeneutic rather than a literal, normal, or plain hermeneutic. NCT and Dispensationalism agree on the centrality of the Abrahamic Covenant in the theology of the OT, but NCT sees one kind of fulfillment of that covenant's land promises in the days of Joshua. It understands the spiritual aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant as ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah and the possession of the promised land as ultimately fulfilled in a spiritual rest. The system holds that the gospel was not clearly revealed before the coming of Christ. The system takes the Old Covenant as fulfilling the physical parts of the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant as fulfilling the spiritual parts. NCT holds that the Israelites redeemed from Egypt were physically redeemed, but not spiritually redeemed because the Mosaic Covenant was based on works. This leads to the strange position that OT saints were not saved until after the death and resurrection of Christ. NCT thinks that the Davidic Covenant was fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ and fails to allow for the NT teaching of a future kingdom. With all its positive features, NCT misses vital points featured in the OT covenants.

* * * * *

Introduction

Majoring on negatives is never a pleasant or satisfying approach to

disagreements. Being overly negative is counterproductive and works against the unity of believers and their mutual edification. Especially when fellow believers are in view, to focus first on areas of agreement is a joy—and, when it comes to New Covenant Theology (NCT), the system has much with which to agree. Proponents of NCT herald the significance of covenants to a proper understanding of the OT and emphasize adhering only to those covenants that Scripture itself specifically identifies.¹ Such an approach immediately separates NCT from the theologians who, for example, find a covenant of works in the white spaces of the biblical text.² In keeping with NCT's concentration on a biblically-based theology, its advocates stress the role of context in Scripture interpretation.³ As the old dictum goes, any text apart from its context is a pretext for a proof text. Context is the touchstone against which every interpretation must be judged.

Respect for the underpinnings of NCT is not grudgingly given. Those who engage its adherents in dialogue quickly appreciate not having to slog through the mire of a philosophically based theology. In his critique of NCT, Richard Barcellos confirms this observation as he lists a number of positives that evangelical theologians should appreciate about NCT: a high view of Scripture, respect for divine sovereignty, diligence to comprehend biblical covenants, engaging the issues of continuity and discontinuity between OT and NT, an insistence that theology be grounded in exegesis, and an endeavor to fathom the implications of “the redemptive-historical effects of Christ's death” for NT theology.⁴

Lest the reader think at this point that little basis exists for devoting The Master's Seminary (TMS) Faculty Lecture Series to NCT, all is not a beautiful mountain meadow filled with brilliant white daisies and sunshine. Theological perfection will not be found this side of heaven—either in a TMS meadow or in that of NCT. Occasional interpretive blight mars the pastoral scene. What is the source of disagreement that incites further discussion and examination? First of all, NCT theologians openly reject both Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology⁵ in their

¹Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (n.p.: Steve Lehrer, 2006) 37, 41.

²For a Reformed theologian's arguments against a covenant of works in Scripture, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 119-21.

³Geoff Volker and Steve Lehrer, “Did Paul Misinterpret the Old Testament? Examining Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:23-29,” *Journal of New Covenant Theology* 2/2 (Summer 2004):61.

⁴Richard C. Barcellos, *In Defense of the Decalogue: A Critique of New Covenant Theology* (Enumclaw, Wash.: Winepress Publishing, 2001) 12-13.

⁵Reisinger's characterization of the Dispensationalism and Covenantalism is exaggerated and inaccurate: “Dispensationalism drives a wedge between the OT and the NT and never the twain shall meet as specific *promise* (OT) and identical *fulfillment* (NT); and Covenant Theology flattens the whole Bible out into one covenant where there is no real and vital distinction between either the Old and New Covenants or Israel and the Church” (John G. Reisinger, *Abraham's Four Seeds* [Frederick, Md.: New Covenant Media, 1998] 19).

search for a middle path between the two—assuming that such a path exists. In their opinion, the two theologies’ “basic presuppositions are either assumed or wrongly deduced from their theological system.”⁶ Thus, relying on a strained view of Dispensationalism, NCT initiated the ongoing skirmish.

Secondly, in the area of hermeneutics, NCT has chosen the interpretive methodology of supersessionism,⁷ rather than nonsupersessionism. Dispensational theology constructs its theology on the following hermeneutical assumptions: “(1) the OT is not reinterpreted by the NT; (2) progressive revelation cannot cancel unconditional promises to Israel; (3) Israel is not a type of the church; and (4) OT promises can have a fulfillment with *both* Israel and the church.”⁸ In contrast, supersessionist hermeneutics assumes that

(1) the New Testament has interpretive priority over the Old Testament; (2) national Israel functioned as a type of the New Testament church; and (3) the New Testament indicates that Old Testament prophecies regarding national Israel are being fulfilled with the church.⁹

Evidence for the association of NCT with supersessionism includes NCT’s claim that NT writers employ OT texts “in ways that the prophets never intended.”¹⁰ This is a strange position for someone to take, who assumes the supremacy and integrity of Scripture as the foundation for theology. It is an inherent contradiction to declare that *Scripture* (in the NT) conveys a meaning not intended by *Scripture* (in the OT).¹¹ However, that is exactly the dilemma faced by a hermeneutic that assumes NT priority over the OT. In yet another association with supersessionism, NCT proponents argue that both OT and NT teach the rejection of national Israel as the people of God and that the New Covenant teaching that Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ rules out any future restoration of national Israel as an independent entity

⁶Ibid., ii.

⁷“Supersessionism is the view that the church is the new or true Israel that has permanently replaced or superseded national Israel as the people of God” (Michael J. Vlach, “The Church as Replacement of Israel: An Analysis of Supersessionism” [unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004], xv).

⁸Ibid., xvii.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Volker and Lehrer, “Did Paul Misinterpret the Old Testament?” 61.

¹¹In response, Lehrer writes: “That is not really what we are saying when we say what we do about the intentions of the prophets. What we mean is that an Old Covenant prophet like Amos might prophesy about the restoration of Israel as in Amos 9, not realizing that the fulfillment of that prophecy would be found in the gentiles coming to faith as we find in Acts 15. The prophets did not always realize how the prophecies they spoke would be fulfilled (1 Peter 1:10-12). But God always had planned the fulfillment of Amos 9 as Acts 15” (online at www.idsblog.org/?p=340, accessed 7/23/07, and personal email correspondence, 2/13/07).

in the divine program.¹²

In light of the clear differences that exist between the hermeneutical and doctrinal stances of TMS and NCT, the issue must be discussed. In spite of all the mutual concord, areas of discord demand greater clarity in the articulation of the respective theological positions. The following presentation focuses on a single aspect of this dialogue: the OT covenants.

General Considerations of OT Covenants

One of the questions often asked about OT covenants is whether they are unilateral (imposed by God alone) or bilateral (entered by mutual agreement between God and man) relationships. Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel insist on the unilateral nature of all biblical covenants: "The point is that a covenant given by God is *imposed* on men. It is entirely from God."¹³ On this point, Dispensationalists and NCT theologians find general agreement. OT covenants are, indeed, mainly unilateral in nature. Strangely, however, Wells assumes that anyone beginning with the OT (before reading the NT) would see but one covenant.¹⁴ It is strange, because he later declares that NCT recognizes "other covenants."¹⁵ However, when it comes to listing those other covenants, it includes only the Noachic and Abrahamic Covenants.¹⁶ Absence of a reference to the Davidic Covenant by NCT writers is the result of viewing it as "simply a continuation of and further revelation of the promises already made in the Abrahamic Covenant. In brief, the Davidic dynasty seems to inherit the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant and follows the story line out further concerning the seed that will bless all nations."¹⁷ This treatment of the Davidic Covenant marks an area of disagreement touched upon later in this essay.

Wells identifies a "mathematical unity" and a "teleological unity" in regard to the OT covenants.¹⁸ The former refers to the progressive nature of the covenants and the latter to the contribution of each covenant to "the fulfillment of redemptive

¹²Compare with Vlach's observations about the theological arguments of supersessionism ("The Church as Replacement of Israel" xvii).

¹³Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* (Frederick, Md.: New Covenant Media, 2002) 5.

¹⁴Tom Wells, "The Christian Appeal of a New Covenant Theology," in *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* 10.

¹⁵Wells, "The Christian Appeal" 25; idem, "The Relations Between the Biblical Covenants," in *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* 275.

¹⁶Wells, "The Relations Between the Biblical Covenants" 276.

¹⁷Lehrer (Online at www.idsblog.org/?p=340, accessed on 7/24/07, and personal email correspondence [2/13/07]).

¹⁸Wells, "The Relations Between the Biblical Covenants" 276.

history.”¹⁹ He also specifies that the Abrahamic Covenant offers an overview of redemptive history:

From the NT we can see that the Abrahamic Covenant spoke of two distinct peoples, Israel and the church, that would experience two kinds of redemptive histories with two covenants to guide them. They stand in *typological* relation to one another. One would experience a physical and national redemption, starting with deliverance from Egypt and guided by the Old or Mosaic Covenant. The other would experience a spiritual, transnational redemption, starting with deliverance from sin and guided by the New Covenant.²⁰

With this approach to the OT covenants, biblical Dispensationalism finds much in common with NCT—especially in what appears (at least at first blush) to be adherence to distinct identities for Israel and the church. Unlike Covenant Theology, NCT does not absolutely equate Israel and the church.

An exquisite balance between inter-covenantal continuities and discontinuities distinguishes the OT revelation concerning the biblical covenants. Each covenant develops a thematic element of the Abrahamic Covenant (representing continuity) while adding distinctly new associations (representing discontinuity). Consider the following chart’s diagrammatic depiction of the thematic continuity of the OT covenants:²¹

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 277.

²¹William D. Barrick, “The Mosaic Covenant,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10/2 (Fall 1999):218. John H. Walton (*Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994] 179) speaks of “the continuity of the covenant under the umbrella of its revelatory purpose. The phases (Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic) are linked together in a developmental pattern.” In addition, “None of these covenants replaces the one before it—each supplements what has come before” (ibid., 49). See also Michael A. Grisanti, “The Davidic Covenant,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10/2 (Fall 1999):245-50.

| Thematic Progression in Israelite Covenants ²² | | | | | | |
|---|--|---------------------------------|--|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| | <i>ABRAHAMIC</i> | <i>MOSAIC</i> | <i>PRIESTLY</i> ²³ | <i>DEUTERONOMIC</i> | <i>DAVIDIC</i> | <i>NEW</i> |
| THEMES | NATION | NATION | | Nation | Nation | NATION |
| | SEED | | | | SEED | |
| | LAND | Land | | LAND | Land | |
| | BLESSING (Spiritual) | BLESSING (Spiritual & Material) | Blessing (Spiritual & Material) | BLESSING (Material) | BLESSING (Material) | BLESSING (Spiritual) |
| | KINGDOM | Kingdom | Kingdom | | KINGDOM | Kingdom |
| SCRIPTURE | Gen 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:3-14; 22:14-19 | Exod 19–24 | Num 25:10-13; 1 Sam 2:35; Ezek 44:10-15; Mal 2:4 | Deut 27–30 | 2 Sam 7:8-16 | Jer 31:27-40 |

Wells stresses that NCT offers the Christian community a return to “the central concern with Old/New Covenants that we have seen in much of church history and a way out of that dead end that seems to largely ignore the discontinuity that characterizes the transition from Moses to Christ.”²⁴ NCT’s stress on discontinuity for the defining characteristic of a covenant²⁵ is built upon the biblical contrast set up between the Old and New Covenants. However, that focus can lead (and in some cases does lead) to an excessive discontinuity between the OT and NT, especially in over-emphasizing physical salvation (in contrast to spiritual salvation) under the Old Covenant.

According to Gary D. Long, NCT aims at “A biblical theology that develops its hermeneutic from a redemptive history approach to understanding the fulfillment of God’s eternal kingdom purpose on earth.”²⁶ In other words, NCT attempts to develop its hermeneutic from prior theological (redemption, fulfillment, and kingdom) assumptions. The very first point that Long makes is that such a

²²Uppercase themes (e.g., NATION) are secondary features within their pericopes; lowercase themes (e.g., Nation) are secondary features within their pericopes.

²³See Irvin A. Busenitz, “Introduction to the Biblical Covenants: The Noachic Covenant and the Priestly Covenant,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10/2 (Fall 1999):186-89.

²⁴Wells, “The Christian Appeal” 32.

²⁵“Scripture uses the term [*covenant*], almost without exception, to illustrate discontinuity” (Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* 38).

²⁶Gary D. Long, “Some Implications: Theological Implications,” in “New Covenant Non-Premillennialism—Part 2” (online at www.soundofgrace.com/v7/n9/glp2.htm, accessed 7/25/07).

hermeneutical approach will “[p]rovide the basis for an alternate way to interpret the Bible” and that hermeneutic will be developed “from the New Testament interpretation of the Old with Christ at its center”²⁷—viz., NT priority over the OT.²⁸ As Long explains it,

Dispensational theology’s hermeneutical principle of “literal, normal, or plain interpretation” which sees God having two distinct purposes and two distinct, chronological aspects of the New Covenant—one for the church and one for Israel—is not based upon a theology expressed in the Bible itself. Biblical theology supports one eternal redemptive purpose and one New Covenant church in history consisting of saved Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 9-11). It is based upon one New Covenant (Heb. 8) inaugurated by Christ at His first advent and is to be consummated by Him at His second advent.²⁹

In fact, the result of such an approach is that a truly biblical theology (by Long’s definition) rejects the concept of a national Israel and the church continuing as two distinct entities for God’s program in this age even before engaging the biblical text interpretively. Any hermeneutic that begins with the assumption that the NT fulfillment alters OT fulfillment must beware of implying that the NT contradicts or revises the OT. The NT complements the OT, contributes to the teachings of the OT, and explains the OT in context. Rightly interpreting the NT in its context reveals that the NT says what the OT says within the OT’s context.³⁰

Abrahamic Covenant³¹

NCT and biblical Dispensationalism agree on the centrality of the Abrahamic Covenant to biblical covenants and to the theology of the OT. However, Lehrer, speaking on behalf of NCT, declares that the land promises of the Abrahamic Covenant were already fulfilled historically “by the time of the conquest of the Land

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸A distinct difference exists between claiming that the NT is God’s commentary on the OT and making that commentary the hermeneutic. God does interpret the OT accurately in the NT, but does not interpret all of the OT. Both OT and NT must be approached with the identical hermeneutic, not two different hermeneutics.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Since this essay is limited to the OT covenants, it cannot examine this issue in greater detail. As Lehrer suggests, further discussion should respond to NCT exegesis of texts “where the New Testament writers seem to take Old Testament quotes in surprising directions” (Lehrer [online at www.idsblog.org/?p=340, accessed 7/24/07, and personal email correspondence, 2/13/07]).

³¹See Keith H. Essex, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10/2 (Fall 1999):191-212.

of Canaan under Joshua.”³² Genesis 15:21 mentions the Canaanites and the Jebusites among the peoples whose lands the Israelites would possess. According to the OT, the Israelites did not fully possess the lands of the Canaanites and Jebusites during the lifetime of Joshua. Joshua himself interpreted the Genesis 15 promise as requiring the driving out of all these inhabitants (Josh 3:10). Judges 1:21 reveals that such did not happen prior to Joshua’s death. Indeed, the Israelites continued to live in the midst of all the peoples God listed in Genesis 15 (see Judg 3:5). It wasn’t until the time of David that the Jebusites were finally evicted from their stronghold at Zion (2 Sam 5:7-9).

Though the Levites and Ezra in Neh 9:8 seem to state that God had fulfilled the promise made to Abraham in Gen 15:18-21, the context and the remainder of Scripture must be brought to bear on that statement. By context, the emphasis is on God’s faithfulness to His people. Also, by context, Ezra and the Levites state that, in spite of the divine faithfulness, the unfaithfulness (disobedience) of the Israelites resulted in non-fulfillment (Neh 9:26).³³ Therefore, NCT’s claim for fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant in the days of Joshua does not survive exegetical scrutiny.

In another matter related to the Abrahamic Covenant, Lehrer sees no necessity for belief in order for one to be a recipient of the covenant’s blessings, since blessing materialized merely through being born into the physical line of Abraham.³⁴ Likewise, when God told Abraham that He would be his God and the God of his descendants (Gen 17:7-8), it “was not a saving relationship in which the Israelites were spiritually redeemed (Heb 3:19), but the entire nation was physically redeemed and chosen to be the recipients of God’s love in a way that no one else was at that time.”³⁵ That is a common claim of NCT. For NCT, Israel was primarily a nation of unbelieving people with whom God had dealings that marked them as special. However, being special had nothing to do with spirituality or being spiritually redeemed.

As far as NCT is concerned, spiritual aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant deal with the ultimate fulfillment of the seed in the Messiah and the possession of the

³²Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* 32. In harmony with Lehrer’s focus on fulfillment of the biblical covenants’ promises, he, in fact, would prefer that NCT theology be called “fulfillment theology” rather than “replacement theology”; idem, “Commonly Asked Questions About New Covenant Theology,” *Journal of New Covenant Theology* 1/1 (2003):10. However, Volker and Lehrer identify the apostle Paul as a “Replacement Theologian” (“Did Paul Misinterpret the Old Testament?” 70).

³³See Jeffrey L. Townsend, “Fulfillment of the Land Promise in the Old Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 142 (Oct 1985):331. This entire journal article is a superb example of a careful exegesis of the OT texts with regard to the Abrahamic Covenant’s land promise.

³⁴Lehrer, “Commonly Asked Questions About New Covenant Theology,” *Journal of New Covenant Theology* 2/1 (Winter 2004):5.

³⁵Ibid., 7.

land is fulfilled in an ultimate spiritual rest, not a physical rest.³⁶ Abraham's spiritual descendants enter into a special relationship with God in which He "promises to love them forever and to never punish them."³⁷ Seeking to clarify the position on salvation in the OT, Lehrer writes, "NCT simply makes the point that the Old Covenant did not save, not that there was no salvation before the Old Covenant era. We say that the Gospel was not as clearly revealed in the eras before Christ, not that there was no revelation of the Gospel."³⁸

Indeed, a straightforward reading of OT and NT indicates that the truths of the Gospel were not hidden from the Israelites though they did not yet have the NT. Therefore, Volker and Lehrer cloud the issue when they claim that Paul had "been given more light by God as to His plan of salvation than any of the Old Testament prophets."³⁹ Perhaps confusion arises from NCT's view that a necessary dichotomy exists because the OT writers and NT writers "read the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant in two different ways."⁴⁰ OT writers, according to Wells, understand that the fulfillment is for Israel, but NT writers see the fulfillment for the church.⁴¹ As proof he offers Josh 21:43-45 and Heb 11:8-9 and 39-40. "Everything is fulfilled in Joshua;⁴² nothing is fulfilled in Hebrews. Clearly they are reading the evidence from differing perspectives."⁴³ For some NCT theologs, the way out of the dilemma consists of resorting to a typological hermeneutic in the OT—Israel is a type of the church.⁴⁴

On the other hand, as Wells admits, "Typology, however, does not quite exhaust the relation of Israel to the church."⁴⁵ Appealing to Romans 11 and Paul's figure of the olive tree, Wells identifies "an organic relation between the church and God's individually elect people from ancient Israel. We who are believers in Jesus

³⁶Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* 36.

³⁷Lehrer, "Commonly Asked Questions About New Covenant Theology," *Journal of New Covenant Theology* 2/1 (Winter 2004):8.

³⁸Lehrer (online at www.idsblog.org/?p=340, and personal email correspondence, 2/13/07).

³⁹Volker and Lehrer, "Did Paul Misinterpret the Old Testament?" 76.

⁴⁰Wells, "Description of the New Covenant (Part Two)," in *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* 60.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²But see the discussion of this argument above in the first two paragraphs under "Abrahamic Covenant."

⁴³Wells, "Description of the New Covenant (Part Two)" 61.

⁴⁴Ibid., 62. This observation ought not be construed as an accusation of excessive typology by NCT, however. As a matter of fact, NCT exposes and condemns excessive typology. A good treatment of this issue is found in Michael Feather's contribution to "Commonly Asked Questions About New Covenant Theology," *Journal of New Covenant Theology* 2/2 (Summer 2004):5-9.

⁴⁵Wells, "Description of the New Covenant (Part Two)" 63.

Christ are now part, with them, of the olive tree as it exists today, i.e., the 'invisible' or 'universal' church of God."⁴⁶ In other words, the body of Christ, the universal church of God, is made up of both the believers of the Old Covenant and those of the New. Thus, believing Israel is in the body of Christ today—not just those Jews who convert after the beginning of the NT church, but all those who believed prior to the commencement of the NT church.

NCT argues that inclusion of the Gentiles fulfills Amos 9:11-12, according to Acts 15:12-19.⁴⁷ Note, first of all, that James never says that Amos 9 is "fulfilled." Secondly, James' reasoning is that the gospel should continue to go out to the Gentiles because God included them in His redemptive and kingdom plan according to Amos 9. Amos 9 mentions Gentiles as recipients of God's kingdom blessings, so how could the early church ever take action to exclude them? Fulfillment of Amos 9 is not the question and it certainly is not identified as fulfilled at the Jerusalem council. Unfortunately, Lehrer slightly misrepresents the text when he insists twice that God "inspired Luke to interpret the passage from Amos in the book of Acts."⁴⁸ James is the one interpreting; Luke is merely recording his interpretation.

For NCT, the "Abrahamic Covenant contains both the Old and New Covenants. The Old Covenant is the physical fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise and the New Covenant is the spiritual fulfillment."⁴⁹ Wells lays out this dual fulfillment scenario as a chart in an appendix to *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense*.⁵⁰ As the argument goes, "seed" has two different meanings (individual and corporate) in the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12 and 15. Therefore, depending on which meaning one uses, that covenant can be read two different ways. For example, the promise that God would make of Abraham a great nation is fulfilled corporately and historically by Israel in Deut 26:5, but in Rev 5:9 that promise is fulfilled individually in Christ (the seed) and thus corporately in the Church.⁵¹ NCT displays an exegetical weakness at this point. Deuteronomy 26:5 does refer to the commencement of the Abrahamic Covenant's fulfillment, but it is nowhere near the divinely intended fulfillment of the original promise in Gen 12:2. Additionally, the ceremony that Deut 26:1-19 describes is a covenant renewal

⁴⁶Ibid., 65-66.

⁴⁷See n. 11 above; Lehrer, "Commonly Asked Questions About New Covenant Theology," *Journal of New Covenant Theology* 2/1 (Winter 2004):12-15, and 3/1 (Summer 2005):47; idem, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* 218-19.

⁴⁸Lehrer, "Commonly Asked Questions" 2/1 (Winter 2004):13, 15.

⁴⁹Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* 36; idem, "Commonly Asked Questions About New Covenant Theology," *Journal of New Covenant Theology* 2/1 (Winter 2004):5; Volker and Lehrer, "Did Paul Misinterpret the Old Testament?" 75.

⁵⁰Wells, "Appendix 4: The Promises of the Abrahamic Covenant," in *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* 285-87.

⁵¹Ibid., 285.

ceremony, which God commanded the Israelites to observe following their entry into the land of promise. This renewal ceremony, intended for continual observance throughout subsequent generations, looks forward to the fulfillment of the promises, not backward on their fulfillment. Therefore, Wells employs the text without regard to its context and function.

Regarding the divine promise to bless those who bless Abraham, Wells points to Gen 39:5 for historical fulfillment by Israel and to Matt 10:42 for spiritual fulfillment by the church.⁵² In Gen 39:5 the reference is to divine blessing upon Joseph in Egypt in Potiphar's household. Israel does not yet exist, so how could the text speak of historical fulfillment by Israel? Likewise, Matt 10:42 takes place before the death and resurrection of Christ, so it is not a reference to the church per se. Certainly far better texts could be employed to try to make this point. Once again, NCT attempts to build a case upon an exegetically suspect foundation. Taking a third example (all of these taken consecutively as Wells presents them), NCT sees God's promise to curse those who curse Abraham (Gen 12:3) fulfilled by Israel in Psalm 149 and by the church in Rev 6:9-11.⁵³ These associations are dubious because neither Psalm 149 nor Rev 6:9-11 make any reference to the Abrahamic Covenant or even to the concept of cursing.

Mosaic Covenant

NCT declares that God's redemption of Israel out of Egypt was only physical, not spiritual, since Israelites of that time were unbelievers (Heb 3:19).⁵⁴ Indeed, in the type of statement that instigates doubt about NCT's true position on salvation in the OT, Lehrer emphatically announces that the Israelites "were never recipients of God's special grace even though He 'bore them on eagle's wings.'"⁵⁵ In an attempt to support his point he explains, "The fact is, the vast majority of Israelites throughout history were physically redeemed but not spiritually redeemed."⁵⁶ According to NCT, the OT context demands physical redemption, since the Mosaic Covenant is based upon works.⁵⁷ NCT adherents compare the Mosaic Covenant's focus on works to Roman Catholicism and its view of a works-based salvation.⁵⁸ Lehrer says it this way:

Notice that according to the sacrificial system laid out for us in the book of Leviticus, if

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., 286.

⁵⁴Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* 46.

⁵⁵Ibid., 47.

⁵⁶Ibid., 53.

⁵⁷Ibid., 49.

⁵⁸Ibid., 50.

you sin you are to do a grocery list of things in order to receive God's forgiveness. This is a works-based arrangement that shows that the Mosaic Covenant is a works-based covenant.⁵⁹

Salvation, according to NCT, was not the immediate purpose of the Mosaic Covenant. "As a part of redemptive history this covenant contributed its part to the ultimate salvation of God's regenerated people, but as an immediate goal *the covenant is virtually silent on this subject!*"⁶⁰ In fact, Wells goes on to declare, "There is not a word directly about eternal life anywhere in the legal code."⁶¹ In the view of NCT, the Mosaic Covenant can only show people their sin, but it does not call them "to seek an eternal remedy."⁶² Since God established the Mosaic Covenant with a "hard-hearted (unbelieving) people,"⁶³ only the New Covenant provides the soteriological content by which anyone might obtain forgiveness of sins. Such statements frustrate those trying hard to understand the true position of NCT concerning salvation in the OT.

NCT's declarations concerning the Mosaic Covenant raise a legitimate question: *How* could an Israelite under the Mosaic Covenant be saved or be forgiven his sins? According to Lehrer, the "reconciliation of both Jews and Gentiles to God is contemporaneous!"⁶⁴ In other words, OT saints obtained salvation only after the death and resurrection of Christ. He insists upon a mere remnant in the OT actually being saved and that only "by the work of Christ that was to be done years later (Rom 3:25)."⁶⁵ Such a viewpoint appears to ignore the Pauline declaration in Acts 26:22-23.

⁵⁹Ibid. Such a viewpoint comes very close to the error that non-Dispensationalists have historically accused Dispensationalists of holding: salvation by works under the Law of Moses (a view based upon a misunderstanding of the old *Scofield Reference Bible* notes). Dispensationalism, however, recognizes but one way of salvation in both testaments (both by grace through faith). See Fred H. Klooster, "The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Continuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1988) 132-33.

⁶⁰Wells, "The Relations Between the Biblical Covenants" 278 (emphasis in the original). See, also, Lehrer, "Commonly Asked Questions About New Covenant Theology," *Journal of New Covenant Theology* 2/2 (Summer 2004):25: "The purpose of the Old Covenant and God's dealings with Old Covenant Israel was not for the salvation of the Israelites of that time."

⁶¹Wells, "The Relations Between the Biblical Covenants" 278. If such teaching is not in the "legal code," what about its presence in the rest of OT revelation?

⁶²Ibid., 279.

⁶³Lehrer, "Commonly Asked Questions About New Covenant Theology," *Journal of New Covenant Theology* 1/1 (2003):17.

⁶⁴Ibid., 12 (emphasis in the original).

⁶⁵Lehrer, "Commonly Asked Questions About New Covenant Theology," *Journal of New Covenant Theology* 2/1 (Winter 2004):23 n. 3. Lehrer's writings lack clarity on this matter of the salvation of OT saints. In a later issue of the same journal he wrote: "The way one gains acceptance from God and avoids

VanGemeren's description of the nature and purpose of the Mosaic Covenant is closer to what is presented in the OT:

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.⁶⁶

God gave the Mosaic Law primarily to the godly, not the ungodly.⁶⁷ Israelites obedient to the divine covenant are defined by that covenant as God's "possession" as well as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5-6). Such language is not secular nor is it political, ethnic, or non-spiritual—it is spiritual. Consider the fact that God's offer in the Mosaic Law to restore Israel when they repent (Lev 26:40-43) is not for the future alone. It is addressed to Israelites at Sinai to teach them how they should approach God at the time, as well as when they eventually go into exile. The text clearly speaks of a spiritual matter, not a physical matter. Confessing iniquity and repenting are spiritual activities that result in God's spiritual action granting

His eternal wrath is the same throughout Scripture. Acceptance comes from trusting in the promises of God and having God apply the work of Christ on the cross to the individual. So, Abraham, David, and all Old Testament saints were saved by grace through faith, in just the same way believers living in the New Covenant era are saved" ("Commonly Asked Questions About New Covenant Theology," *Journal of New Covenant Theology* 2/2 [Summer 2004]:9). Yet, on the other hand, in the same article he writes, "The content of the gospel preached to Abraham, as far as we know, was simply: 'All peoples of the earth will be blessed through you' (Genesis 12:3)" (ibid., 9-10). So Abraham, without direct revelation concerning Christ's atonement for sin, "trusted in whatever God revealed to Him and the work of Christ was applied to him retroactively" (ibid., 10). What Lehrer assumes is that the Scripture records all revelation given in any period of time to anyone anywhere, be they Abel, Enoch, Abraham, or Joseph. However, that Abel had revelation from God concerning sacrifice is quite clear—a revelation of which the Bible has no record. According to the Dispensationalism taught at TMS, OT and NT believers are all saved by the same grace through the same faith in the same Savior and His atoning work. OT saints looked forward to Christ's atoning work and the NT saint looks back on it—but it is still forgiveness of sins and eternal life as the outcome, based upon the work of Christ.

⁶⁶Willem A. VanGemeren, "The Law Is the Perfection of Righteousness in Jesus Christ: A Reformed Perspective," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, Greg L. Bahnsen et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 28.

⁶⁷This should not be taken as a contradiction to Rom 2:15, which indicates that God wrote the Law in the hearts of the Gentiles, even though they had not been given custody of the written Law as Israel had. Nor should it be taken as a denial of the work of the Law for convicting unbelievers of sin. God intended Mosaic Law to serve a variety of purposes for both the godly and the ungodly.

forgiveness. Repentance was not omitted from Mosaic Law.⁶⁸

For NCT, however, the nation of Israel “never truly became God’s people in any spiritual and eternal sense whatever. They were never a true ‘holy nation,’ nor were they ever the true ‘people of God.’”⁶⁹ They argue that, whereas the Old Covenant’s purpose was to point forward to the work of Christ, the New Covenant is all about Christ’s saving of sinners—offering them forgiveness of sins.⁷⁰ The message and purpose of the latter is not the message and purpose of the former. However, this position is a denial of the clear divine declaration in the Law of Moses that “I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people” (Lev 26:12).

Reisinger insists that “every single word like *elect, chosen, loved, redeemed, son* that describes Israel’s relationship to God as a *nation* has a totally different connotation when the identical words are used of the *church’s* relationship to God.”⁷¹ Yet, Psalm 49 clearly teaches redemption by means of a ransom price that no man is capable of paying (vv. 7-8). That redemption deals with living forever (v. 9). God alone gives such a ransom for an individual soul (v. 15). In the same context, it is also clear that life beyond this life and beyond the grave is in view when the psalmist announces that “the upright will rule over them [the unrighteous dead] in the morning” (v. 14). Does this sound like “redeemed” has “a totally different connotation” than when it is used in the NT? Where does the NT obtain its terminology? It obtains it from the OT. Paul did not miss-speak when he reminded Timothy that from his youth he had “known the sacred writings [= OT] which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ” (2 Tim 3:15; cp. Ps 19:7).

Davidic Covenant⁷²

This covenant seems to be largely ignored by NCT, in spite of the fact that a strong argument can be made for it receiving “more attention in the Hebrew Bible than any covenant except the Sinaitic.”⁷³ Reisinger states that he believes that “the

⁶⁸Unfortunately, J. A. Thompson and Elmer A. Martens ignore Leviticus 26 in their discussion of שָׁרָב in “שָׁרָב,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols., ed. by Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 4:55-59. All of the prophetic calls for Israel to repent are founded upon this Mosaic Covenant text on repentance.

⁶⁹Reisinger, *Abraham’s Four Seeds* 28 (emphasis in the original).

⁷⁰Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* 61.

⁷¹Reisinger, *Abraham’s Four Seeds* 30.

⁷²See Grisanti, “The Davidic Covenant” 233-50; Thomas H. Cragoe, “The Davidic Covenant,” in *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Analysis of the Movement and Defense of Traditional Dispensationalism*, ed. Ron J. Bigalke, Jr. (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2005) 99-134.

⁷³Jon D. Levenson, “The Davidic Covenant and Its Modern Interpreters,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979):205-6.

NT Scriptures clearly establish that the Davidic Covenant was fulfilled in the resurrection and ascension of Christ (Acts 2:22-36). The Davidic throne is not waiting to be set up in the future, but it is already established.”⁷⁴ Long mentions it in his attribution of divided views among Dispensationalists and Covenantalists.⁷⁵ But, if this is true, why does Christ announce that those who follow Him will one day judge “the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt 19:28) as a separate entity in His kingdom (Luke 22:30)? That kingdom and that judging have yet to commence.

In Acts 1:6-8, the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” He did not tell them that they were in error regarding “restoring the kingdom to Israel.” His response merely tells them that it is not for them to know when that will occur—implying that it will. Nor did He say, “Wait a minute, fellows. When I say ‘Israel,’ I really don’t mean Israel. I am referring to the church.” Lest one think that the kingdom was inaugurated on the day of Pentecost (as Reisinger believes⁷⁶), Paul is still looking forward to “the hope of Israel” at the end of Acts (28:20) and proclaiming the coming kingdom to all who will listen (28:23, 31). That is not surprising. Paul spoke of the kingdom as something yet to be inherited (1 Cor 6:9-10), the kingdom that will come at the time of Christ’s judging the living and the dead when He appears in the second advent (2 Tim 4:1). At the end of Paul’s life he was still expecting to be brought “safely to His heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim 4:18), because he had not yet entered it. James (Jas 2:5) and Peter both concur (2 Pet 1:11) with Paul that they had not yet entered that kingdom⁷⁷—a kingdom whose coming John describes in Revelation 12:10.

New Covenant⁷⁸

NCT defines the New Covenant as “the bond between God and man, established by the blood (i.e. sacrificial death) of Christ, under which the church of Jesus Christ has come into being.”⁷⁹

Conclusion

There is much within NCT with which TMS might find agreement—especially in its strong faith in Christ, its high regard for Scripture, its desire

⁷⁴Reisinger, *Abraham’s Four Seeds* 21.

⁷⁵Long, “Chapter 8, Part 1: Summary,” in “New Covenant Non-Premillennialism” (online at www.soundofgrace.com/v7/n8/ncprmlgdLL.htm, accessed 7/26/07).

⁷⁶Reisinger, *Abraham’s Four Seeds* 49.

⁷⁷Contra *ibid.*, 56.

⁷⁸See Larry D. Pettegrew, “The New Covenant,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10/2 (Fall 1999):251-70 and his presentation of “The New Covenant and NCT” in the current issue.

⁷⁹Wells, “Description of the New Covenant (Part One),” in *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* 57.

to develop a theology based upon the Word of God rather than upon human philosophy, its stand contrary to the theological position of Covenant Theology, and its participation in the ongoing debate over continuity and discontinuity. Many of the observations NCT adherents have made about the Abrahamic Covenant and its centrality are biblical. That covenant's central role as the leading OT covenant theologically cannot be seriously denied. Likewise, NCT engages eagerly in a study of the Mosaic Covenant because of its dominance in the OT and the apparent contrasts between it and the New Covenant. The role of Mosaic Law for NT believers is not just a hot button topic—it is a topic that should be of great interest to all believers. An aspect of the topic requiring clarification is NCT's true beliefs concerning the salvation of OT saints living under Law.

This study must not end without reviewing the differences between what TMS teaches and what NCT espouses. Due to a weakness in both hermeneutics and exegesis, NCT struggles with inconsistencies and ends up doing exactly what its adherents condemn in Covenantalism and Dispensationalism: they make their theology their hermeneutic. By placing total priority on the NT, NCT tends not to treat the OT text in its own context. It is correct that the NT plays a vital role in one's interpretation of the OT, but too often NCT presupposes a discontinuity far more radical than what either testament actually demands. Though accurate in saying that people in both OT and NT times are saved from sin by the same gospel message concerning the atoning work of Christ, NCT theologians too often obscure their stance on the immediate salvation for the OT saint. By focusing almost entirely on the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and New Covenants, NCT devalues the covenant that has some of the strongest ties to God's future program for national Israel: the Davidic Covenant. That is no small oversight. For NCT to continue contributing to the ongoing discussion to which they invite others and to which TMS willingly responds, they must expend time and energy to produce a complete study of the full revelation concerning the Davidic Covenant in the OT.

As fellow believers, brothers in Christ, who accept the full authority of Scripture, we can engage NCT adherents in fruitful conversation. Hopefully, this series of essays will be just the entrée to a fuller feast in the Word.

THE NEW COVENANT AND NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY

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On a spectrum of continuity and discontinuity, New Covenant Theology lies between Covenant Theology and Progressive Dispensationalism and shows a number of improvements over Covenant Theology in such matters as emphasizing exegetical and biblical theology as a basis for systematic theology. Jeremiah 31:31-34 and several other passages state provisions of the New Covenant in the OT. The NT mentions the New Covenant in Luke 22:20, 1 Cor 11:25, and 2 Cor 3:6, among other places, indicating that the death of Christ marked the inauguration of the New Covenant. Traditional Covenant Theology sees the New Covenant as merely an updating of the Old Covenant and sees it as fulfilled in the church. New Covenant Theology sees the New Covenant as something new and not just a redoing of the Mosaic Covenant, but still thinks the New Covenant is being fulfilled in the church. Though some Dispensationalists disagree, most Dispensationalists understand that the New Covenant was inaugurated with the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. Dispensationalism sees the New Covenant as something new, but in agreement with early Christian tradition, furnishes a fuller explanation of the New Covenant in regard to Israel's future regathering and restoration. Covenant Theology and New Covenant Theology agree that the OT is to be read through the lens of the NT, but Dispensationalism is alone in insisting that the OT should be given its full weight in light of historical-grammatical principles of hermeneutics.

* * * * *

New Covenant Theology (NCT) is a branch of Reformed theology that

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proclaims that the entire Mosaic Covenant has passed away as a law code, and that Christians are supposed to live under the New Covenant. This is in contrast to many Covenant theologians who assert that the New Covenant is only an updated Old Covenant and that parts of the Mosaic Covenant continue on into the New Covenant era and serve as a standard of ethics for New Testament Christians. In the spectrum of continuity and discontinuity, New Covenant Theology seems to fit in between Covenant Theology and Progressive Dispensationalism.

Continuity

Discontinuity

^{7th}Day Adventism—Theonomy—Covenant Theology—NCT—Progressive Dispen.—Traditional Dispen.—Ultra Dispen.

THINGS TO LIKE ABOUT NCT

There are several things to like about NCT. Without going into detail or referencing Covenant theologians from whom NCT is contrasted, the following twelve points are definite improvements over Covenant Theology.

1. NCT tries to emphasize “exegetical and biblical theology as the source of systematics.”¹ New Covenant theologians, Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel write,

Those of us who are of the Calvinistic theological tradition should be diligently seeking to sort out biblical fact from system or tradition driven conclusions. That is, if there is some belief that we hold to be biblically true and its truth is an essential part of our theological system or heritage, yet we cannot establish its validity on any text of scripture, then we must throw that belief out; perhaps even throw out our theological system; or ignore certain parts of our heritage.²

2. NCT rejects the Covenant of Redemption as a theological covenant. Steve Lehrer explains,

We do not believe that it is wise to refer to God’s plan to save a people in eternity past as a “covenant.” But we do believe that our one God who is three co-equal and co-eternal persons did make a perfect plan that He would save a people from their sins. But if this plan is not called a covenant by the authors of Scripture, we must think twice about describing it by that name ourselves. . . . The danger of calling something a covenant that Scripture does not refer to as a covenant increases the likelihood of making something a cornerstone of our theology that in fact is not an emphasis in Scripture. This of course would lead to an unbalanced and unbiblical theological system.³

¹Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* (Frederick, Md.: New Covenant Media, 2002) 2.

²Steve Lehrer and Geoff Volker, “Examining the Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ: A Study in Calvinistic Sacred Cowism,” *The Journal of New Covenant Theology* II:2 (2004):79.

³Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (Self-Published, 2006).

3. NCT rejects the Covenant of Works as a foundational theological covenant. According to Lehrer, “NCT, however, disagrees with those who hold to a Covenant of Works with Adam.”⁴

4. NCT rejects the Covenant of Grace as a theological covenant.⁵

5. NCT “views the Ten Commandments as the essence of the Old Covenant and not the essence of all of God’s law.”⁶

6. NCT believes that “the Old Covenant is obsolete and will disappear. . . . Hebrews 8:13.”⁷

7. NCT recognizes the relative newness of Covenant Theology. “Covenant Theology was unknown until Ulrich Zwingli called it into service against the Anabaptists.”⁸

8. NCT appreciates the contributions of the Anabaptists. “Whether anyone noticed or not, they [the Anabaptists] adopted the Reformation slogan *sola scriptura* and took it more seriously than their opponents, but traditional ways of doing theology won the day.”⁹

9. NCT rejects the typical Covenant Theological (and others) view that divides the Mosaic Law into three distinct parts, some of which have been abrogated, and some of which the New Covenant Christian is obligated to obey. Wells and Zaspel write, “The popular hermeneutical attempt to divide Moses’ law into so many parts and then interpret NT statements of the passing of law accordingly is simplistic, and it cannot be maintained exegetically.”¹⁰ “It is the Mosaic code as a whole and in all its parts that has passed away, and the apostolic declarations to that end must therefore be seen to embrace even the Decalogue.”¹¹

10. NCT recognizes the difficulty for Covenant Theologians to differ from

⁴Ibid., 37.

⁵Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* 45.

⁶Geoff Volker and Mike Adams, “Defining New Covenant Theology. Online at: http://www.geocities.com/pvrozman/New_Covenant_Theology_Defined.html, accessed 7/2/07.

⁷Ibid. See also Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 181ff. and 186.

⁸Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* 2.

⁹Ibid., 30.

¹⁰Ibid., 150.

¹¹Ibid., 152. See also *ibid.*, 185.

the Reformation creeds. “What I want to say [in this chapter] may be summarized in two short sentences:

1. Our creeds and confessions are one immense barrier to unity.
2. There is no easy or obvious way to cross this divide.”¹²

11. NCT elevates the person and law of Christ, that is, the New Covenant, over the Mosaic Law. “Which is the higher revelation of the character of God, the Ten commandments or the person, work and teaching of Jesus Christ? Most Christians, we think, will agree on the answer. We’ve tried to go a step further and work out its implications according to the NT Scriptures.”¹³

12. NCT rejects the typical covenant theological view that the New Covenant is simply a renewed Old Covenant.¹⁴

It would seem, therefore, that NCT has exposed and corrected some of the major errors of Covenant Theology, and for that one can be thankful to NCT. In fact, one might think that NCT has cut out the heart of Covenant Theology by rejecting the three basic theological covenants of Covenant Theology. But this would be somewhat of an exaggeration in that other essential Covenant Theological matters are embraced by NCT.

This article will focus on the role of the New Covenant in New Covenant Theology. Specifically, the goal of this essay is threefold: (1) To identify the differences between NCT, Covenant Theology, and Dispensationalism in the interpretation of the New Covenant as it is found in Scripture. These differences will be found in two key questions: Is the New Covenant a renewed Old Covenant or the New Covenant? And is Israel really Israel, or is Israel the church? (2) What are the key differences in these three systems in doing theology, especially in the relation of the Old Testament to the New Testament? (3) In regard to understanding the New Covenant, what are the differences in the hermeneutical systems in these three systems?

THE NEW COVENANT

Before considering the differences between NCT, Covenant Theology, and Dispensationalism in the interpretation of the New Covenant, the main features of the

¹²Ibid., 259.

¹³Ibid., 2.

¹⁴Ibid., 46ff.

New Covenant as stated in Scripture need to be summarized.

The New Covenant in the Old Testament

The phrase, “New Covenant,” is only found in one passage in the OT, Jeremiah 31:31-34:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law with in them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”¹⁵

However, the New Covenant is revealed under other names and descriptions throughout the OT prophets. The New Covenant is described as the “everlasting covenant” (Jer 32:40); “new heart” and “new spirit” (Ezek 11:19-20); “covenant of peace” (Ezek 37:26); “a covenant” or “my covenant” (Isa 49:8).

The parties of the Covenant are always God with Israel/Judah, as illustrated in Jer 31:31-40 quoted above. Sometimes the prophets even mention the geography of Israel, or the city of Jerusalem in their descriptions of the recipients of the New Covenant. On the other hand, other nations are not excluded from the NC, and in fact there seems to be some spill over or trickle down benefits of the New Covenant to the Gentiles (Isa 56:7-8). But the Covenant is made with Israel.

The provisions of the New Covenant include a new heart (Ezek 11:19-20); permanent forgiveness of sins (Jer 33:8); the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in all believers (Ezek 36:27); the law inside of a believer (Jer 31:33); a consummation of Israel’s relationship with God (Jer 31:33); physical blessings on Israel consisting of gathering of the scattered Israelites to the land, rebuilding of the cities, productivity of the land, increase in herds and flocks, rest, peace, and expressions of joy.

The fulfillment of the New Covenant, from an OT perspective, therefore, involves two parties—God, on the one hand, and Israel/Judah, on the other (Ezek 37:15-28) According to the OT, the fulfillment of the New Covenant will take place when Israel is spiritually alive (Ezek 37:1-14); in relationship to the coming of the Messiah when Israel is regathered to the land (Ezek 37:24-28; Jer 3:14-16); and in the Messianic Kingdom (Isa 11:6-10; Jer 32:37-41). Other nations will also receive the trickle down blessings (Isa 19:22-25) as an elaboration of the feature of the Abrahamic Covenant, “in you all the nations of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 12:3).

¹⁵All biblical quotations are from the NASB Update unless otherwise noted.

Of course, there is nothing in the New Covenant passages about the church—Jew and Gentile together in one body on equal footing because the New Testament explains that the church was a mystery in the OT (Eph 3:1-12).

The New Covenant in the New Testament

Some Dispensationalists would argue that the New Covenant is not inaugurated until the beginning of the millennial kingdom. It seems much more likely, however, that the New Covenant was inaugurated with the death of Christ for forgiveness of sins, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus says that the shedding of His blood is the basis of the New Covenant: “And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:20). Moreover, the Holy Spirit, a main feature of the New Covenant, comes to begin to fulfill the promise of the New Covenant at Pentecost. In his Pentecost sermon, Peter explains,

“This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. . . .” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself” (Acts 2:32-33; 38-39).

In the epistles, Paul restates the Lord’s teaching about the blood of the New Covenant to the church at Corinth: “In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me’ (1 Cor 11:25). Paul also identifies himself and his fellow ministers as “servants of a new covenant” (2 Cor 3:6).

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews also tries to convince the Christian Jews that through the New Covenant, they had a better mediator than Moses in Jesus Christ (Heb 8:6; cf. Exod 20:18-21). He also plainly explains that the New Covenant has replaced the Old Covenant (Heb 8:7-13). In fact, we know exactly when the Old Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, came to an end. God clearly indicated that it was no longer in existence at the crucifixion when the great veil in the Jerusalem temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt 27:51). Really, the NT is a manual on how to live as a Christian under the New Covenant.

THE NEW COVENANT AND THE THEOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

The discussion about the New Covenant among the systems focuses on two key questions: (1) Is the new covenant a renewed Old Covenant or a New Covenant distinct from the old Mosaic Covenant? (2) Is the “Israel” that is to fulfill the New Covenant really Israel, or is Israel somehow replaced by the church?

Traditional Covenant Theology

An Updated Old Covenant

To answer the first question, many traditional Covenant theologians argue that the New Covenant is really the Old Covenant updated. Without a doubt, the main sponsor of the renewed Old Covenant viewpoint was John Calvin. In his commentary on Jeremiah, Calvin states,

Now, as to the *new* covenant, it is not so called, because it is contrary to the first covenant; for God is never inconsistent with himself, nor is he unlike himself. . . . It then follows, that the first covenant was inviolable; besides, he had already made his covenant with Abraham, and the Law was a confirmation of that covenant. And then the Law depended on that covenant which God made with his servant Abraham, it follows that God could never have made a new, that is, a contrary or a different covenant. . . .

It being new, no doubt refers to what they call the form. . . . But the substance remains the same. By substance I understand the doctrine; for God in the Gospel brings forward nothing but what the Law contains. We hence see that God has so spoken from the beginning, that he has not changed, no not a syllable, with regard to the substance of the doctrine.¹⁶

Also in the *Institutes*, in a section entitled, “The Similarity of the Old and New Testaments,” Calvin argues that the New Covenant is really a renewed Old Covenant. He writes, “Now we can clearly see from what has already been said that all men adopted by God into the company of his people since the beginning of the world were covenanted to him by the same law and by the bond of the same doctrine as obtains among us.”¹⁷ Moreover, “The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation.”¹⁸

For Calvin and his Covenant followers, the Mosaic law, though renewed in the New Covenant, serves as the norm for the Christian’s life today. More specifically, the moral law, given for the New Testament Christian, is given in the Ten Commandments. Question 41 of *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 1647, reads: “Wherein is the law summarily comprehended? Ans. The moral law is

¹⁶John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, translated from the Latin and edited by John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1852; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 126-27.

¹⁷John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics, Volume XX, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 2:10:1, 428.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 2:10:2. 429.

summarily comprehended in the ten commandments.”¹⁹ And the Westminster Confession, perhaps the first major confession of faith to promote systematized Covenant Theology, reads, “The moral law [i.e., the ten commandments] doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator who gave it. Neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen, this obligation.”

Traditional Covenant Theologians, such as the nineteenth-century Princeton professors, followed Calvin’s interpretation.²⁰ And so have contemporary Covenant Theologians. William Van Gemeren states, The New Covenant “is the same in substance as the old covenant (the Mosaic administration), but different in form”²¹, and “The law is not replaced by the Spirit in the eschatological age. The Spirit opens people up to the law and transforms them to live by a higher ethics.”²² Robert Reymond adds, “Revelation defines that likeness to God according to which Christians’ lives are to be patterned concretely in terms of conformity to his perceptive will for them—the moral law or Ten commandments (Exod 20:1-17; Deut 5:6-21). That is to say, it is the Decalogue which is the ethical norm for the Christian’s covenant way of life.”²³ Interestingly enough, some New Perspective theologians have also stressed this rather extreme continuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.²⁴

Fulfilled with the Church

To the second question as to who fulfills the New Covenant, traditional Covenant Theology answers that though the New Covenant was made with Israel, it is ultimately fulfilled with the church. William E. Cox writes, “The contention of

¹⁹“The Westminster Shorter Confession,” 1647, in *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1877; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) 684.

²⁰E.g., A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983; reprint of 1879 edition), 368-71.

²¹William Van Gemeren, in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christians, Five Views*, ed. Wayne G. Strickland, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) 36.

²²*Ibid.*, 45.

²³Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 770.

²⁴James D. G. Dunn writes, “For it is important to recall that the hope which Paul saw as thus fulfilled in the Spirit was not hope for another law or a different Torah. . . . Contrary to popular opinion, the promise of a new covenant in Jeremiah is not of a new or different law. The promise is plain: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts” (Jer. 31:33). Likewise the new heart and spirit promised in Ezekiel has in view a more effective keeping of the law . . .” (*The Theology of Paul the Apostle* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998] 645). See also the very helpful book, Femi Adeyemi, *The New Covenant Torah in Jeremiah and the Law of Christ*, Studies in Biblical Literature, ed. Hemchand Gossai, vol. 94 (New York: Peter Lang, 2006) 7-10.

this writer is that the new covenant was established at the first coming of Christ, and that it was established with the church—which is the fullness of which Israel was only a type (compare Eph. 1:23).”²⁵ David Wilkerson proclaims, “However, this New Covenant was meant not for natural Israel, not then, not now, nor in some millennial period. It is meant for spiritual Israel. . . .”²⁶ Samuel Waldron adds, “You may be asking: Does not Jeremiah 31 say that the New Covenant was to be made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah? How can it be, then, that the New Covenant is fulfilled in the mainly Gentile Church? The simple answer to that question is that the Church is Israel.”²⁷

In fact, the way the New Covenant relates to the church is one of Covenant Theology’s arguments for the church being new Israel. O. Palmer Robertson writes:

When Jeremiah specifically indicates that the new covenant will be made “with the house of Judah and with the house of Israel,” this perspective must be kept in mind. If the new covenant people of God are the actualized realization of a typological form, and the new covenant now is in effect, those constituting the people of God in the present circumstances must be recognized as the ‘Israel of God.’ As a unified people, the participants of the new covenant today are Israel.”²⁸

What Robertson seems to be saying is, (1) The Old Testament said that the New Covenant would be fulfilled with Israel. (2) Today, the New Covenant is being fulfilled with the church. (3) Therefore, the church must be a renewed Israel.

One would think that the more biblical and logical conclusion in point three above would be that this proves that the ultimate fulfillment of the promises of the New Covenant has not yet occurred, and there will be a future fulfillment of this Covenant with Israel. So to summarize: Most Covenant Theologians believe that the New Covenant is really the Old Covenant updated; and all Covenant Theologians believe that the church replaces Israel in fulfillment of the New Covenant.

New Covenant Theology

NCT places a great stress on the New Covenant, as one would expect, given the name of the system. Lehrer explains,

²⁵William E. Cox, *The New Covenant Israel* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1963) 35.

²⁶David Wilkerson, *Israel and the New Covenant* (Lindale, Tex.: Wilkerson Trust Publication, 2000) 13.

²⁷Samuel E. Waldron, with Richard C. Barcellos, *A Reformed Baptist Manifesto: The New Covenant Constitution of the Church* (Palmdale, Calif.: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2004) 21.

²⁸O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980) 289.

We are often asked why, as a ministry, we have chosen to highlight NCT. . . . We believe that our emphasis on the New Covenant is a reflection of God's Word. The reason why we highlight the New Covenant is because the Scriptures highlight it. . . . The centrality of the New Covenant cannot be overemphasized. It is a way of speaking about all that the Lord accomplished. We believe that the way in which you understand the New Covenant affects both how you understand a myriad of important doctrines in Scripture and how you live as a Christian in a fallen world.²⁹

A New Covenant

Moreover, for NCT, the New Covenant really is a New Covenant, not the old Mosaic Covenant redone.³⁰ Still, there is a fine line here. For NCT, this does not mean that the Old Covenant is abolished. Rather the Old Covenant transmutes into the New. David Wells writes, "Does that mean that the Decalogue is abolished? Not at all. It just means that the fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:33 is a fulfillment that involves a transformation from the Ten Commandments as written in the OT to the teaching of Jesus and his writing disciples. The caterpillar has been transformed. He now looks *very* different."³¹

At any rate, as a result of this transformation, the Ten Commandments are no longer a rule of life for a child of God in NCT. In Zaspel's words,

[T]he church is not at all obliged to follow the old law in its older form. We are required to follow the law only as it comes to us through the grid of Jesus Christ, the law's Lord and fulfiller. It does not belong to any hermeneutical system to dictate beforehand what part of Moses remains and what does not—which parts are 'moral' and which are not. Neither must we displace the law altogether because of another hermeneutic.³²

Even the idea of dividing the Mosaic Covenant into three parts and claiming that one part still remains is rejected. "To argue that not the moral (i.e., Decalogue) but only the civil and/or ceremonial aspects of Moses are passed, when Paul says that it is in fact the Old Covenant itself, 'written and engraved in stones' that has passed away, misses Paul's point. It is Moses *en toto* that he says has gone (2 Cor. 3)."³³

Thus, instead of the Mosaic law, the rule of life under the New Covenant is the "law of Christ." "NCT embraces the law of Christ," writes Lehrer, "which is the law that is applicable to believers today. The law of Christ includes the commands

²⁹Steve Lehrer, "Editor's Introduction," *The Journal of New Covenant Theology* 1:1 (2003):3.

³⁰See, for example, Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 170.

³¹Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* 184.

³²*Ibid.*, 130.

³³*Ibid.*, 151.

given by Christ and His Apostles. There are many, many laws in the New Covenant Scriptures. . . .”³⁴

Fulfilled with the Church

Though making some significant steps forward, NCT takes a step back toward Covenant Theology and teaches that the New Covenant is ultimately fulfilled with the church rather than with the nation of Israel. New Covenant Theologians admit that Jer 31:31 teaches that the New Covenant was originally made with Israel. According to Lehrer, “If you read the verses that surround this text. . . , it is crystal clear that this New Covenant, in its Old Testament context, is promised to the geopolitical nation of Israel at some point in the future.”³⁵ Nonetheless, “Israel in the Old Covenant era was a temporary, unbelieving picture of the true people of God, the church. There always existed a small remnant of believers within unbelieving Israel.”³⁶ Thus, in both Covenant Theology and NCT, the church replaces Israel, and God has no special future for the nation other than as individual Jews become a part of the church.

NCT does have a somewhat different view of OT Israel from standard Covenant Theology. NCT, much more than Covenant Theology, minimizes the significance of OT Israel. The nation of Israel, at best, was only “an unbelieving type or picture of the true people of God, the church. . . . Israel was not the church in the Old Testament. . . .”³⁷ Many Covenant Theologians would insist that Israel in the OT was the church. But for NCT, except for “a tiny remnant,” OT Israelites “are in hell because of unbelief.”³⁸

Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism is not a monolithic theology. There are differences of opinions within Dispensationalism on many items, and some Dispensationalists have taught not only that the New Covenant of Jer 31:31 has not yet been inaugurated, but also that the New Covenant really is the Old Covenant redone.³⁹ But this would

³⁴Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 112.

³⁵Ibid., 170.

³⁶Ibid., 20.

³⁷Ibid., 66.

³⁸Ibid., 34.

³⁹John R. Master, “The New Covenant,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, eds. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody, 1994) 97. Master writes, “In Jeremiah’s prophecy, what ‘law’ would be in their minds and on their hearts? Contextually would not Jeremiah’s readers have thought of the commands of God given through Moses? Is there any indication that new commands are demanded or even implied. The term *my law* is the Hebrew word *torati*, which to Jeremiah’s audience, would have signaled the instruction God had given to His people through Moses and the prophets. The difference

probably be a minority view. Most Dispensationalists teach that the New Covenant was indeed inaugurated in connection with the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and with the coming of the Spirit in His New Covenant ministries on the day of Pentecost. Moreover, the New Covenant really is new.⁴⁰

A New Covenant

One might think, therefore, that Dispensationalists are in agreement with New Covenant Theologians who also teach that the New Covenant really is new. Though this is true to some extent, some disagreement with NCT also exists as to how the New Covenant should be defined and explained.

A Correct Definition

New Covenant Theologians regularly limit their definition of the New Covenant to “the work of Jesus Christ on the cross (Hebrews 8:6-13; 10:11-18.”⁴¹ Wells defines, “*The New Covenant, then, is the bond between God and man, established by the blood (i.e. the sacrificial death) of Christ, under which the church of Jesus Christ has come into being.*”⁴²

Such explanations are good as far as they go, and one could not argue with the essence of these explanations. But they leave out many other features of the New Covenant, not the least that the New Covenant was made with Israel, not the church. From the Dispensational perspective, a fuller explanation of the New Covenant as taught in Scripture might add something like this: “This Covenant, then, has to do with the regeneration, forgiveness, and justification of Israel, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with His subsequent ministries, Israel’s regathering and restoration to the place of blessing, all founded on the blood of Christ.”⁴³

An Historical Tradition

Though Calvin’s view that the New Covenant is basically the Old Covenant redone has many followers, the view that the New Covenant is really a new and

between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant did not lie specifically in a difference in commands but rather in the people’s response, which would, under the new covenant, be the work of God in the individual’s life so that each would obey (*torati*). . . . Interestingly, there is no mention of a change in the laws of God, only in their actual obedience to them.”

⁴⁰See Larry D. Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Kregel,, 201) 85-107.

⁴¹Lehrer, “Editor’s Introduction” 3.

⁴²Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* 57 (emphasis in the original).

⁴³J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham, 1958) 118.

different covenant also has a strong tradition in the history of Christian doctrine. The church father, Justin Martyr, in his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, argues that Christians “do not trust through Moses or through the law. . . . Now, law placed against law has abrogated that which is before it, and a covenant which comes after in like manner has put an end to the previous one, and an eternal and final law—namely, Christ—has been given to us, and the covenant is trustworthy, after which there shall be no law, no commandment, nor ordinance.”⁴⁴ Femi Adeyemi comments,

From the above one could say that Justin Martyr understood that the Old Covenant was a covenant for national Israel only, not for the current church. It could be assumed also that he recognized that the Old Covenant had its own law, both of which have already ended with the Christ event. However, in Justin, with the cessation of the Old Covenant and its Law came the New Covenant and its law through Christ.⁴⁵

Other fathers who also proclaim the newness of the New Covenant include Irenaeus,⁴⁶ Tertullian,⁴⁷ and Augustine.⁴⁸ In the Reformation, Martin Luther insisted that the New Covenant was not the Old Covenant redone and that the entire Mosaic Covenant had passed away, not just the ceremonial law.⁴⁹ So Dispensationalists and New Covenant Theologians would fall in line with this historical tradition that the New Covenant is really new, not an updated Old Covenant.

⁴⁴Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, 11:10-13, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; reprint editor A. Cleveland Coxe; vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) 199-200.

⁴⁵Femi Adeyemi, *The New Covenant Torah* 23.

⁴⁶See Irenaeus, *Five Books Against Heresies*, book 4, chapters 9-15 especially, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, eds. Roberts and Donaldson, 472-80. See also Adeyemi, *New Covenant Torah* 23.

⁴⁷See Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, book 5, chapter 11, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, eds. Roberts and Donaldson, 452-53.

⁴⁸See Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, especially chapters 31-39, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 96-99.

⁴⁹Martin Luther, “On the Bondage of the Will,” *Luther’s Works*, vol. 33, Career of the Reformer, III, eds. Philip S. Wateson and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972) 258-59.

A Better Exposition

Moreover, the best exposition of the key OT passage where the covenant is called “new” teaches that the New Covenant is indeed new.⁵⁰ The Hebrew word for “new” means “new,” “fresh,” something “not yet existing.” It is used in the OT for a new garment, a new house, a new wife, a new song, a new king, and a new moon. Other Hebrew words speak of repair, but not the word used here. Neither the Hebrew adjective nor the Greek adjective means “renewed.”⁵¹

Furthermore, the Lord through Jeremiah, adds that the New Covenant would not be like the Old Covenant that He had made with the fathers at the time of the Exodus, the Covenant “which they broke” (Jer 31:32). The adverb, “not,” placed with the comparative phrase, “like the covenant,” “emphatically negates the correspondence or identity of the coming New Covenant with the Sinaitic Covenant that had existed before.”⁵² Besides, Israel’s ongoing disobedience of the Old Covenant brought curses to them instead of blessings (cf. Deut 29) and eventually led to the abrogation of the Old Covenant with Israel (cf. Matt 27:51; Heb 8:13). It is highly unlikely, therefore, that the New Covenant is a renewed Old Covenant, or that the Mosaic law, which is at the heart of the Mosaic Covenant, is at the heart of New Covenant Christian ethics. Of course, the New Covenant as taught by Christ and His apostles, is often similar to the Mosaic law.

Fulfilled with Israel

Dispensationalists are agreed that the New Covenant will be ultimately fulfilled with Israel in the millennial kingdom.⁵³ Jeremiah states that the New Covenant will be made with the House of Israel and the House of Judah (Jer 31:31). “House of Israel” occurs 147 times in the OT and “House of Judah” occurs 35 times. The two terms are found together nine times, eight of these in Jeremiah. All of these texts speak specifically of national Israel. Since it is plainly stated that the New Covenant is made with Israel, one might expect that its ultimate fulfillment would be made with Israel.

Many other texts throughout the OT point toward the fulfillment of the New Covenant with a future Israel. The prophet Hosea, for example, writes, “For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred

⁵⁰For a helpful exegesis of Jer 31:31-34, see Adeyemi, *New Covenant Tarah* 43-76. His entire work is enlightening.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 47-49.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 49.

⁵³Dispensationalists have often struggled to explain how the church gets into the New Covenant made with Israel. For a discussion of this theological issue see Larry Pettegrew, “The New Covenant,” *The Master's Seminary Journal* 10/2 (Fall 1999):251-70. Also see Larry D. Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit* 28-38.

pillar and without ephod or household idols. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days” (Hos 3:3-4).

In addition, the NT teaches that God has not permanently cast off disobedient Israel. Paul says it clearly:

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.” From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God's* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Rom 11:25-29).

THE NEW COVENANT AND THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

In the ongoing discussions among the systems, the debate has often come down to two basic matters. First, different views have been taken about how theology should be done in determining the order of the Old and New Testaments. The second matter deals with hermeneutics, specifically how does one interpret the OT. The two matters are closely related.

How to Do Theology: The Order of the Testaments

NCT follows the error of classic Covenant Theology of subordinating the Old Covenant to the new. Historically, the Reformers brought the Protestant church out of the long night of Medieval exegetical disaster and reawakened the church to the value of the history and ethics of the OT. They took the OT more seriously and developed their idea of the theological covenant out of OT theology. There was also a renewal of the commitment to literal interpretation and an awareness of the dangers of allegorical interpretation. However, one hermeneutical principle from medieval attitudes toward the clarity of Scripture remained: the subordination of the OT to the NT.

This procedure in doing theology continues to this day to be the method of doing theology in Covenant Theology. Covenant Theologian, Hans K. LaRondelle, for example, argues that the OT Scriptures can be interpreted accurately only by studying the NT. Historic Christianity, he says, has always tried to understand the Old by the New. The Christian interpreter of the OT is once and for all obliged to read the Hebrew Scriptures in the light of the NT as a whole, because the Old is interpreted authoritatively, under divine inspiration, in the NT as God’s continuous

history of salvation. According to LaRondelle, historic Christianity has always confessed that the New Testament is the goal and fulfillment of the Old.⁵⁴

New Covenant theologians agree. Lehrer insists, "Hermeneutical principle #2 is, always read the Old Covenant Scriptures through the lens of the New Covenant Scriptures."⁵⁵ Tom Wells concurs, "The critical point here is this: NT revelation, due to its finality, must be allowed to speak first on every issue that it addresses."⁵⁶

For Covenant and New Covenant Theologians, therefore, doing theology proceeds as follows:⁵⁷

- (1) The formulation of a biblical theology from the NT;
- (2) The formulation of a biblical theology from the OT;
- (3) The production of a systematic theology by harmonizing points 1 and 2.

But there are serious weaknesses in using the NT as a pair of glasses through which to read the OT, as nice as it may sound. By reading the NT back into the OT, Covenant Theologians may in effect minimize the historical-grammatical interpretation of great sections of the OT and produce allegorizations of the OT. New Covenant Theologians admit that the OT says one thing (i.e., "Israel"), but it must mean something else (i.e., "church"), because they have restricted its meaning only to what they think the NT directs the OT to say.

New Covenant Theologians in effect "undo, or replace the results that would have been obtained in performing a true biblical theology of the OT."⁵⁸ In doing theology, the OT is almost an afterthought in this procedure. In actuality, the NT is used like the "presidential power of veto"⁵⁹ over legitimate exegetical results in OT passages. Consequently, a true OT biblical theology that serves to form the production of systematic theology is nonexistent. The systematic theology is "one-legged."⁶⁰

The proper approach for doing theology is as follows:

⁵⁴Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University, 1983) 19. Unfortunately, the "historic Christianity" that he is referring to in this case is the medieval method of interpretation. See further, Larry D. Pettegrew, "The Perspicuity of Scripture," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 15/2 (Fall 2004):216-25.

⁵⁵Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 177.

⁵⁶Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* 7.

⁵⁷See the helpful study by Mike Stallard, "Literal Hermeneutics, Theological Method, and the Essence of Dispensationalism" (unpublished paper, Pre-Trib Research Center, 1998) 13-16. The paper is available online at www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=196, accessed 7/3/07. The following discussion is adapted from this paper.

⁵⁸Ibid., 15.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

- (1) The formulation of a biblical theology from the OT;
- (2) The formulation of a biblical theology from the NT;
- (3) The production of a systematic theology by harmonizing all biblical inputs to theology.

And why is this better? For at least three reasons. First, because this is the nature of progressive revelation. In progressive revelation, revelation builds upon previous revelation. Second, because this process enables the interpreter to read the OT with a consistent grammatical-historical hermeneutic. And third, because in this procedure, there is really no priority of one testament over another except in a chronological order of progressive revelation. In the end, it is superior to be able to insist that an OT text must not be stripped of its original meaning in its context, found through historical-grammatical interpretation and biblical theology. Both the NT and the OT should be treated as perspicuous, not just the NT.

How to Do Hermeneutics: The Interpretation of the Old Testament

Interpreting the OT through the lens of the New Testament leads New Covenant Theologians to use non-historical-grammatical hermeneutics in interpreting important OT passages. This propensity to dismiss what the OT says spreads to passages that are not necessarily related to the New Covenant. Lehrer writes, for example, “The words ‘atonement’ and ‘forgiven’ are repeated many times. If you were simply to read the Old Testament accounts without considering the New Testament teachings, you would certainly come to the conclusion that true spiritual atonement and divine forgiveness were acquired by that priestly work.”⁶¹ Lehrer continues, “The problem still remains that God said that the animal sacrifices actually atoned for sin when they did not. . . . Consequently, God could say that the animal sacrifices actually atoned for sin when they did not because he wanted to teach us spiritual truth through this Old Covenant picture.”⁶² It certainly sounds as though Lehrer is suggesting that God said something that was not true. A system that depends on that kind of hermeneutic would seem to be inferior to a system that consistently interprets OT passages with historical-grammatical hermeneutics.

Such an inadequate hermeneutic of the OT impacts specifically New Covenant Theology’s understanding of the New Covenant. As noted above, new Covenant Theologians recognize that Jer 31:31 “is promised to the geo-political nation of Israel at some point in the future.”⁶³ As Lehrer comments, “The Israelites would have read Jeremiah 31 and thought that the New Covenant restoration was exclusively for them. But when God interprets His own word He tells us that this is

⁶¹Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 52.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 61.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 170.

simply not the case.”⁶⁴ A confusing hermeneutic such as this leads to a confusing biblical theology, and consequently to an inadequate systematic theology.

The consistent use of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic leads to an understanding that the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants made with Israel were declared to be everlasting and irrevocable. Moreover, the NT clearly teaches that a gracious and faithful God has not cast off Israel even though the nation was often disobedient and unbelieving. In regard to the covenant-keeping God, Scripture says, “What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar . . .” (Rom 3:3-4; cf. 11:25-29).

CONCLUSION

The interpretations of the New Covenant presented by Covenant Theology, NCT, and Dispensationalism can be summarized in chart form as follows:

| SYSTEM | Covenant Theology | New Covenant Theology | Dispensationalism |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| New Covenant new? | NO | YES | YES |
| Is Israel really Israel? | NO | NO | YES |
| Maintains OT integrity? | NO | NO | YES |
| Consistent historical-grammatical interpretation of the OT? | NO | NO | YES |

New Covenant Theologians have taken a large step in recognizing that the New Covenant is really a new covenant—that Christians live under the commandments of the law of Christ, as the NT states it (1 Cor 9:19-21). New Covenant Theologians’ spiritual maturity and honest desire to interpret the Scriptures accurately is obvious in their literature. However, replacement of Israel by the church in New Covenant passages is biblically unwarranted, and represents extreme continuity in the continuity/discontinuity debate. Hopefully, since NCT is still in development, the

⁶⁴Ibid., 175.

New Covenant Theologians will yet improve their system, first, by seriously reexamining their theological procedure of reading the OT through the grid of the NT, and second, by reevaluating their hermeneutics that lead them to abandon the historical-grammatical method of interpreting the OT.

NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY COMPARED WITH COVENANTALISM

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New Covenant Theology has arisen as an alternative to Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. It differs from Covenant Theology in denying the covenants of works, grace, and redemption, and in asserting the temporary nature of the Mosaic Law. It differs from Dispensationalism and agrees with Covenant Theology in endorsing a hermeneutical approach to the OT and the NT that abandons the historical-grammatical understanding of certain OT passages. In agreement with Covenant Theology, it also adopts supersessionist views regarding Israel and the church. The eight specific differences between New Covenant Theology (NCT) and Covenant Theology (CT) include NCT's denial of the Covenant of Redemption, its denial of the Covenant of Works, its denial of the Covenant of Grace, its affirmation of the unity of the Mosaic Law, its affirmation of the expiration of the Mosaic Law, its teaching that Christians are under only the Law of Christ, its rejection of infant baptism, and its affirmation that the church began at Pentecost. NCT agrees with CT hermeneutically in accepting the NT logical priority over the OT and a typological interpretation of the two testaments, in holding that the NT church is the only true people of God, and in exhibiting a vagueness about the nature of the future kingdom. NCT shows some improvement over CT, but still has its own shortcomings.

* * * * *

The purpose of the following discussion is to examine the relationship between New Covenant Theology (hereafter NCT) and Covenant Theology¹ (hereafter CT). Such an examination is justified for three reasons. First, New Covenant theologians have openly identified NCT as an alternative to the theological systems of Dispensationalism and CT. Thus, a comparison of NCT with either of

¹Covenant Theology is also called Federal Theology “because of its emphasis on solidarity in a representative head” (Michael Horton, *God of Promise* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006] 78.)

those two systems is a worthwhile endeavor. Second, at the time of this writing, New Covenant theologians have focused significant effort on showing how their system contrasts with CT. Though also interacting with Dispensationalism, they have devoted most of their attention so far to explaining and defending their system in contrast to CT. Third, some of the key theologians of NCT received their theological training within an environment of CT. Thus, NCT appears primarily to be a movement away from CT.

The following will contrast and compare NCT with CT, focusing on significant differences and similarities between the two theological systems. Since NCT and CT deal primarily with theological issues of continuity and discontinuity, the focus will be mostly on the areas of covenants, law, people of God, and hermeneutics. At times, evaluations of NCT and CT will be offered, although the following treatment is mostly about NCT.

In short, NCT differs from CT on eight key areas of theology. And in most cases where NCT differs with CT, NCT is closer to the biblical witness than CT. This applies especially to NCT's refusal to accept the three foundational covenants of CT and NCT's view on the temporary nature of the Mosaic Law. However, NCT also has serious deficiencies that it shares with CT. Particularly troublesome is NCT's hermeneutical approach to the Old and New Testaments that at times abandons the historical-grammatical context of certain OT passages. Also troubling is NCT's supersessionist views regarding Israel and the church.

Covenant Theology Defined

Establishing a basic understanding of CT as a basis for a comparison of NCT with CT is important. CT is a system of theology that views God's eternal plan of salvation through the outworking of three covenants—the Covenant of Works, Covenant of Grace, and Covenant of Redemption.²

Historically, CT was birthed out of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, particularly by those in the Reformed tradition.³ Some of the

²Some Covenant theologians see only two covenants—the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. O. Palmer Robertson, for example does not believe there is enough evidence to conclude that there was a pre-creation Covenant of Redemption between the Father and the Son (O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980] 54).

³“Covenant Theology itself is generally to be identified with the Reformed tradition” (Morton H. Smith, “The Church and Covenant Theology,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21/1 [March 1978]:47). Though Covenant Theology and Reformed Theology are not synonymous, apparently most Covenant theologians affirm Reformed Theology. Willem VanGemeren believes that with Gisbertus Voetius (1588-1676), “‘Covenant Theology’ becomes ‘the system’ or framework of Reformed Theology” (Willem VanGemeren, “Systems of Continuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg [Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1988] 45).

Reformers, Zwingli especially, began to emphasize the importance of “covenant” in the plan of God. In the early seventeenth century, the system of CT began to take shape. CT found a mature form in the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647, which is often viewed as a primary expression of CT.

Covenant of Works

According to CT, three covenants are the overarching framework for understanding God’s purposes in salvation and the explicit covenants mentioned in Scripture.⁴ The first is the Covenant of Works.⁵ According to the Westminster Confession: “The first covenant made with man was a Covenant of Works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.”⁶ Thus, the Covenant of Works was made with Adam before the Fall. According to M. E. Osterhaven, the Covenant of Works consisted of three things: “(1) a promise of eternal life upon the condition of perfect obedience throughout a probationary period; (2) the threat of death upon disobedience; and (3) the sacrament of the tree of life.”⁷

Covenant of Grace

According to CT, Adam, the federal head of the human race, failed the Covenant of Works. As a result, God then instituted another covenant—the Covenant of Grace. This allegedly is a covenant made between God and the elect after the Fall in which salvation is given to those who trust in Christ by faith. In regard to this Covenant of Grace, the Westminster Confession of Faith states,

Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein he freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.⁸

⁴Horton states, “A broad consensus emerged in this Reformed (federal) theology with respect to the existence in Scripture of three distinct covenants: the Covenant of Redemption (*pactum salutis*), the Covenant of Creation (*foederus naturae*), and the Covenant of Grace (*foederus gratiae*). The other covenants in Scripture (Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic) are all grouped under these broader arrangements” (Horton, *God of Promise* 78).

⁵The Covenant of Works has also been called a covenant of “creation,” “nature,” and “law” (Horton, *God of Promise* 83).

⁶“The Westminster Confession of Faith” (online at www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/, accessed 6/5/07).

⁷M. E. Osterhaven, “Covenant Theology,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 279.

⁸Chapter VII of “The Westminster Confession of Faith” (online at www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/, accessed 6/5/07).

For Covenant theologians, the Covenant of Grace is believed to be manifested in the other covenants of Scripture such as the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants.⁹ Accordingly, significant continuity exists between the covenants of Scripture since they are all outworkings of the Covenant of Grace.

Covenant of Redemption

Many Covenant theologians affirm a third covenant—the Covenant of Redemption, a covenant supposedly established in eternity past between the members of the Trinity. As defined by Louis Berkhof, “The covenant of redemption may be defined as *the agreement between the Father, giving the Son as Head and Redeemer of the elect, and the Son, voluntarily taking the place of those whom the Father had given Him.*”¹⁰ Commenting on this Covenant of Redemption, Osterhaven states, “[C]ovenant theology affirms that God the Father and God the Son covenanted together for the redemption of the human race.”¹¹ According to CT, the Father commissioned the Son to be the Savior, and the Son accepted the commission, agreeing to fulfill all righteousness by obeying the law of God.

Other important beliefs are associated with CT. Covenant theologians traditionally have affirmed Reformed Theology. Thus, they hold a high view of God and Scripture. Also, an important hermeneutical belief of CT is its view of NT priority over the OT, in which the NT has logical priority over the OT. This means that the NT becomes the interpreter and even reinterpreter of the OT. Covenant Theology often describes the OT-NT relationship as one of “type-antitype” and “shadow-reality” in which the new supersedes the old. A major implication of the type-antitype understanding of the testaments is that the nation Israel was a type that has given way to the superior antitype—the Christian church composed of both Jews and Gentiles. According to CT, the true Israel is now the church and the promises to Israel about a land and a temple find a spiritual fulfillment in the church.

Another key belief of CT is infant baptism. If Israel of the OT used circumcision on its children, then the new Israel—the church—should use baptism on its children as well.¹² Also, many Covenant theologians hold that the Mosaic Law, particularly the Ten Commandments, is still in force. Though the ceremonial and civil aspects of the Mosaic Law are no longer binding, the moral law as found in the

⁹See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941) 279.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 271 (emphases in the original).

¹¹Osterhaven, “Covenant Theology” 280.

¹²“The covenant theologian sees this sign of the covenant continued in the NT in baptism, which carries the same basic meaning as circumcision” (Smith, “The Church and Covenant Theology” 57).

Decalogue is still operative. Thus, the Mosaic Law has a continuing aspect today.¹³

Comparing NCT with CT

Several New Covenant theologians have a background in both Reformed Theology and CT. Thus, some of them are in full agreement with many aspects of Reformed Theology, such as a high view of Scripture, belief in God's sovereignty, and Calvinism. Therefore, comparisons cannot be comprehensive. Comparing NCT and CT in every area of doctrine would reflect points of agreement that are quite numerous. Rather than being exhaustive, the following will focus on issues such as hermeneutics, law, people of God, covenants, and salvation in the two testaments. Those topics are on which the most significant differences exist.

Differences Between NCT and CT

NCT breaks with CT on eight key issues:

(1) **NCT does not accept the Covenant of Redemption.** Unlike Covenant theologians, New Covenant theologians hold that the Bible does not teach a Covenant of Redemption, as Steve Lehrer states: "We do not believe that it is wise to refer to God's plan to save a people in eternity past as a 'covenant.'"¹⁴ Jon Zens writes,

But, further, why must the "covenant" concept be called into service to describe the "eternal purpose" of God in Christ? Why not be satisfied with the Biblical delineation? As far as I can tell, the Bible nowhere calls the pre-creation commitments in the Godhead—among themselves or to elect sinners—a "covenant."¹⁵

New Covenant theologians are not asserting that the persons of the Trinity did not have a plan for salvation before time.¹⁶ But they see no evidence of a specific

¹³VanGemeren states, "The ceremonial laws, civil laws, and the penal code have been abrogated, and the moral law has received further clarification in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ" (Willem A. VanGemeren, "The Law is the Perfection of Righteousness in Jesus Christ," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian: Five Views*, Greg L. Bahnsen, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Douglas J. Moo, Wayne G. Strickland, and Willem A. VanGemeren [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993] 37). Knox Chamblin takes issue with the idea that "the moral dimension of the Mosaic Law is safeguarded while the ceremonial and the civil dimensions are jettisoned. In some sense, the entirety of the law remains in force." For Chamblin, the whole law is "preserved," "transformed" and "reshaped" in the hands of Jesus and the apostles (Knox Chamblin, "The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ," in *Continuity and Discontinuity* 200).

¹⁴Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (n.p.: Steve Lehrer, 2006) 37.

¹⁵Jon Zens, "Is There a 'Covenant of Grace?'" (online at www.searchingtogether.org/articles/zens/covenant.htm, accessed 6/4/07).

¹⁶See Article 4, "God's Decree," The New Covenant Confession of Faith (online at www.ncbf.net/PDF/confession.pdf, accessed 6/4/07).

Covenant of Redemption.

(2) **NCT does not accept the Covenant of Works.** Departing from CT, New Covenant theologians reject the idea of a Covenant of Works. Lehrer writes,

NCT, however, disagrees with those who hold to a Covenant of Works with Adam.¹⁷

NCT does not believe that it is wise to refer to God's relationship with Adam as a "covenant." NCT holds that God gave Adam a command with a promise of punishment if broken. And because this situation is not called a covenant by the authors of Scripture, we must think twice about describing it by that name ourselves.¹⁸

(3) **NCT does not accept the Covenant of Grace.** Also, New Covenant theologians do not believe in a Covenant of Grace. Jon Zens states, "But, it must be asked, where is 'covenant of grace' revealed in the Bible?"¹⁹ Tom Wells declares,

Nevertheless, it now seems clear that a mistake has been made in speaking of this purpose as "the Covenant of Grace." We may agree in asserting the unity of God's purpose through the ages, but the selection of the word "covenant" to describe this unity has lent itself to important misunderstanding.²⁰

New Covenant theologians are not denying the importance of grace in salvation history, but they do not believe in a specific Covenant of Grace.

In offering an evaluation of points 1-3 above, this writer believes that NCT is correct in not accepting and affirming the three covenants of CT. New Covenant theologians have rightly pointed out that CT has confused matters with its talk of a Covenant of Redemption, a Covenant of Works, and a Covenant of Grace. Three reasons support this positive assessment of NCT on this matter.

First, NCT is correct that the three covenants of CT are not found or rooted in the Bible. They are the product of CT's system, but they do not arise from Scripture. For example, commenting on the concept of an alleged Covenant of Redemption, O. Palmer Robertson, a Covenant theologian himself, states, "To speak concretely of an intertrinitarian 'covenant' with terms and conditions between Father and Son mutually endorsed before the foundation of the world is to extend the bounds

¹⁷Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology*, 40.

¹⁸Ibid., 41. Also, Article 20, "The Law of God," in the New Covenant Confession of Faith states, "There is no record in Scripture of God making a Covenant of Works with Adam" (online at www.ncbf.net/PDF/confession.pdf, accessed 6/4/07).

¹⁹Zens, "Is There a 'Covenant of Grace?'" (online at www.searchingtogether.org/articles/zens/covenant.htm, accessed 6/4/07).

²⁰Tom Wells and Fred G. Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* (Frederick, Md.: New Covenant Media, 2002) 45.

of scriptural evidence beyond propriety.”²¹ The same is true for the Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace which find little support in Scripture.²²

John Reisinger, who may be considered the father of NCT, rightly states that the covenants of CT are the children of CT’s theological system and are not the products of exegesis. In addressing a group of Reformed ministers who adopted CT, he said,

We agree that the Bible is structured around *two* covenants. However, the two covenants that you keep talking about, namely, a covenant of works with Adam in the garden of Eden and a covenant of grace made with Adam immediately after the fall, have no textual basis in the Word of God. They are both theological covenants and not biblical covenants. They are the children of one’s theological system. Their mother is Covenant Theology and their father is logic applied to that system. Neither of these two covenants had their origin in Scripture texts and biblical exegesis. Both of them were invented by theology as the necessary consequences of a theological system.²³

Second, as New Covenant theologians have pointed out, the term “covenant” is strategic in the Bible.²⁴ *Berith* is explicitly used to describe the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, New, and other covenants. These are actual biblical covenants that have been cut in history. It is unwise to add three covenants that God does not designate as covenants. What makes matters particularly confusing is that CT is asking Christians to understand the actual biblical covenants of Scripture through the lens of the covenants of CT. For example, CT views the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and New Covenants as outworkings of the alleged Covenant of Grace. This approach, though—as NCT has shown—flattens out the meaning of the actual biblical covenants²⁵ and emphasizes a continuity that is not supported by Scripture.

²¹Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* 54.

²²Horton states that the concept of a Covenant of Works is even more “controversial” than the idea of a Covenant of Redemption within contemporary Reformed Theology (*God of Promise*, 83). He also points to “a growing tide of sentiment against the covenant of works” (*ibid.*, 86).

²³John Reisinger, *Abraham’s Four Seeds*. (Frederick, Md.; New Covenant Media, 1998) 129.

²⁴Jon Zens emphasizes the importance of using biblical terms in their biblical meaning: “If, as Dr. Gordon Clark suggests, ‘a Christian theologian should use Biblical terms in their Biblical meaning,’ is it valid to take the covenant concept and employ it as a theological catch-all without careful regard for how the word ‘covenant’ is employed in Scripture?” (Jon Zens, “A Study of the Presuppositions of Covenant and Dispensational Theology” [online at www.gospelpedlar.com/articles/Bible/prediscov.html], accessed 6/4/07).

²⁵“It is my contention that viewing the covenant of works/covenant of grace as the primary covenants in Scripture has had the effect of *dehistoricizing* the covenants revealed in the Bible as ‘cut.’ This occurs because the covenant of grace is a post-fall, yet *a-historical* covenant, which is said to be variously administrated in the *historical* covenants. . . . In this system, then, it is impossible to do justice to the ‘covenants of promise’ (Eph. 2:12; Rom. 9:4) which were ‘cut’ *in history*, because they are all flattened out, being contemplated as ‘various administrations of the one covenant of grace’” (Jon Zens,

For example, Scripture teaches significant discontinuities between the Mosaic and the New Covenants. The Mosaic Covenant was a conditional temporary covenant based on Israel's faithfulness to God (see Jer 31:31-32).²⁶ The NT indicates that the Mosaic Covenant came to an end with the death of Christ (see Eph 2:15 and Col 2:14). The New Covenant, which replaces the now "obsolete" Mosaic Covenant (see Heb 8:13), is an unconditional, eternal covenant of God. It is specifically "not like the covenant which I made with their fathers" (Heb 8:9). Yet, CT wants to emphasize too much continuity between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant claiming that both are the outworkings of an alleged Covenant of Grace.²⁷

Third, New Covenant theologians have rightly pointed out that an understanding of biblical covenants should be based on the actual covenants of the Bible.²⁸ Their interpretation of these covenants is in error at times, but at least NCT starts with the actual covenants of the Bible and not alleged covenants that are not referred to as covenants in Scripture.

In sum, NCT is correct in not accepting the covenants of CT. Ockham's Razor may apply to this issue, which is, "Don't multiply hypotheses needlessly." In this case CT has cluttered God's plan with covenants that can only be found in the white spaces of scripture.

(4) NCT views the Mosaic Law as a unit that cannot be divided. The issue of a Christian's relation to the Mosaic Law's is a major point of disagreement between CT and NCT. Steve Lehrer states, "Law has been the hill upon which many swords have been drawn between NCT and Covenant Theology."²⁹

Covenant theologians often make a functional distinction between the moral, civil, and ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law. Though many Covenant theologians do not view the ceremonial and civil elements of the Mosaic Law as binding on the present-day believer, some of them believe that the Decalogue or moral regulations of the Mosaic Law are currently binding.

NCT, though, views the Mosaic Law as a unit that cannot be divided. Thus, NCT rejects a functional distinction between moral, civil, and ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law. As Lehrer puts it,

"A Study of the Presuppositions of Covenant and Dispensational Theology" [online at www.gospelpedlar.com/articles/Bible/prediscov.html, accessed 6/4/07]]. See also Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 38.

²⁶Jeremiah 31:31-32 indicates the need for a New Covenant since the people of Israel broke the Mosaic Covenant.

²⁷In addition, Galatians 3 contrasts the Abrahamic Covenant with Mosaic Covenant.

²⁸See Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 37, 41.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 24.

Covenant Theologians divide the Mosaic Law into moral, civil, and ceremonial laws and consider the moral laws binding but the civil and ceremonial laws as having been fulfilled in Christ and no longer binding on believers today. But I don't believe this understanding is supported by Scripture. . . . It seems to me that dividing the Mosaic Law into different kinds of laws to arrive at an answer concerning which laws believers must obey today is misguided.³⁰

On this matter, NCT is more correct than CT. Although the Mosaic Law can be analyzed by looking at its ceremonial, civil, and moral elements, the Mosaic Law is a unit that cannot be divided. The Bible does not warrant believing that some parts of the Mosaic Law are for today while others are not. The NT emphasizes the unity of the law as James and Paul have written:

James 2:10: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all."

Galatians 5:3: "And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law."

D. A. Carson has argued that Scripture does not support the tri-fold distinction in law, which is often stressed in CT: "Although this tripartite distinction is old, its use as a basis for explaining the relationship between the testaments is not demonstrably derived from the NT and probably does not antedate Aquinas."³¹

(5) NCT affirms that the Mosaic Law as a unit has been fulfilled and is no longer operative for Christians today. NCT emphasizes that the Mosaic Law in its entirety has been fulfilled and is no longer binding. That includes the Sabbath command. Steve Lehrer states, "The Old Covenant has passed away and none of the commands of the Mosaic Law are binding on believers today, including the command to keep the Sabbath holy."³² Geoff Volker writes,

I understand that the Mosaic Law is tied to the Old Covenant and that the Old Covenant came to an end at the cross (Luke 23:45, Hebrews 8:7-13, Galatians 4:21-31). Therefore, since the Old Covenant has come to an end the law of that covenant, the Mosaic Law, has

³⁰Ibid., 185 n. 46. "Covenant Theologians typically divide the Mosaic Law into moral, civil, and ceremonial categories. Then they say that Christ has fulfilled the civil and ceremonial elements of the Mosaic Law but not the moral laws. I don't believe that there is a biblical basis for dividing the Mosaic Law into different categories of laws" (ibid., 134 n. 39).

³¹D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 143.

³²Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 181.

also come to an end (Ephesians 2:14-16).³³

Important to this understanding is NCT's interpretation of Matthew 5:17-18. New Covenant theologians say Jesus brought the Mosaic Law to an end by eschatologically fulfilling it. For NCT, the Mosaic Law ended at the cross, as Lehrer states,

This covenant [Old or Mosaic Covenant] is brought to an end and is fulfilled at the cross.³⁴

The Mosaic Law has passed away with the coming of Christ and the New Covenant. God no longer requires people to follow the Mosaic Law.³⁵

On this point, NCT is more correct than CT. The era of the Mosaic Law has come to an end. The biblical witness affirms this on multiple occasions:

For you are not under law, but under grace (Rom 6:14).

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law (Gal 5:18).

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom 10:4).

For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also (Heb 7:12).

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear (Heb 8:13).

(6) NCT teaches that Christians today are under only the Law of Christ.

Unlike CT which stresses that Christians today are under the Decalogue, NCT teaches that Christians are solely under the Law of Christ which consists of the commands and principles found in the NT.³⁶ Lehrer states, "NCT embraces the law of Christ, which is the law that is applicable to believers today. The law of Christ includes the commands given by Christ and His Apostles."³⁷ The New Covenant Confession of Faith declares, "The church is made up of both Jew and Gentiles and is not regulated by the Mosaic Law, but by the Law of Christ."³⁸

Again, NCT offers a significant advance over CT on this issue. In 1 Cor

³³Geoff Volker, "Foreword," in *New Covenant Theology* 14. "[T]he Mosaic era is 'done away' with the establishing of the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:11, 13)" (Zens, "Is There a 'Covenant of Grace?'").

³⁴Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 19.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 20.

³⁶This is not to say that Covenant theologians do not also believe that Christians are under the Law of Christ. For them, though, the Law of Christ is a reapplication of the Law of Moses.

³⁷Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 112.

³⁸Article 24, "The Church," The New Covenant Confession of Faith (online at www.ncbf.net/PDF/confession.pdf, accessed 6/4/07).

9:20-21 Paul explicitly states that he is not under the Mosaic Law, but instead is under the Law of Christ:

And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, *though not being myself under the Law*, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God *but under the law of Christ*, that I might win those who are without law. (emphasis added)

This view that the Christian is not under the Mosaic Law has led to the charge of lawlessness or antinomianism by some.³⁹ Many Dispensationalists, too, have faced this charge for their view that the NT Christian is not under the Mosaic Law but under the Law of Christ. Now New Covenant theologians are facing this accusation as well. The charge is baseless, however. It is not as though New Covenant theologians (and Dispensationalists) are saying that Christians are not bound to any law—they are. But there is a new law for the New Covenant era—the Law of Christ, which consists of the commands, principles, and precepts of the NT. Thus, it cannot rightfully be claimed that New Covenant theologians are antinomians.

(7) **NCT rejects infant baptism.** Another point of difference between CT and NCT relates to NCT's rejection of infant baptism. CT sees so much continuity between the OT and the NT that infant baptism is viewed as the parallel to circumcision. NCT disagrees with this. As Lehrer notes: "Infant baptism . . . and New Covenant Theology are incompatible because they are based on fundamentally different views of how the Old Covenant relates to the New Covenant."⁴⁰ John Reisinger states,

[I]f Covenant Theology can exegetically establish its view of Abraham and his seed from the Scriptures, then . . . the Baptist view of baptism is proven to be a denial of the major covenant promise given to Christian parents. Baptists are literally guilty of heresy if Covenant Theology is correct.⁴¹

This is another area in which NCT is an advance on traditional CT. The Bible does not support the concept of infant baptism. No evidences for infant baptism appear in the NT, nor do any instructions that indicate that baptism of infants is warranted.

³⁹R. Scott Clark states that "NCT tends toward antinomianism" ("Theses on Covenant Theology" [online at www.wscal.edu/clark/covtheses.php, accessed 6/4/07]).

⁴⁰Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 211. See also 212 and 214.

⁴¹Reisinger, *Abraham's Four Seeds* 5.

(8) NCT affirms that the church began at Pentecost and that Israel was not the church in the Old Testament. CT holds that the church began in the OT and that Israel was the church of the OT.⁴² NCT rejects both these points, claiming that the church began at Pentecost and that Israel was not the church in the OT:

While there has always been a people of God, the church in the New Covenant era has a unique historical beginning at Pentecost.⁴³

Covenant Theology looks at Israel as the church in the Old Testament. This system of theology sees continuity between Israel and the church in that they are both part of the one people of God. . . . Covenant Theology views the people of God in the Old Testament being widened in the New Covenant era to include Gentiles as well. It also sees the future for Israel that is predicted in the Old Testament as being fulfilled in the church today. Then there is the view of NCT. . . . Israel was not the church in the Old Testament. . . .⁴⁴

NCT does not view Old Covenant Israel as the church. We make a distinction between Old Covenant Israel and the church.⁴⁵

This view of NCT has strong biblical support. Israel was not the church of the OT. Jesus presented the church as future during his earthly ministry. In Matthew 16:18 He declared: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church."

On the eight points of difference mentioned above, NCT offers a significant advance over CT. NCT is correct that the three foundational covenants of CT do not find support in Scripture. Plus, NCT offers a view of the temporary nature of the Mosaic Law that is more biblical than what CT proposes. NCT is also correct in its rejection of infant baptism and its belief that the church began with the Pentecost event described in Acts 2.

Similarities Between NCT and CT

Significant points of similarity between CT and NCT need to be highlighted at this point. The points of agreement are in areas of hermeneutics, people of God, and kingdom.

⁴²According to Smith, "Thus it is to the Abrahamic covenant that we look to see the beginnings of the Church as a formal organization" (Smith, "The Church and Covenant Theology" 55).

⁴³Article 24, "The Church," *The New Covenant Confession of Faith* (online at www.ncbf.net/PDF/confession.pdf, accessed 6/4/07).

⁴⁴Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 66. See also *ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 147.

(1) **Hermeneutics.** In regard to the hermeneutical relationship between the two testaments, NCT and CT share two common assumptions: the NT has a logical priority over the OT, and typological interpretation is a proper hermeneutical approach for interpreting the testaments.

Logical priority of the NT over the OT

CT and NCT share the view that the OT must be understood primarily through the lens of the NT. That approach goes beyond the idea of progressive revelation to holding that the NT actually jettisons the original historical-grammatical sense of certain OT passages. Thus, according to NCT and CT, at times the NT overrides or supersedes the original authorial intent of the OT authors. This is particularly true of OT passages that teach the restoration of the nation Israel. Such is the view of Covenant theologian, Anthony Hoekema: “I agree . . . that the Old Testament must be interpreted in light of the New Testament and that a totally and exclusively literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy is not justified.”⁴⁶ This is also the view of Louis Berkhof, another Covenant theologian:

It is very doubtful, however, whether Scripture warrants the expectation that Israel will finally be re-established as a nation, and will as a nation turn to the Lord. Some Old Testament prophecies seem to predict this, but these should be read in light of the New Testament.⁴⁷

The view of NT priority is also the perspective of New Covenant theologians. Wells and Zaspel assert,

[I]t has seemed to some of us that if the New Testament is the apex of God’s revelation, then we ought to read the earlier parts of Scripture in its light.⁴⁸

The critical point here is this: NT revelation, due to its finality, must be allowed to speak first on every issue that it addresses.⁴⁹

[T]he NT holds logical priority over the rest in determining theological questions upon which it speaks.⁵⁰

⁴⁶Anthony A. Hoekema, “Amillennialism,” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1977) 55.

⁴⁷Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* 699.

⁴⁸Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* 1.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 8.

The view of testament priority in which the NT becomes the starting point for understanding OT texts is problematic. Though acknowledging the varied applications that the NT writers make in using the OT, one is not justified in jettisoning the authorial intent of the OT writers. The approach of NCT and CT, at times, casts doubt on the integrity of some OT texts. It also casts doubt on the perspicuity of the OT. If the NT reinterprets the OT or seriously modifies its promises and covenants, in what sense were the original OT revelations actually revelations to the original readers?⁵¹ What about the original authorial intent of the OT writers? David L. Turner rightly states, "If NT reinterpretation reverses, cancels, or seriously modifies OT promises to Israel, one wonders how to define the word 'progressive.' God's faithfulness to His promises to Israel must also be explained."⁵² Turner also points out that this approach comes close to violating NT statements that uphold the truth claims of the OT: "It appears exceedingly doubtful that the NT reinterprets the OT. . . . This comes perilously close to conflicting with such NT passages as Matt 5:18 and John 10:35b."⁵³

Walter C. Kaiser is correct when he points out that Christians "misjudge the revelation of God if we have a theory of interpretation which says the most recent revelation of God is to be preferred or substituted for that which came earlier."⁵⁴ In fact, this belief that the NT must be the guide for interpreting the OT comes dangerously close to the view of a canon within the canon. Kaiser states,

But why would a rule be imposed on the revelation of God that demands that the Old Testament passages may not become the basis for giving primary direction on any doctrines or truths that have relevancy for New Testament times? This is only to argue in the end for a canon within a canon.⁵⁵

Typological interpretation as a proper approach for interpreting the testaments

Both CT and NCT adopt what is sometimes called "typological interpretation." Typological interpretation is a hermeneutical approach that views the

⁵¹In response to George Ladd's declaration that the New Testament reinterprets the Old Testament, Paul Feinberg asks relevant questions: "If Ladd is correct that the NT reinterprets the OT, his hermeneutic does raise some serious questions. How can the integrity of the OT text be maintained? In what sense can the OT really be called a *revelation* in its original meaning?" (Paul Feinberg, "Hermeneutics of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity* 116 [emphasis in the original]).

⁵²David L. Turner, "The Continuity of Scripture and Eschatology: Key Hermeneutical Issues," *Grace Theological Journal* 6/2 (1985):281.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 282.

⁵⁴Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Land of Israel and the Future Return (Zechariah 10:6-12)," in *Israel, the Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God's Promises*, ed. H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998) 222.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 219.

connection between the OT and NT on the basis of type/antitype relationships found in the two testaments. This perspective has led both CT and NCT to emphasize (and, from a dispensational viewpoint, overemphasize) the typological connection between Israel and the church. For both CT and NCT, Israel of the OT is the inferior type that gives way to the fuller reality or antitype—the church. Likewise, all the promises of land and physical blessings to national Israel typologically point to the greater spiritual blessings of the church.

Mark W. Karlberg, a Covenant theologian, argues against a future restoration of the nation Israel based on typological interpretation:

If one grants that national Israel in OT revelation was truly a type of the eternal kingdom of Christ, then it seems that, according to the canons of Biblical typology, national Israel can no longer retain any independent status whatever.⁵⁶

According to Karlberg, Israel's special place in the plan of God has been transferred to the Christian church, which is now "the true people of God with the privileges, the responsibilities, and the destiny of Israel."⁵⁷ This belief that national Israel is a type of the church means that OT prophecies and promises given to Israel find their typological fulfillment in the church. This rules out a literal fulfillment of those promises with the nation Israel.⁵⁸

This use of typological interpretation is also the view of NCT. Lehrer states,

Then there is the view of NCT, which understands Israel to be an unbelieving type or picture of the true people of God, the church. According to NCT, Israel never was a believing people as a whole. Israel always had a tiny remnant of true believers in her midst. Israel was not the church in the Old Testament, but they did function as a type or picture of the church—the true people of God.⁵⁹

Israel in the Old Covenant era was a temporary, unbelieving picture of the true people of

⁵⁶Mark W. Karlberg, "The Significance of Israel in Biblical Typology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31/3 (1988):259.

⁵⁷Ibid., 263.

⁵⁸Summarizing this view of supersessionists, Glenny states, "Since the Church has replaced Israel in God's program, specific and direct prophecies made to Israel are only fulfilled typologically in the Church—that is, there will be no application of even direct OT prophecies to ethnic, national Israel in the future. . . . Such a fulfillment to Israel would require a move backward in God's program of salvation history and is not necessary since some OT prophecies for Israel are applied to the Church in the NT" (W. Edward Glenny, "Typology: A Summary of the Present Evangelical Discussion," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40/4 [1997]:631-32). Glenny himself is not a supersessionist. Karlberg claims his view is consistent with historic Reformed theology, which views national Israel as having served "a symbolic and typological purpose in redemptive history" ("Legitimate Discontinuities Between the Testaments," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28/1 [1985]:16).

⁵⁹Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology* 66. See also *ibid.*, 79.

God, the church.⁶⁰

The use of typological hermeneutics by Covenant theologians and New Covenant theologians is problematic. Certainly, progressive revelation exists. And yes, the NT is a more complete revelation than the OT, plus, antitypes that fulfill OT types occur in the NT. In addition, applications of OT passages occur in the NT that go beyond the single intended meaning of the OT authors. Those issues must be taken into account. However, it is highly doubtful that the NT teaches that OT promises will not be fulfilled in agreement with the original intent of OT authors. Though NT authors may offer added applications and significance to OT passages, they do not do so at the expense of the original intent of the texts.

Two questions raise doubts about Israel being a type that has been superseded by the church. First, how can Israel be a type that is transcended by a greater antitype (the church) when the NT itself explicitly reaffirms the OT expectation of a restoration of Israel? Jesus discussed a restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel in Matt 19:28 and Luke 22:30 when He told His apostles that in the regeneration of the earth they would be ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel. Also, after forty days of kingdom instruction from the risen Jesus, the apostles still expected a restoration of the nation Israel (see Acts 1:6). This idea was not corrected by Jesus.⁶¹ Also, Paul reaffirmed that “all Israel shall be saved” (Rom 11:26) and proved this point by quoting New Covenant texts in the OT (see Rom 11:27). In reference to Paul’s use of Isa 59:20, 21 and Jer 31:34 in Rom 11:27, John Murray states, “There should be no question but Paul regards these Old Testament passages as applicable to the restoration of Israel.”⁶² The fact that Paul speaks of a future for the nation Israel after the beginning of the church shows that the church cannot be equated with Israel. If the nation Israel was a type that has been superseded, why does the NT still predict the salvation and restoration of Israel?

Second, CT and NCT have not adequately shown how God can make unconditional and eternal promises to a specific people—Israel—and then not fulfill His promises to this people? CT and NCT have no adequate answer to that question. God specifically promised the perpetuity of the nation Israel (Jer 31:35–37). How then can God not fulfill His promises to this people? Claims that “Israel” has now been redefined and that the church is the new Israel are not satisfactory. Jeremiah promises the perpetuity of Israel as a nation.

Upon review, it appears that CT’s and NCT’s understanding of testament

⁶⁰Ibid., 20.

⁶¹Acts 1:6 is significant because it offers a snapshot of what the apostles believed about the restoration of Israel at this crucial point in salvation history. Claims that they had a wrong or incomplete view of Israel’s restoration in Acts 1 are not convincing.

⁶²John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 99. Murray is referring to ethnic Israel.

priority is related to what R. Kendall Soulen calls “structural supersessionism.” Structural supersessionism occurs when a hermeneutic is adopted that boxes out the ability of the Jewish Scriptures to inform on the issues that they address. With the hermeneutics of CT and NCT, the OT is muted.⁶³ Since the NT is viewed as the starting point and the lens through which the OT is understood, texts like Jer 31:35-37, which explicitly declare the perpetuity of national Israel’s place in God’s plan, are not given the attention they deserve.⁶⁴

(2) **People of God.** As the discussion on hermeneutics reflects, both CT and NCT view the NT church as the only true people of God. Both affirm that the nation Israel will never again experience a unique identity, role, or mission in the plan of God. NCT does differ from CT in believing that the nation Israel was not the church of the OT. Instead, NCT affirms that Israel was just an unbelieving picture of the people of God.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, both NCT and CT assert that the church alone is now the true people of God and that the nation Israel will never again possess a unique identity or mission as the people of God.⁶⁶

Thus, both CT and NCT promote supersessionism.⁶⁷ Supersessionism is the view that the NT church supersedes, fulfills, or replaces the nation Israel as the people of God. In particular, both CT and NCT promote a form of supersessionism called “economic supersessionism.” According to Soulen, economic supersessionism is the view that “carnal Israel’s history is providentially ordered from the outset to be taken up into the spiritual church.”⁶⁸ With this form of supersessionism, national Israel corresponds to Christ’s church in a merely prefigurative and carnal way. Thus, Christ, with His advent, “brings about the obsolescence of carnal Israel and inaugurates the age of the spiritual church.”⁶⁹ With economic supersessionism, Israel

⁶³See R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 31.

⁶⁴See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Evidence From Jeremiah,” in *A Case For Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, eds. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody, 1992) 113.

⁶⁵Geoff Volker states, “We who hold to New Covenant Theology understand the Bible to teach that Israel should be viewed as the picture of the promises to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant” (“A New Covenant Theology of Israel,” 1 [online at www.ids.org/pdf/nct/israel.pdf, accessed 5/18/07]). He also says, “Israel is an “unbelieving picture of the people of God” (ibid., 2).

⁶⁶Volker also writes, “The Israelites in the New Covenant era have been removed as the people of God . . .” (ibid., 3).

⁶⁷Lehrer shies away from the term “replacement theology” since he does not see the church replacing the nation Israel. He says, “Instead I would rather use the term ‘fulfillment theology.’ Israel was simply a picture of the true people of God, which the church fulfills” (*New Covenant Theology* 203).

⁶⁸Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* 181 n. 6. Soulen himself rejects all forms of supersessionism.

⁶⁹Ibid., 29.

is not replaced primarily because of her disobedience, but rather because her role in the history of redemption expired with the coming of Jesus. It is now superseded by the arrival of a new spiritual Israel—the Christian church. This form of supersessionism appears similar to what CT and NCT are affirming.

In sum, CT's and NCT's rejection of national Israel's restoration goes against the biblical witness of both the OT and the NT. Texts such as Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30; Acts 1:6; and Romans 11:25ff. reaffirm the OT expectation of a salvation and restoration of the nation Israel. Further, CT and NCT do not adequately account for OT texts that explicitly promise the perpetuity of Israel as a nation (Jer 31:35–37).⁷⁰

(3) **Kingdom.** The issue of the kingdom is one in which New Covenant theologians and Covenant theologians appear to be similar. Neither side claims that its system necessarily leads to any particular millennial view. It appears that, within both CT and NCT, one could be an amillennialist, postmillennialist, or historic premillennialist. Yet neither CT nor NCT is compatible with dispensational premillennialism and its view that the nation Israel will have a distinct identity and mission in the plan of God that is culminated in a literal millennium. Thus, both NCT and CT appear to offer some latitude on the issue of the millennium.

Conclusion

NCT has significant areas of disagreement and agreement with CT. NCT differs with CT in that it rejects the covenants of redemption, works, and grace. NCT also views the Mosaic Law as a temporary law that has been fulfilled and superseded by the Law of Christ. NCT also rejects infant baptism and the belief that Israel in the OT was the church. On these areas of disagreement between NCT and CT, it appears that NCT is closer to the biblical witness than is CT.

As for points of agreement, NCT largely shares the same hermeneutic as CT in regard to the testaments. Both hold to logical priority of the NT over the OT and both accept a view of typological interpretation which leads to the view that the nation Israel has been superseded by a greater antitype—the church. Thus, both groups deny a restoration of the nation Israel.

New Covenant theologians are to be commended for their departure from CT on several key areas of doctrine where CT is found wanting. Yet the picture is not

⁷⁰Verses 35–36 of this passage read: “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.’” In this poem made up of two sayings (vv. 35–36 and 37), the Lord declares, what Ernest W. Nicholson has called, “the impossibility of Israel being forsaken forever by God” (Ernest W. Nicholson, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah: Chapters 26–52* [Great Britain: Cambridge University, 1975] 72).

as bright as it could be. NCT's hermeneutic in regard to the testaments and its denial of a future for Israel remain problematic. The OT and NT present a much brighter future for the nation Israel than do either CT or NCT.

NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY AND FUTURISTIC PREMILLENNIALISM

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New Covenant Theology (NCT) advocates have correctly abandoned the non-biblical covenants of Covenant Theology (CT). However, with few exceptions, they have inconsistently maintained CT's eschatologies, which usually reject a future premillennial kingdom on earth, ruled over by Christ for 1,000 years in fulfillment of OT unconditional promises made to Abraham and David. After surveying the current theological landscape among prominent NCT writers, seven compelling reasons for embracing Futuristic Premillennialism (FP) are discussed: (1) Hermeneutics Is a Presupposition, Not a Theology, (2) Careful Exegesis Is Required, Not a Presupposed Theology, (3) Unconfused and Separate Identities for Israel and the Church, (4) Preservation of the Jewish Race and Israel, (5) Unconditional Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants, (6) Proper Order of Christ's Return and Christ's Reign, and (7) Promises of an Irreversible Restoration for the Nation. Because of these seven determinative, biblical facts, the only eschatology which would be consistent with NCT's denial of the non-existent covenants espoused by CT would be FP.

This essay builds upon the four previous articles in this issue of *TMSJ*, dealing with *New Covenant Theology (NCT): A Critique*. If you have not yet read Dr. Barrick on how NCT relates to OT covenants and Dr. Vlach on how NCT relates to Covenant Theology (CT), please do so before proceeding here.

NCT is to be commended for having recognized the absolute lack of biblical evidence for the three covenantal mainstays of CT, i.e., Covenant of Grace, Covenant of Redemption, and Covenant of Works. NCT has advanced the theological discussion by limiting their studies to covenants that are clearly and repeatedly taught in Scripture, e.g., the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants.

We interact here with NCT in that they limit God's promises for Israel in the

future and miss the futuristic aspects of the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants. In this, they unnecessarily and erroneously rejoin their CT brothers in proposing that the NT church has replaced OT Israel and thus inherited God's land, ruler, and kingdom promises from the supposedly disobedient and disinherited Jews. As a result, the eschatological options for NCT are essentially no different from those of CT.

Bed-Rock Hermeneutics

Why would NCT rejoin CT at the point of eschatology? Dr. Barrick's assertion that their presupposed eschatology drives their hermeneutic rather than the other way around needs to be reasserted. By putting the theological cart before the hermeneutical horse, NCT slips back into the CT error that they avoided in their soteriology where the hermeneutical horse is rightly ahead of the theological cart. Most NCT adherents have not completely abandoned CT as they rightfully should.

A somewhat surprising explanation of hermeneutics made by a well-known theologian illustrates this point.

What is covenant theology? The straightforward, if provocative answer to that question is that it is what is nowadays called a hermeneutic—that is, a way of reading the whole Bible that is itself part of the overall interpretation of the Bible that it undergirds. A successful hermeneutic is a consistent interpretative procedure yielding a consistent understanding of Scripture that in turn confirms the propriety of the procedure itself. Covenant theology is a case in point. It is a hermeneutic that forces itself upon every thoughtful Bible-reader who gets to the place, *first*, of reading, hearing, and digesting Holy Scripture as didactic instruction given through human agents by God himself, in person; *second*, of recognizing that what the God who speaks the Scriptures tells us about in their pages is his own sustained sovereign action in creation, providence, and grace; *third*, of discerning that in our salvation by grace God stands revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, executing in tripersonal unity of single cooperative enterprise of raising sinners from the gutter of spiritual destitution to share Christ's glory for ever; and *fourth*, of seeing that God-centered thought and life, spring responsively from a God-wrought change of heart that expresses itself spontaneously in grateful praise, is the essence of true knowledge of God. Once Christians have got this far, the covenant theology of the Scriptures is something that they can hardly miss.¹

According to the highly respected Dr. Packer, "Covenant Theology ... is a hermeneutic...." Amazing! If one's hermeneutic is one's theology, then one's theology determines one's hermeneutic; that is what logicians call "circular reasoning"—a catastrophic logical fallacy. Traditionally, one's hermeneutic has applied to the entirety of the OT and NT, text by text, which then resulted in one's

¹J. I. Packer, "Introduction: On Covenant Theology," in Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, vol. 1 (1677; reprint, Escondido, Calif.: The den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990) 12-13.

theology, not the reverse as stated by Packer.

NCT advocate Donald Hochner similarly writes, “There are three main systems of interpreting Scripture.... [T]he author of this comparative analysis wishes to state his preference for New Covenant Theology, as being a more balanced system for interpreting Scripture....”² Gary D. Long likewise notes, “If the *non-premillennialism* aspect of prophecy is on the right track then it must be part of a better hermeneutic. I believe New Covenant theology presents a better biblical hermeneutic.”³

If a consistent hermeneutic that leads to one’s theology is the proper way to approach Scripture, then some of Futuristic Premillennialism’s (FP’s) staunchest critics recognize the consistent nature of and outcome when the historical-grammatical approach is taken to interpret all Scripture, including prophetic portions. For example,

O.T. Allis—“...the Old Testament prophecies if literally interpreted cannot be regarded as having been yet fulfilled or as being capable of fulfillment in this present age.”⁴

Floyd E. Hamilton—“Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures.”⁵

Loraine Boettner—“It is generally agreed that if the prophecies are taken literally, they do foretell a restoration of the nation of Israel in the land of Palestine with the Jews having a prominent place in that kingdom and ruling over the other nations.”⁶

However, each one asserts that consistency does not necessarily yield the eschatological truth of Scripture, because the fruit thereof does not agree with his hermeneutic of CT.

Perhaps the great writer Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894) summed it up best.

I cannot understand how you theologians and preachers can apply to the Church—or the

²Donald Hochner, “A Comparison of Three Systems: Dispensationalism, Covenant Theology, and New Covenant Theology” (online at www.angelfire.com/ca/DeafPreterist/compare.html, accessed 9/2/07).

³Gary D. Long, “New Covenant Non-Premillennialism—Part 2” (online at www.soundofgrace.com/v7/n.9/glp2.htm, accessed 9/2/07).

⁴O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (1945; reprint, Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977) 238.

⁵Floyd E. Hamilton, *The Basis of the Millennial Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942) 38.

⁶Loraine Boettner, “Postmillennialism,” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1977) 95.

multiplicity of churches—Scripture promises which, in their plain meaning, must apply to God's chosen people Israel, and to Palestine; and which, consequently, must still be future. You call yourselves the "Israel of God" or the "Spiritual Israel." As an example of this misinterpretation, he gave me Isaiah LXII. "But," said he, "that does not stand alone. The prophetic books are full of teachings which, if they are interpreted literally, would be inspiring, and a magnificent assurance of a great and glorious future; but which, as they are spiritualized, become farcical—as applied to the Church, they are a comedy."⁷

Representative NCT Eschatological Approaches

Steve Lehrer offers five key conclusions that lead him away from premillennialism.⁸

1. "NCT ... views the Old Testament through the lens of the New. That is our driving theological presupposition."⁹
2. "This means that if the New Covenant fulfillment of an Old Covenant promise changes the nature of the original promise, then we *have no biblical reason to expect the Old Covenant promise will be fulfilled as the promise stood in its Old Covenant context.*"¹⁰
3. "Then there is the view of NCT, which understands Israel to be an unbelieving type or picture of the true people of God, the church. According to NCT, Israel never was a believing people as a whole. Israel always had a tiny remnant of true believers in her midst. Israel was not the church in the Old Testament, but they did function as a type or picture of the church—the true people of God."¹¹
4. "I don't believe that Romans 11 teaches there is a promise for a national salvation for all of ethnic Israel."¹²
5. "In summary, NCT is not replacement theology if by that you mean that God has replaced the first true people of God with people of God number two. But NCT is replacement theology if by that you mean the focus of God's attention is no longer on a particular nation (Israel), but rather God's preoccupation with the nation has been "replaced" or fulfilled by God showering His love on the true people of God, which is made up of Jews and Gentiles."¹³

⁷As quoted from personal conversation by S. J. Whitmee, "'Tusitala,' R. L. S.—A New Phase," *The Atlantic Monthly* 131 (March 1923):348.

⁸Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (self-published, 2006).

⁹Ibid., 216.

¹⁰Ibid., 224.

¹¹Ibid., 66.

¹²Ibid., 104. In stark contrast, CT advocate John Murray concludes that if *Israel* means anything but ethnic, national Israel, it does exegetical violence to the text (*The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968] 97).

¹³Ibid., 205.

John Reisinger, in spite of his excellent critique of CT,¹⁴ shies away from premillennialism because

1. "Israel has no separate purpose or future independent of the Body of Christ."¹⁵
2. "The *physical* nation of Israel was cast off and the special national covenant relationship was totally ended when Christ came (Matt. 21:43).¹⁶

Tom Wells reasons from Romans 11. He concludes, "From the standpoint of eternity future, looking back, the church will prove to have been God's elect individuals from every era."¹⁷

While each of these men has approached the theme of eschatology differently, they have one common characteristic. Having rejected CT's unbiblical covenants in favor of the New Covenant, they then embrace CT's eschatological conclusions which had their origins and basis in the abandoned, non-biblical covenants. They have returned to the source of the error which supposedly they already recognized and from which they fled.

But is this return to CT eschatologies an essential, necessary plank in the NCT agenda?

NCT Is Compatible Only With FP

Fred Zaspel, who co-authored *New Covenant Theology* with Tom Wells, is unquestionably a futuristic premillennialist and finds FP in absolute harmony with NCT, especially in its rejection of the unbiblical covenants of CT. In personal correspondence (10/22/06), he writes, "NCT generally is more a movement than a settled position as of yet. This is particularly the case in terms of eschatology.... [M]ost of the *published* 'spokesmen' (self-appointed or otherwise) for NCT are amillennial. And of these, some are particularly outspoken in their disregard for premillennialism."

Zaspel, though a minority voice in NCT, eschatologically speaking, is a determined FP. He believes in a distinct future for ethnic Israel.¹⁸ He reasons thusly from Romans 11:

¹⁴John G. Reisinger, *Abraham's Four Seeds* (Frederick, Md.: New Covenant Media, 1998). See Appendix 3, "Covenant Theology's 'Two Administrations of One Covenant'" 129-39.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁷Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* (Frederick, Md.: New Covenant Media, 2002) 63.

¹⁸Fred G. Zaspel, *Jews, Gentiles, and the Goal of Redemptive History* (Hatfield, Pa.: IBRI, 1995) 24.

It should be noted further that the ground on which Paul bases his hope of the future conversion of “all Israel” is nothing other than Israel’s ancient covenants. In 11:29 Paul says this directly, and in 11:26–27 he cites by way of support and explanation a composite of passages from the Old Testament (Psa. 14:7; Gen. 17:4; Isa. 59:20–21; 27:9; Jer. 31:33ff). The language is reminiscent of more passages, particularly from the prophets, in which the Davidic, Abrahamic, and new covenants are held in view for the people. Significantly, these same passages speak to a time when Israel, in her own land, will again enjoy her prominence among the nations.¹⁹

Amusingly, one British CT adherent accuses both Zaspel and his amillennial co-author of being FPs. George M. Ella writes in a review of *New Covenant Theology*, “They offer us dyed-in-the-wool Dispensationalism of the most extreme kind under the guise of a New Speak which is almost amusing in its ingenuity....”²⁰ Actually, Ella proves to be the extremist by labeling amillennialist Wells as a dispensationalist and accusing Zaspel of being extreme when, in fact, he is quite moderate.

Just released, in late summer 2007, is the most significant NCT futuristic premillennial book, *Future Israel*, by Barry Horner.²¹ He contributes a formidable work that clearly marks out FP as the most compatible eschatology for NCT. In so doing, he dramatically demonstrates that non-FPs in NCT have not fully removed their roots from the soil of CT.

A Brief Case for Futuristic Premillennialism²²

NCTs who find a CT-based eschatology incompatible with their total break from CT in favor of NCT, will be encouraged by the seminal works of Zaspel and Horner. Also, they will take heart in the following discussion of seven primary reasons for FP.²³

¹⁹Ibid., 25.

²⁰George M. Ella, “New Covenant Theology: A Review,” *New Focus* 11/3 (Oct/Nov 2006) (online at www.go-newfocus.co.uk/pages.php?section=25&subsection=7&artID=177, accessed 9/3/07). Australian CT devotee Kevin Hartley understands Zaspel to be “a dispensationalist at heart” (See “New Covenant Theology and its Fundamental Presupposition” [online at www.pressiechurch.org/Theol_1/Defining%20NCT.htm, accessed 9/2/07]).

²¹Barry Horner, *Future Israel* (Nashville: B&H, 2007). He has been significantly influenced by the 19th-century Scottish Presbyterian and hymn writer of note (1808-1889), Horatius Bonar, *Prophetical Landmarks Containing Data for Helping to Determine the Question of Christ's Pre-Millennial Advent* (London: James Nisbet, 1847).

²²See David Larsen, *Jews, Gentiles, and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1995) for an excellent treatment of Futuristic Premillennialism.

²³These materials have been adapted from Richard Mayhue, *1, 2 Thessalonians* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1999) 203–11.

1. **Hermeneutics Is a Presupposition, Not a Theology**

Advocates of FP use a consistent grammatical-historical approach to both the Old and New Testament Scriptures, by which the Bible is interpreted normally throughout, regardless of whether it is non-eschatological or eschatological. Therefore, God's promises to Abraham and David are viewed in a futuristic sense as anticipating a restored nation of Israel. In this pattern, the rapture comes first (it can be pre-tribulational, mid-tribulational, or post-tribulational), followed by Christ's second coming at the end of the seven-year tribulation period, biblically spoken of as Daniel's seventieth week. After judging the earth and its inhabitants, Christ rules over the earth for one thousand years (the millennium) from His Davidic throne in Jerusalem. At the end of the millennium, Satan rebels for one final time but is instantly defeated. Then comes the resurrection and judgment of all unbelievers at the Great White Throne judgment, which is followed by the New Jerusalem and the eternal state.

FP does not require new special rules of interpretation when it comes to prophetic texts. The biblical text is taken at normal face-value, in its context, recognizing symbolic language and speech figures, plus the reality that they represent. It allows the interpreter to take the same general approach to the unvarnished history of Joshua, or the highly figurative images of Solomon's Song, or the prophetic books.

Normal interpretation produces the correct understanding of OT prophecies that have already been fulfilled in history. For example, Gen 17:6 predicts that from Abraham would come real kings, and they did. Daniel prophesied of coming Persian, Greek, and Roman nations, and they came to be.

Most convincing to this writer is the manner in which Christ's first advent prophecies are correctly interpreted, i.e., by consistently using the normal or grammatical-historical approach. Christ was born in the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10); He was born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2); He died by crucifixion (Ps 22) and rose from the grave (cf. Ps 2:7 with Acts 13:33; 16:10; Isa 55:3).

Therefore, unless some clear, uncontested mandate from Scripture changes how one interprets second-coming prophecies (and there is none), then prophetic Scripture should be interpreted consistently throughout the Bible. Only FP does so.

2. **Careful Exegesis Is Required, Not a Presupposed Theology**

Revelation 20:1-10 might well be considered the *summum bonum* of millennial studies, for in this text one encounters a unique historical period which is designated as "one thousand years" (vv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7). This serves as an example of careful exegesis.

Several preliminary inquiries logically precede determining a correct eschatological understanding of Revelation 20. First, the question needs to be asked whether this period of time is yet future or has it already been fulfilled?

Next, is this period actually one thousand years in length or does the term represent another length of time, e.g., 5,000 years? Finally, how has the 'one thousand' of Revelation 20:1-10 normally been interpreted in the past?

The Time of Fulfillment

Several peculiar events occur during this special segment of time. An angel binds Satan with a great chain (20:1-2). Satan is then incarcerated in the abyss which is shut and sealed (20:3). Thus, Satan no longer deceives the nations until the one thousand years transpire. The Tribulation martyrs are resurrected to reign with Christ (20:4, 6). When the one thousand years end, Satan is released for a short time to deceive the nations once again (20:3, 7-8).

Has this already been fulfilled? Most who hold to a form of Covenant Theology respond affirmatively and point to Christ's victory over Satan at the cross as the starting point. Such texts as Matt 12:22-29 are employed to bolster the position that Satan is *now* bound in fulfillment of Revelation 20.

Though Christ did win the victory at Calvary and Satan's doom was eternally settled, Satan has not been incapacitated in the manner demanded by this text. Satan still entices men to lie (Acts 5:3). He is blinding the minds of unbelievers to the gospel of the glory of Christ in God (2 Cor 4:4). Satan currently disguises himself as an angel of light to deceive the church (2 Cor 11:2-3, 13-15). The devil hinders ministers of God (1 Thess 2:18) and roams about the earth to devour its population (1 Pet 5:8). Revelation 20 could never refer to the present time in light of these abundant testimonies of Satan's present, frenetic pace (cf. 2 Cor 2:11; Eph 6:11-12). Therefore, the conclusion must be that Revelation 20 looks to some future time of special magnitude. Since it is yet ahead, the next question is, "How long will this time last?"

The Period of Time

The bottom line in this discussion asks, "Does *chilia etē* in Revelation 20 really mean a literal one-thousand years?" The discussion begins by looking at biblical numbers in general and then narrowing the focus to Revelation and "one thousand" in particular.

It is commonly understood as a basic rule of hermeneutics that numbers should be accepted at face value, i.e., conveying a mathematical quantity, unless substantial evidence warrants otherwise. This dictum for interpreting biblical numbers is generally accepted by all as the proper starting point.

This rule holds true throughout the Bible, including Revelation. A survey of numbers in the Apocalypse supports this. For instance, seven churches and seven angels in Revelation 1 refer to seven literal churches and their messengers. Twelve tribes and twelve apostles refer to actual, historical numbers (21:12, 14).

Seven lampstands (1:12), five months (9:5), two witnesses (11:3), twelve hundred and sixty days (11:3), twelve stars (12:1), ten horns (13:1), sixteen hundred stadia (14:20), three demons (16:13), and five fallen kings (17:9–10) all use numbers in their normal sense. Out of the scores of numbers in Revelation, only two (seven spirits in 1:4 and 666 in 13:18) are conclusively used in a symbolic fashion. Though this line of reasoning does not prove that “one thousand” in Revelation 20 should be taken normally, it does put the burden of proof on those who disagree with accepting “one thousand” as one thousand to prove otherwise.

Not only are numbers in general to be taken normally in Revelation but, more specifically, this is also true with numbers referring to time. In Revelation 4–20 at least twenty-five references to measurements of time occur. Only two of these demand to be understood in something other than a literal sense and, with these instances, numbers are not employed. The “day of His wrath” (6:17) would likely exceed twenty-four hours and ‘the hour of His judgment’ (14:7) seemingly extends beyond sixty minutes. Nothing, however, in the phrase “one thousand years” suggests a symbolic interpretation.

This next point is very important. Never in the Bible is “year” used with a numerical adjective when it does not refer to the actual period of time that it mathematically represents. Unless evidence to the contrary can be provided, Revelation 20 is not the one exception in the entire Scripture.

Also, the number “one thousand” is not used elsewhere in the Bible with a symbolic sense. Job 9:3; 33:23; Pss 50:10; 90:4; Eccl 6:6; 7:28; and 2 Pet 3:8 have been used in support of the idea that “one thousand” in this text is used symbolically. However, these attempts fail because in each of these texts “one thousand” is used in its normal sense to make a vivid point.

One thousand and its varied combinations are used frequently in both Testaments. No one questions the response to five thousand believers (Acts 4:4), twenty-three thousand men killed (1 Cor 10:8), or seven thousand killed (Rev 11:13). Likewise, no exegetical reason exists to question the normality of one-thousand years in Revelation 20.

The Testimony of History

From the earliest post-apostolic era, the church understood the “millennium” of Revelation 20 as a literal, one thousand years. Papias, Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian all evidenced this fact in their writings. The church taught nothing else until the fourth century.

When ancient theologians began to go beyond what the Bible taught about the millennium, when they began to make it a period of time that would be more for the enjoyment of men than for the glory of God, some reacted to correct this excess by interpreting this time as something less than an actual historical period.

Augustine (c.354-430) popularized the approach, which reasoned that the

church inherited the blessings promised to Israel and that they are spiritual, not earthly. He taught that Revelation 20 referred to this time.

However, even Augustine understood from Revelation 20 that this period lasted one thousand literal years. So Augustine, called by many the father of amillennialism, took the one thousand years normally. Even to this day some non-premillennialists interpret Revelation 20 to be actually one thousand years in length. To do differently does injustice to the text.

Conclusions

The one thousand years of Revelation 20 look to the future for fulfillment since an honest appraisal of the text and history determines that they have not yet occurred. Further, a survey of numbers in the Bible and Revelation pointedly demands that the “one thousand” years be understood in a normal sense. This position received further substantiation through a brief review of how the church has historically interpreted this text.

Although to prove Futuristic Premillennialism from Revelation 20 alone is beyond the scope of this discussion, certainly the next sequentially logical question would be, “Is there an unmistakable bridge that links the OT promises of a restored earthly kingdom to Israel with the distinctive statements of Revelation 20?” In closing, the suggestion is that there is—the rule and reign of the Lord Jesus Christ on the throne of David in the city of God. Consider 2 Sam 7:12-16; Ps 2:1-12; Isa 2:2-4; 9:7; Jer 33:14-18; Ezek 34:23-24; Dan 2:44-45; Hos 3:5; Joel 3:9-21; Zeph 3:14-20; and Zech 14:1-11 with Revelation 20:4, 6. Only FP takes this approach and arrives at this conclusion.

3. Unconfused and Separate Identities for Israel and the Church

The book of Acts speaks frequently of the “church” (nineteen times) and “Israel” (twenty times). However, ‘church’ refers to those believing at Pentecost and beyond; while “Israel” refers to the nation—historically and ethnically. The terms are never used synonymously or interchangeably. The church is never called “spiritual Israel” or “new Israel” in the NT; furthermore, Israel is never called “the church” in the OT.

Only three texts might even remotely be considered to equate Israel with the church. However, upon closer inspection, they yield the following proper interpretations.

1. Romans 9:6 distinguishes between physical birth and the new birth.
2. Romans 11:26 promises that all elect Jews will be saved.
3. Galatians 6:16 refers to the believing Jews in the Galatian congregations.

“Church” is mentioned at least eighteen times in Revelation 1–3. It is not

later confused with “Israel” in Revelation 6–19. Between Rev 4:1 and Rev 22:15, the church is not mentioned. The last occurrence of “church” refers back to the original recipients/readers in the late first-century church. Only FP accounts for this clear biblical distinction.

4. Preservation of the Jewish Race and Israel

The Jewish race is the most persecuted ethnic group in world history. The ten northern tribes of Israel have been extremely obscure since the Assyrian captivity in 722 B.C. The nation of Israel never regained any degree of its former sovereign rule after the Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C. until the nation was restored in A.D. 1948. Yet, today the Jewish race and the nation of Israel are a recognized people residing in the ancient land of their ancestors, who trace their roots back to Abraham in Genesis 12 (c.2165–1990 B.C.).

The OT promised that Israel would again be restored by God to international prominence in spite of their ancient exiles, Ezek 37:15–28 being the most prominent text. Both Jer 31:35–37 and 33:19–26 guarantee that this promise is as sure as the laws of nature. Many OT texts promise that once Israel is fully restored, she will never be overthrown or shamed again (Jer 31:40; Ezek 37:25; Joel 2:26–27; Amos 9:15; Zeph 3:20). Only with FP is this expected.

5. Unconditional Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants

Both the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants were intended to be unconditional in their ultimate effect. Nowhere does Scripture suggest that Israel forsook God’s blessings forever and that these blessings have now allegedly been made spiritual and inherited by the church. To say otherwise, in effect, is to make God a liar.

The Abrahamic Covenant is called an everlasting covenant in which God gave Abraham and his descendents the land of Israel as an everlasting possession (Gen 17:7–8). God’s promise to Abraham is corroborated in 1 Chron 16:15–17 and Ps 105:8–15. By this covenant, a people and a land are promised for Israel.

The Davidic Covenant of 2 Sam 7:8–16 is called an everlasting covenant in 2 Sam 23:5, 2 Chron 21:7, and Ps 89:3–4, 19–29, 36. By this covenant, a throne is promised for Israel. Only FP fully takes these features into consideration.

6. Proper Order of Christ’s Return and Christ’s Reign

In prophetic Scripture, Christ is portrayed as first returning to earth for His kingdom and then reigning over it. He returns in Daniel 2:34–35 and then reigns in Dan 2:44–45. He first returns in Zech 14:5 and then reigns in 14:9. Christ’s coming first appears in Matt 24:27, 30, 37, 42, 44, followed by His reign in Matt 25:31. In Rev 19:11, He returns to reign as described in Rev 20:4. Only FP holds to this repeated pattern. In the other unbiblical prophetic profiles, Christ reigns first before later coming to earth.

7. Promises of an Irreversible Restoration for the Nation²⁴

The OT has scores of passages that support this thesis. For the sake of brevity, listed below are ten of the most indisputable.

- Jeremiah 24:6—“I will plant them and not pluck them up.”
- Jeremiah 31:12—“They shall never languish again.”
- Jeremiah 31:40—“It shall not be plucked up, or overthrown any more forever.”
- Ezekiel 34:28–29—“They will no longer be prey to the nations” (v. 28).
“They will not endure the insults of the nations anymore” (v. 29).
- Ezekiel 37:25—“They shall live in the land ... forever.”
- Joel 2:26–27—“Then, My people will never be put to shame” (vv. 26, 27).
- Joel 3:18–21—“Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem for all generations” (v. 20).
- Amos 9:11–15—“They will not again be rooted out from their land” (v. 15).
- Zeph 3:14–20—“You will fear disaster no more” (v. 15).
- Zech 14:11—“There will be no more curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security.”

Only FP takes these promises seriously.

A Final Word

The purpose of this article has been twofold. First, to show the lamentable inconsistency that most NCT adherents display by rejecting the non-biblical covenants of CT, while at the same time embracing CT eschatologies. This illogical and unnecessary approach has been avoided by NCT spokesmen Fred Zaspel and Barry Horner. Each of these NCT advocates reject both CT non-biblical covenants and CT eschatologies in favor of a thoroughgoing, biblically based, grammatical-historical hermeneutic, which results in FP.

Second, a representative and suggestive case for FP has been offered. Though this is not intended to be an unabridged discussion, it certainly forms a primary foundation upon which particular details can be added to construct a convincing FP eschatology which is not in need of CT's unbiblical covenantal influence.

²⁴The extreme to which CT and/or NCT people go to deny a future for ethnic and national Israel is illustrated in “An Open Letter,” in which it is written, “[A] day should not be anticipated in which Christ’s kingdom will manifest Jewish distinctives, whether by its location in ‘the land,’ by its constituency, or by its ceremonial institutions and practices” (online at www.knoxseminary.org/prospective/faculty/wittenbergdoor, accessed 8/31/07) . Signatories include well-known men such as Richard Gaffin, Michael Horton, Joseph Pipa, Robert Reymond, O. Palmer Robertson, R. C. Sproul, and Bruce Waltke.

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Compiled by Dennis M. Swanson
Director of the Seminary Library

New Covenant Theology was the subject of the 2007 Faculty Lecture Series at The Master's Seminary. The following bibliography contains the fruit of the lecturers' collective research.

This bibliography cannot be exhaustive because there are more than 1.8 million Web pages with material on the movement and a number of different spins that define New Covenant Theology. The bibliography is offered to facilitate further research and study by readers of *TMSJ*. It is divided into four sections: (1) Reference Works, (2) Monographs and Multi-Author Works, (3) Journal and Periodical Literature, and (4) Unpublished and Online Resources.

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REVIEWS

Jeffrey D. Arthurs. *Preaching with Variety: How to Re-create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007. 238 pp. \$15.99 (paper).
Reviewed by Keith Essex, Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition.

“I believe that a sermon’s *content* should explain and apply the Word of God as it is found in a biblical text, and a sermon’s *form* should unleash the impact of that text. The second part of that declaration is the special province of this book” (13). So begins Jeffrey Arthurs, associate professor of preaching and communication at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in the sixth and latest volume of Kregel’s *Preaching With* series. One of the earlier books in this series is *Preaching with Passion* by Alex Montoya from TMS. In the present work, Arthurs describes six biblical genres and suggests how they can guide contemporary expositors in developing variety in their preaching.

The author creatively borrows from Martin Luther with an introduction that states 9.5 theses which clarify the presuppositions of this book (13-20). In essence, variety in preaching is important because Jesus and other biblical preachers used various forms, and both listeners and preachers could use some variety too. However, while variety is *necessary*, it is not *sufficient*; a sermon must herald God’s Word, flow from a clean heart, and have as its purpose the glory of God. When these characteristics are present, the preacher has the freedom to choose from a variety of sermon forms to communicate his message. Arthurs explains the most important thesis for his book: “The defining essence of an expository sermon lies primarily in its content, not in its form” (16). That principle is foundational for the author’s argument and his advice to preachers though the rest of the volume. He even suggests to preachers that “[w]e must patiently help people distinguish between biblical doctrine and communicative procedure” (17), a task made easier because “most North Americans in the twenty-first century have been socialized to expect variety and multiple perspectives” (17).

Nine chapters form the heart of the book. Chapters 1 and 2 defend Arthurs’ theory that variety in preaching is biblical and it can enhance receptivity. The first chapter declares that God is “the great communicator” who used a variety of literary forms in His special revelation, the Bible, because He is both an artist and a persuader.

This is the first and basic reason we should preach with variety (21-28).

The second chapter gives the other reason for variety in preaching: the need to adapt our sermons to the way contemporary hearers listen. The preacher needs to learn how to “speak Bantu to channel surfers” (29-37). The author concludes, “Why preach with variety? Not because we’re trying to exalt self, but because we want to exalt God; not because we call the shots, but because God sets the pattern as the Great Communicator; not because we want to manipulate listeners, but because they speak Bantu” (37).

Chapters 3 to 9 are devoted to a discussion of six biblical genres [psalms, narratives, parables, proverbs, epistles, and apocalyptic] (38-199). Each genre is allotted one chapter, except narrative, which has two. The author first describes the genre. He then suggests ways the genre can be preached. He concludes with a checklist to aid the preacher in both his exegesis and exposition of the genre under consideration. Arthurs does give this caveat: “I do not assert that we must slavishly and minutely copy the exact genre of the text. . . . The key to genre sensitive preaching is to replicate the impact of the text, not its exact techniques, although technique is the best place to start” (27-28). The author concludes with a one-page epilogue that summarizes the essence of the book (201). Endnotes (203-20) and a bibliography (221-38) complete the volume.

Preaching with Variety is a stimulating read for the biblical expositor. Its strength is in its descriptions of the biblical genres discussed and its suggestions of the various ways the preacher can enhance his variety. The different biblical genres remind expositors of the necessity of such elements as evocative language, the lean story, lead-in statements, summary statements, pithy statements, end stress, rhetorical questions. Arthurs cautions the preacher not to go too far or too fast in reduplicating the exact biblical genre in a sermon, although he gives only broad suggestions and not specific directions on how to accomplish this. However, he does make it clear that the goal is always to explain the content of the text to the listener, not to show the creative skill of the preacher.

William P. Brown. *Ecclesiastes*. Interpretation. Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 2000. xiii + 143 pp. \$21.95 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

William P. Brown is professor of Old Testament at Union Theological Seminary/PSCE in Virginia. As the subtitle for the series (A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching) indicates, the Interpretation commentaries seek to present a contemporary exposition integrating history and theology. Each commentary is based upon the RSV or (more recently) the NRSV.

The volume is a very readable exposition throughout, in which the author freely expresses his own thinking and feeling. In his preface he wonders whether any traditional commentary on Ecclesiastes could be considered a legitimate undertaking

in light of the book's mysteries, ambiguities, and contradictions (vii). Thus, Brown follows the model of a dialogical commentary exhibiting the simultaneous operation of "a hermeneutics of trust and a hermeneutics of suspicion" (viii).

At the outset, he compares Qoheleth with the Mesopotamian tale of Gilgamesh (1-7). He believes that the Gilgamesh epic was the source of the original Qoheleth's reflections. Rejecting Solomonic authorship, Brown places the book's composition in the fourth or even third century B.C. (8), even though he admits that Ecclesiastes itself claims to have been written by Solomon (10). Throughout the commentary, the reader is reminded that the commentator believes that a variety of editors were involved in the composition of Ecclesiastes (cf. vii, 116). Yet, Ecclesiastes is viewed as "an indispensable part of the canon" (33).

Brown correctly (and eloquently) highlights the various themes of Ecclesiastes. Some of those themes include the following: God-given enjoyment of life (37), reverence for God out of an awareness of our finitude (45), individual accountability for how one lives before God in the world (56), and the inevitable common experience of death (91). Illustrating his thoughts with writers like Gustave Flaubert (26), Mark Twain (69), and Barbara Kingsolver (102), Brown weaves them into the teachings of Ecclesiastes. Such citations provide material for the preacher in today's pulpit. Exegetical problems receive short shrift since detailed treatment of the Hebrew text is outside the intent of a dialogical commentary. However, that does not mean that Brown totally ignores tough problems. For example, he dedicates over a page and a half (in other words, approximately one percent of his entire commentary) to the *crux interpretum* in 5:9 (Hebrew, 5:8), providing some excellent insight to its solution.

The commentary concludes with its own epilogue exploring "Qoheleth's Place in Christian Faith and Life" (121-37). The bibliography includes recommendations for further study (139-40) and a list of the works cited in the body of the commentary (140-43).

Brown's volume would not be the first choice (or even a second) for the expositor to add to his library if he is looking for a verse-by-verse, exegetical commentary. The commentaries by Michael Eaton (Tyndale OT Commentaries; IVP, 1983), Duane Garrett (New American Commentary; Broadman & Holman, 1993), and Tremper Longman III (New International Commentary on the OT; Eerdmans, 1998) serve that purpose better. For the expositor capable of mature theological discernment (able to separate the wheat from the chaff), this commentary can be a catalyst for illustration, preaching, and application.

William P. Brown. *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2002. xiii + 274 pp. \$24.95 (paper). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

“More so than any other corpus in Scripture, the Psalter contains discourse that is as visceral as it is sublime. In the psalms, pathos is wedded to image” (ix). Thus the author contends for the significance of this volume on metaphor in the Psalms. His introduction deals with “A Poetics of the Psalmic Imagination” (1-14), presenting a case for the power of evocative language in the Psalter. Brown asserts that metaphors act as “‘grids’ or ‘filters’ through which reality is viewed and reconfigured” (6), so that the reader might apprehend that reality differently. Metaphor “exploits an irresolvable incongruity between the target and source domains to generate a ‘semantic shock’” (7). Therefore, metaphors in Hebrew poetry require that the reader think more and more about the text (9). Indeed, the Psalter’s poetry is not just visceral, it is intensely reflective and cognitive.

By their very nature, metaphors provoke hermeneutical discussion. If metaphor is “the hinge between multiple lines of associations and manifold worlds of meaning” (8), how can it be “delimiting” hermeneutically (10)? Brown throws down the gauntlet for reader-oriented methodologies by insisting that the reader’s imagination must be subject to the full appreciation and understanding of the ancient imagination (12). In his view, the reader is not sovereign, nor is the text a mere corpse (223 n. 110). He concludes, “Perhaps the time has come to declare the resurrection of the text and the receptivity of the reader” (ibid.). In the remainder of the volume, Brown’s *modus operandi* identifies the source and target domains for each metaphor, seeks to discover its meaning in its ancient Near Eastern background, and examines its associations within the Psalter itself (14).

Eight chapters take up the examination of the following topics:

1. metaphors of refuge (15-30),
2. metaphors of pathway (31-53),
3. arboreal metaphor (55-79, a detailed analysis of the metaphor in Psalm 1),
4. solar metaphor (81-103, an examination of metaphor in Psalm 19),
5. water metaphors (105-34),
6. animal metaphors (135-66, a non-exhaustive survey of animal motifs and metaphors in Psalms),
7. personal metaphors for God (167-95, anthropomorphisms involving the senses, face, hands, mouth and voice, breath, emotions, and roles such as king, warrior, parent, and teacher), and
8. impersonal metaphors for God (197-206, including light, shield, shadow, mountain, fountain, portion, and cup).

Metaphors may also have counter metaphors. For example, the pit and Sheol are counter metaphors of the refuge metaphor (26). As the author observes, the language of lament sets the psalmist “between pit and refuge, between God’s absence and presence, death and deliverance” (27). A metaphor’s meaning informs the meaning of its counter metaphor and vice versa.

Brown proposes that neither refuge nor pathway comprises a root metaphor

encompassing the entire Psalter. Both are complementary, each to the other. Their association is robust, but they are not interchangeable and neither can subsume the other (39). Refuge features being present before God, while pathway designates the struggle toward God via law and wisdom (42, 45). The two metaphors are “the warp and the woof of the Psalter’s variegated tapestry” (53).

From time to time, the author’s analyses appear strained. For example, his treatment of Psalm 19, comparing its concepts with the iconography of synagogue mosaics (100-103) might strike the reader as esoteric. However, although the discerning evangelical reader might weed out some of the association, the point of the diversion is still pertinent: neither natural nor special revelation can be detached totally from the other. The interrelationship is a major aspect of what the psalmist presents in Psalm 19.

Polyvalency of metaphors comes to the fore in Brown’s essay on water (105-34). Many waters frequently represent overwhelming danger and chaos (106-22), but water also pictures refreshment and renewal (122-34). Images of sweeping floodwaters and the overwhelming power of thunderous cataracts and waves are foundational to two different experiences and perspectives. Metaphors are flexible and are capable of conveying widely differing meanings. Readers must pay close attention to context in order to interpret such images properly. “Destructive and cleansing, formless yet sustaining, water can convey diametrically opposing nuances even within one verse or line of poetry” (105).

In his conclusion, Brown takes up Psalm 139 to examine its metaphors (207-15). Extensive endnotes (217-62), an extremely helpful index of Scripture and ancient sources (263-70), and an author/subject index (271-74, detailed in the former case, and very limited in the latter) close out the volume.

William P. Brown is professor of OT at Union Theological Seminary/PSCE in Virginia. Among the books he has authored are *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1996), *Ecclesiastes* (Interpretation; John Knox, 2000; see earlier in this issue of *TMSJ*), and *The Ten Commandments: The Reciprocity of Faithfulness* (Westminster John Knox, 2004). He is also editor and contributor to *Character & Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation* (Eerdmans, 2002).

Dee Duke, *Prayer Quest: Breaking through to Your God-Given Dreams and Destiny*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2004. 178 pp. \$11.00 (paper). Reviewed by Gregory H. Harris, Professor of Bible Exposition.

A popular website promises a secret means of getting what you want from life by visualizing your goals and dreams to such a degree that they eventually become reality. From a website promoting “The Secret,” the following is promised:

There is a universal intelligence or knowingness in each and every one of us. When you are open to this intelligence of the heart, it guides you in the right direction to do what is best for you and those around you. Following this intuitive knowing attracts to you whatever you need as you need it. You find yourself having, being and doing whatever is right for you in the moment for your highest good. Your heart knows what actions are appropriate for you to take to attract to you what is appropriate for you.

In *Prayer Quest: Breaking through to Your God-Given Dreams and Destiny*, Dee Duke presents very much the same approach. Throughout the book he offers ways to develop and follow one's dreams. Of course, in this case dreams do not refer to revelatory dreams, such as to Joseph had in Matthew 1 or to the common dreams that occur during sleep. Duke uses dreams in the sense of goals, desires, or wants, writing,

A dream is a desire felt so strongly that we think and meditate on it constantly until we see it in our mind as clearly as if it were reality. A dream believes that what is desired will happen; it is accomplished by anticipation and positive expectation. People who dream tend to be upbeat and enthusiastic. They give hope to those around them, attracting people to their dreams and causes (26).

Self-help sources abound, in both the secular and the Christian world, without much difference at the core of each. Something like the statement above is expected from the secular world on a website promising entrance into "The Secret," but not in a book from a Christian publisher such as NavPress that teaches in essence the same approach.

Using John 14:12 as a launching pad ("he will do even greater things than these," 23), Duke launches into instructing readers on how to dream their own dream, which he repeatedly claims is God's dream. For instance,

Welcome to the reality where dreams come true! God has a dream, and it is certain to happen just as He imagines it. He has placed the stamp of His image on our souls, so that we also dream great dreams. As we learn to passionately share and enjoy God's dreams, we will see Him work in amazing ways . . . (15).

Again, it is not so much their own dreams Christians are to pursue, but ultimately they are God's dream for Christians. Duke asks in question #9, "What do these passages [Titus 2:1-4; Romans 12:10-12; Joshua 1:7-8] teach about God's dream for each of us?" That is a brash assumption in these and other verses. The answer, biblically speaking, is nothing. Nothing appears in any of the contexts in regard to a "believer's dreams," nothing about what "we think and meditate on . . . constantly until we see it in our mind as clearly as if it were reality," or believing "that what is desired will happen; it is accomplished by anticipation and positive expectation" (26).

Although proponents of *Prayer Quest* would no doubt argue that the book is replete with Scripture references throughout each chapter and therefore thoroughly biblical, rarely do the references in their context relate to the point made. Rather, the author's presuppositions frame them. One of dozens of such examples is the "Parable

of the Ten Virgins” in Matt 25:14-30. The context deals with events specifically related to the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, the second coming of Christ to earth, and the end of the age (Matt 24:1-3). Duke instead writes, “The most common reason that most believers have given up dreaming God’s dreams is illustrated by Jesus in Matthew 25:14-30” (24).

The author coaches his followers on how to dream their dream with God, for example, by developing “dream notes” as “one of many ways to release your imagination in prayer” (28-29). Still referring to these as God’s “dreams and plans” (28), he cites “do not judge or be critical of your thoughts now—just let them flow” (ibid.). He further counsels, “Determine to dream with God again” (ibid.).

Duke acknowledges that the source of such dreams is not a given. He states, “Your dream notes may stem from one of four sources (although discerning between these is difficult and not always necessary)” (29). He then lists the four sources as “thoughts from God,” “your own original thoughts,” “thoughts from the world (good, neutral, or evil sources),” and “thoughts from Satan and his demons” (29). Duke prays in this regard, “Father, please help me to understand whether this thought is from You or from some other source. Help me to discern which thoughts are worthy of Your dream for my life” (28).

In reference to one’s heart (that is, used in the sense of the seat of one’s thoughts, motives, and desires), the Creator who made the heart states and asks about it in Jer 17:9: “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” He then answers in 17:10: “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind.” Further, Jesus said in reference to the heart in Mark 7:20-23:

And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”

Those who imply their thoughts are God’s thoughts plainly contradict what God has stated in His Word. For those whose “dream prayers” originate in their own heart (even with a “God-tag” placed on them), do so from a source that is “more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick.” Has this changed since the time of Jeremiah or Jesus? Yet Duke explains to his readers, “Select the dream notes you believe God wishes you to pursue” (29). How does someone know? Feelings? Your original thoughts? What issues forth from your heart?

For those who “will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths” (2 Tim 4:3-4), *Prayer Quest* is a book for them. For those who want to justify the lusts of the flesh, in the name of God, this book should make them feel good about themselves. For those who want to be a disciple of Jesus, counting the cost, leaning

not on their own understanding, denying themselves, and taking up their cross to follow Him, avoid this nonbiblical theology.

G. R. Evans. *John Wyclif: Myth and Reality*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2005. 320 pp. \$25.00 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Wyclif's legendary status as "the Morning Star of the Reformation" fails to survive Gillian Evans' vigorous professorial investigation (113, 244, 249). Evans holds the professorship of medieval theology and intellectual history at the University of Cambridge. She is author of *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Earlier Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), *Law and Theology in the Middle Ages* (Routledge, 2001), and *Faith in the Medieval World* (InterVarsity, 2002). In addition, she edited both *The Medieval Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Medieval Period* (Blackwell, 2001) and *The First Christian Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Church* (Blackwell, 2004), contributing a number of the essays herself. Writing extensively on the Middle Ages and on a wide range of patristic and medieval authors (including Augustine, Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Lombard, Alan of Lille, and Gregory the Great), Evans is eminently qualified for a rigorous examination of Wyclif's writings within his medieval academic environment at Oxford University.

Evans' portrait of Wyclif reveals a complex and conflicted man—an irascible academic as well as a contrite cleric (14). His academic setting at Oxford forms the dominant background for Evans' portrait of both the ecclesiastic and the educator (16-128). According to the author, the Oxford with which Wyclif was contemporary bore no signs of the lethargy that John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* attributed to it (24). On the contrary, Oxford throbbed with academic rivalry and thrived on a combative and competitive style of teaching (76). Such pedagogical methodology "made Wyclif and his opponents habitually adversarial in their problem-solving" (84). Wyclif alleged that spies attending his lectures maliciously recorded his most shocking remarks to use against him (85). These adversarial habits in the academy often spilled over into the pulpit (123).

As a parish priest, Wyclif was more educated than most. In 1379 (some years after he had left the parish ministry), he authored a book on "The Pastoral Office" in which he defined the duties of the godly pastor: to feed his sheep with God's Word, to purge his flock of contagious spiritual disease, and to defend his flock against ravaging wolves (93-94). Evans concludes that Wyclif found pastoral ministry less than satisfying, so he returned to Oxford to pursue a doctor of theology degree (94). He was a staunch critic of absentee pastors who held a plurality of parishes and/or benefices that drew them away from their pastoral duties (94-95). In this reviewer's opinion, Evans' focus is so much on the educator (and, later, the

public servant of the royal court, 129-93) that the ecclesiastic lacks adequate coverage. This may, in part, be due to an absence of adequate documentation, the result of the ultimate condemnation and burning of Wyclif's books in 1410 (204). However, if a pastor, rather than an academic, were to write the biography, Wyclif's portrait probably would include a more detailed examination of his pastoral practices for comparison with his pastoral philosophy.

Throughout his teaching career, Wyclif exhibited a bent for theology. His writings on logic deal with theological topics: "the Trinity, transubstantiation, divine foreknowledge, futurity and eternity, necessary futurity, time as fourth dimension" (100). In *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae* ("About the Truthfulness of Sacred Scriptures") he declares that no human writing is superior to the Bible, all Christians have a right to read it, and the Scriptures are the best foundation for secular and ecclesiastical life (121). As far as the Wycliffite translations of the Bible into English are concerned, Evans finds no evidence of any contribution directly from the hand of Wyclif (230). Although he advocated preaching and teaching in English, embarrassingly little remains to demonstrate that he did any of it himself (243).

Evans portrays Wyclif as an angry man in his old age (129, 197), exploding in diatribes against perceived enemies (204). In her opinion, some of that anger arose from his frustration over never attaining to a position of power and becoming "a pawn in other people's political games" (135). In 1374 Wyclif served as a member of a diplomatic commission to meet a papal delegation in Belgium (144). All the clerics except Wyclif immediately received appointments as bishops (144). He became bitter (145) and sensitive at being slighted (167). At his passing "there is no saintly deathbed scene, no reconciliation; there are no edifying words of wisdom to report. We have to turn from him as he fell, angry and despairing" (214). Evans paints a dark and disappointing picture of a failed hero.

On occasion Evans' own political sensitivity manifests itself. One passage comes during her discussion of a violation of the rule of sanctuary when Sir Robert Hauley was pursued inside Westminster Abbey by the Constable of the Tower and slain in 1378. Wyclif argued the king's right to violate the rule of sanctuary (179-80). Evans' own political opinion flares as she compares Wyclif's arguments with those of President Bush and Prime Minister Blair "when they took the USA and Britain into war in Iraq in 2003" (180). She appears to use this biography as the springboard for expressing her own political bitterness and/or agenda (cp. 183-84, "Alarm bells ring when politicians are seen to attempt to suborn the academics and undermine their independence by making the funding of their research dependent on their arriving at conclusions acceptable to the Government of the day").

In spite of the author's pessimistic approach and assessment, her volume is still worth reading. Every future biographer of Wyclif needs to begin with Evans' book. It is as much an exposé of early Oxford as it is of Wyclif. The reader will find Evans' enthusiastic study of the Middle Ages infectious.

Bryan A. Follis. *Truth with Love: The Apologetics of Francis Schaeffer*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006. 206 pp. \$15.99 (paper). Reviewed by Michael J. Vlach, Assistant Professor of Theology

For those interested in the ministry of Francis Schaeffer or apologetics in general, *Truth with Love: The Apologetics of Francis Schaeffer* is a helpful book. Bryan A. Follis, rector of All Saints' Church, offers a heartwarming and intellectually stimulating presentation of the apologetic ministry of Francis Schaeffer, which he developed from his dissertation at Trinity College, Dublin.

Schaeffer possesses a mythical and even heroic status for many evangelicals today, a status that is rightly deserved. Yet, while Schaeffer has left much in the form of writings and video series, he and his ministry are often misunderstood. Follis, though, does a good service by explaining with precision and clarity the true Francis Schaeffer. This includes who Schaeffer was as a person and his approach to apologetics.

Follis shows that understanding Schaeffer starts with knowing what motivated him. Schaeffer, a convert from agnosticism, was driven by love—love for God, love for people, and a love for truth, a combination that is rarely found.

As well known as Schaeffer is because of his ideas, he was primarily a front-line evangelist, not an academic. Thus, Schaeffer's theology of apologetics was not always air-tight, nor did Schaeffer feel the need to respond to every criticism. Schaeffer also did not believe that "there is any one apologetic which meets the needs of all people."

While Schaeffer certainly did his share of speaking and writing to large audiences, he was at his best when he was engaging individuals. As Follis points out, so many were willing to listen to him because they knew he cared. Whether it was the maid at the hotel, the man with cerebral palsy asking nearly incoherent questions, or the disheartened and lonely visitor to L'Abri, Schaeffer carefully listened to individuals and reached out to them with the love of Christ. Any attempts to understand Schaeffer apart from comprehending his love for the person will certainly be unsuccessful.

Follis is also helpful in clearing up confusion about Schaeffer's views and methodology. He shows how recent attempts to label Schaeffer as a presuppositionalist or evidentialist are inaccurate. He incorporated elements from both systems, but was not an adherent of either approach.

Schaeffer adopted much from the presuppositionalist, Cornelius Van Til, but he also differed with Van Til in significant areas. One difference was that Schaeffer was more open to allowing the unbeliever to question the truth claims of Christianity, something which Van Til opposed. In reality, Schaeffer forged his own apologetic method, one that Follis says is close to the verification method. This approach starts with hypotheses and subjects them to various arguments to see if they are true.

One of the more interesting parts of the book is Follis's description of how Van Til viewed Schaeffer and why Schaeffer was reluctant to engage in public

dispute with Van Til. Follis also evaluates the critics of Schaeffer, like Clark Pinnock and others, to show that they largely misunderstood Schaeffer. Follis shows that attempts to label Schaeffer as a rationalist are misguided, especially since Schaeffer was so reliant upon prayer and the Holy Spirit. For Follis, to consider Schaeffer a rationalist is ridiculous because he lived his life so much in light of the supernatural.

Follis's final chapter, "Conclusion: Love as the Final Apologetic," is powerful. Here he shows how the apologetic of Francis Schaeffer can help today in the postmodern era. With keen insight, Schaeffer anticipated what is known now as postmodernism. Though one must be aware of the mindset of today's postmodern, he or she is still made in the image of God and must be challenged to see the emptiness of his or her worldview and embrace Jesus Christ.

Follis offers helpful instruction on how a Schaefferian approach can deal with recent trends. Though Schaeffer was relational and emphasized community, he never did so at the expense of objective truth. Thus, Follis criticizes the church's current fascination with postmodernism. He also singles out the emerging church movement as abandoning the importance of objective truth in its quest to be more relevant, mystical, and community-oriented. As Follis points out, Schaeffer believed that being relevant or community-oriented and committed to objective truth were not mutually exclusive. Both can exist simultaneously.

This reviewer found the book to be inspiring as well as informative. For dealing with such a large topic as the life and beliefs of Francis Schaeffer in a little over 200 pages, one could criticize Follis for not discussing this or that, but that could be said of nearly every book of this nature. What Follis intended to address, he did well.

One does not have to agree with Schaeffer on every detail to learn from him. For Schaeffer, apologetics was not just a theoretical or academic issue. It was personal and it was done in love, something all can learn from.

John Goldingay. *Psalms: Volume 1, Psalms 1–41*. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. 639 pp. \$44.99 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

The commentary series of which this volume is a part targets primarily the needs of clergy and seminary students (8). It is confined to Psalms (3 vols. by Goldingay), Proverbs (by Tremper Longman III), Song of Songs (by Richard S. Hess), Job, and Ecclesiastes. The second Psalms volume is scheduled for publication in late 2007. Goldingay's volume was a finalist for the 2007 Christian Book Awards by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association.

A general introduction (21-78) opens the volume, providing readers with discussions of the Psalms' relationship to history (21-37), poetry (37-45), worship (46-58), spirituality (58-69), and theology (69-78). Included in the final area of

introduction is a brief examination of the relationship of the NT and the Psalms (75-78). Each psalm's commentary consists of three sections: translation (Goldingay's own with technicalities relegated to footnotes), interpretation (supported by both bibliographical and technical footnotes), and theological implications. The third section is periodically anemic, consisting of basic application or generic summaries, as in the 10-line summary of Psalm 5:1-12 (133).

Making a leap in logic, Goldingay appeals to the songs of Miriam, Deborah, and Hannah to deduce that "many of the composers of psalms in the Psalter were women, though one can imagine that female authorship might need to be concealed in a patriarchal context in Israel" (32). Overall he is unsupportive of Davidic authorship of any psalm (26-28). Ignoring biblical (2 Sam 22:1; Hab 3:1, 19; Isa 38:9, 20; Ezek 19:14) and contemporary examples of hymn superscriptions and subscriptions (even though he cites an extrabiblical text including one, 34), he makes no mention of James Thirtle's theory regarding psalm superscriptions and subscriptions. In fact, he asserts that the psalm headings were not part of the original compositions (109).

Some literary works among ancient Near Eastern peoples exhibit similarities to biblical psalms. Goldingay properly cautions against thinking "in terms of direct development from it [i.e., such secular literature]. The similarities rather reflect a common humanity and a common culture" (32). Perceptively he writes that Hebrew poetic parallelism "keeps the psalm moving, keeps the hearers involved, and enables the psalmist to have two runs at expressing adequately what needs to be expressed" (56). The author identifies and explains the interpretive significance of a variety of literary devices throughout the commentary.

Goldingay's translation sometimes borders on idiosyncratic. He renders 1:1's "Blessed" (NRSV, "Happy"; NLT, "Oh, the joys of") as "The good fortune of" (79) and neglects to counter any potential association with "luck." In nearly every instance he translates "sin" (אָטָה, אָטָה) as "failure" (79, 593; see "fall short" in 4:4 [116]), which he defines as moral failure (82) or "a reprehensible failure to do what was required, a missing the way for which we are responsible" (593). Three exceptions appear at 26:9 ("sinners," 380), 32:5 ("my sinful wrongdoing," 452), and 39:1 ("so as not to sin with my tongue," 553). The commentary on Psalm 32 (452-61) clears up any doubts about the author's view of sin. It is, indeed, a biblical reality for which he is willing to employ the term "sin." "Selah" becomes "Rise" (107, 599), creating a misleading juxtaposition in 7:5-6, "(Rise) Rise, Yhwh" (142-43). "Composition" replaces "psalm" (פְּסַלְמוֹת, 592) and "daughter Zion" appears as "Ms. Zion" (9:14). With minimal explanation, the author avoids terms like "hate" ("Against, Be," 591), "love" ("Dedicate oneself," 593), "sin" ("Fail, failures," 593), and "iniquity" ("Waywardness," 601).

Goldingay makes little reference to dates for the psalms (30), since historical references are lacking in most psalms and background is not as significant as it is for prophetic literature (24-25). Likewise, he steers clear of identifying any specific liturgical setting for individual psalms (54-55). Exemplifying his reluctance to assign

a background to individual psalms, he speaks of imagining the use of Psalm 6 on the lips of someone like Hannah or even as the prayer of a woman who had been raped (137; quoting Marchiene Vroon Rienstra, *Swallow's Nest: A Feminine Reading of the Psalms* [Eerdmans, 1992]). Women as well as men might relate to and find comfort in this psalm—a fact that exegetes and expositors too often ignore.

Imprecatory psalms are given meager treatment (66-67)—a lack one would hope to find remedied in later volumes. According to Goldingay, no psalm's original meaning had any prophetic reference to the Messiah. Instead, the NT uses them "in a way that sees new significance in them" (72). His view is similar to ISP (inspired *sensus plenior*): "The Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture is inspiring the writers to see a new significance in the words that appear in Scripture" (77; cp. 234).

At 2:11-12 the commentator eliminates reference to "the Son" ("submit sincerely, Lest he be angry") siding with Symmachus, Jerome, NRSV, and NJPS (93). Though he avoids any messianic interpretation of Psalm 2, he accurately notes that it depicts a situation unknown in any Israelite king's reign (95-96) and that kings from all over the world are involved (98). About whom does the psalm speak then? He concludes that it "belongs to the Jewish people as the people of God . . . in particular to the State of Israel as a focal embodiment of the Jewish people" and also to the church "as an expanded version of the people of God" (105).

Goldingay observes that 14:1-3, if kept in isolation from verses 4-6, "could be taken as a statement about universal wickedness" (212). However, he himself interprets the text as a reference to the permeation of corruption within the psalmist's immediate community (213, 214). After stating that Paul (Rom 3:10-12) makes the point that "the whole of humanity can be described in terms of vv. 1-3," the author repeats that the psalmist's meaning is only that "communities can degenerate to that point" (217), thus taking a stance at odds with a commentator like Willem A. VanGemeren ("Psalms," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary* [Zondervan 1991] 5:144-45).

This reviewer especially appreciates the author's recommendation that the two copies of Psalm 18 (2 Sam 22) not be assimilated and harmonized with one another (253). It seems viable to identify 2 Samuel 22 as the royal archive's copy of the original composition (presented as an exhibit of David's psalmistry) and Psalm 18 as the revised version for the more liturgical use in the Temple.

Comment on Psalm 19 distances the psalm from any concept of revelation (either natural or special), thereby eliminating any treatment of the psalm along these lines (298-99). "At the end," writes Goldingay, "it has to come to a plea for redemption" (299). However, his summation rings hollow on the heels of translating the final word of verse 14 as "my restorer," rather than "my Redeemer," and a commentary that relegates אָרָם לְ (אָרָם) to implying "'Do your duty by me'" (297).

At the conclusion of the volume, Psalm 41:13 is handled in a separate chapter as the coda to Psalms 1-41 (590). A glossary of terms marked by asterisks throughout the commentary elucidates key vocabulary and concepts (591-601). A select bibliography (602-5) omits major commentaries by James Montgomery Boice

(3 vols., Baker, 1996), Amos Hakham (3 vols., Mosad Harav Kook, 2003), Robert Davidson (Eerdmans, 1998), Franz Delitzsch (3 vols. in 1; reprinted, Hendrickson, 2006), J. J. Stewart Perowne (2 vols.; reprinted, Zondervan, 1966), and VanGemeren (in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan, 1991).

Practical and purposefully theological, this commentary contains a variety of quotable excerpts: "Christians are reticent about telling God things that God presumably knows, though they are then oddly unrestrained about itemizing what God should do even though they recognize that God could work this out" (62). "Doxology requires theology" (69). "God even has the glory in the grammar" (55). Seminarians and pastors alike will benefit substantially from Goldingay's 3-volume commentary.

John Goldingay is David Allan Hubbard Professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary. Prior to his tenure at Fuller, he was lecturer in Old Testament and Hebrew at St. John's Theological College in Nottingham, England. From 1988 until his departure in 1997, he also served as principal. A prolific writer, his works include *Daniel* (Word Biblical Commentary; Word, 1989), *Isaiah* (New International Biblical Commentary; Hendrickson, 2001), *The Message of Isaiah 40–55: A Literary-Theological Commentary* (T & T Clark, 2005), and *Old Testament Theology*, first 2 of 3 vols. (IVP, 2003, 2006). He also serves as associate pastor at St. Barnabas Church, Pasadena, California.

Hank Hanegraaff. *The Apocalypse Code*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007. xxvii + 300 pp. \$21.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Gregory H. Harris, Professor of Bible Exposition.

The Apocalypse Code is Hank Hanegraaff's reaction to what he and others would consider fanciful interpretations of the Book of Revelation by Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye. Though many premillennialists would not necessarily hold many of the same interpretations on selected passages, Hanegraaff seems to lump all premillennialists together through "guilt by association." He specifically targets Tim LaHaye since he considers him to be "the standard-bearer for Lindsey's brand of eschatology" (xviii). Yet the absence of Robert Thomas' two-volume work on the book of Revelation in his rather extensive bibliography of books (295-99) and articles used (300) is significant. One would hope that at least one sentence within Thomas' first volume, *Revelation 1–7* (524 pages), or the second, *Revelation 8–22* (690 pages), might contribute in some way to Hanegraaff's argument. In addition, Hanegraaff has no references to the works of MacArthur, Ryrie, and Pentecost on eschatology. Hanegraaff takes two authors and any speculation they may bring to the text to imply that anyone who holds a premillennial understanding of the Book of Revelation must reach that conclusion by the same hermeneutical means.

Using an acronym "LIGHTS," which begins with "L" for a "literal

understanding” of the text, Hanegraaff presents his methodology as the proper means “to interpret the Bible for all its worth . . . “ (xxvii). Though this sounds very similar to a premillennial understanding of the text, the outworking or application of his hermeneutics causes the interpretational paths to diverge.

For instance, the “T” section of his acronym “LIGHTS” is chapter six, “Typology Principle: The Golden Key” (161-203). Perhaps a better subheading would be “The Hermeneutical ‘Get Out of Jail Free’ Card.” In reality, what Hanegraaff does in the name of typology is employ an allegorized hermeneutic whenever a text does not support his preterist theology. Allegorizing of different texts basically undermines a great deal of what he argues for in a literal approach to the text (his “L” section in the LIGHTS acronym). If the “L” (literal principle) and the “T” (typology principle) stand at odds with each other, how can one discern which is dominant?

Most Bible-believing scholars readily accept types as a legitimate component of hermeneutics and recognize that wide debate exists regarding the number and breadth of what is and what is not a type. However, Hanegraaff’s use of typology inserts his theology and supports it with what he calls typology. For instance, in writing about the paramount importance of types, he writes, almost by fiat pronouncement and with no support, “Persons, places, events, or things in redemptive history serve as types of Christ or spiritual realities pertaining to Christ. Palestine is typological of paradise” (9). Hanegraaff refers to the land of Israel as “Palestine,” a term God never used for the land; the name “Palestine” came from Philistia (Exod 15:14; 14:29, 31; Joel 3:4). Hanegraaff has shown his bias, already denouncing what he considers to be racial discrimination against Arabs (xx-xxiii) and the modern “explosive debate over real estate” in the Middle East (xxiii-xxvii). He presents his conclusion, which presumably will be in the “H” (historical principle) section. “Ultimately, we must decide whether the land is the focus of the Lord or the Lord the locus of the land” (xxvii). Yet God is the one who repeatedly refers to the land, His covenant promises, and Jerusalem throughout the Word. Just one example of this hermeneutical divide is Zech 14:1-4:

Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.

Obviously, this is important since it describes the return of the Lord to earth. Does Zech 14:1-4 refer to literal Jerusalem where “His feet will stand on the Mount

of Olives,” or is it some sort of life lesson for Christians to decipher? Would Hanegraaff place this under the “L” (literal) section, “H” (historical), or “T” (typological)? This is important because he ends his introduction saying,

In the pages that follow, you will answer these and a host of other questions by internalizing and applying the principles of a methodology called Exegetical Eschatology. . . . In the process you will not only be equipped to interpret the Bible for all its worth but you may well discover that you hold the key to the problem of terrorism in one hand and the fuse of Armageddon in the other (xxvii).

Repeatedly throughout the book, Hanegraaff uses typology to allegorize prophetic texts that do not suit his preterist preunderstanding.

Hanegraaff cites the need for Scripture to be interpreted by Scripture as the last element in his LIGHTS acronym:

Finally, the *S* in LIGHTS represents the principle of *scriptural synergy*. Simply stated, this means that the whole of Scripture is greater than the sum of its individual passages. You cannot comprehend the Bible as a whole without comprehending its individual parts, and you cannot comprehend its individual parts without comprehending the Bible as a whole. Individual passages of Scripture are synergistic rather than deflective with respect to the whole of Scripture.

Scriptural synergy demands that individual Bible passages may never be interpreted in such a way as to conflict with the whole of Scripture. Nor may we assign arbitrary meanings to words or phrases that have their referent in biblical history. The biblical interpreter must keep in mind that all Scripture, though communicated through various human instruments, has one single Author. And that Author does not contradict himself, nor does he confuse his servants (9-10).

Such reasoning is sound and many premillennial scholars would wholeheartedly agree with the principle. Accordingly, since Hanegraaff claims to base his teaching from within the text, to use his own words, individual passages must be compared in Scripture to see if they harmonize. In other words, his scriptural synergy principle applies just as much to himself as it does to Lindsey, LaHaye, or anyone else.

One of the major positions Hanegraaff holds in interpreting the Book of Revelation is that Nero was the first beast of Revelation 13:1-8, namely, the Antichrist. Hanegraaff mocks LaHaye's (and others') rejection that the advent of the Antichrist has occurred in history past and that instead, a future individual with relevance to the Jewish people is divine prophecy that awaits fulfillment. Hanegraaff's position that Nero is the first beast full of exegetical problems, only one of which this review has space to cite. When he describes the death of Nero by suicide on June 9, A.D. 68 (148-49), the scriptural synthesis principle is just as true for him as for anyone. Hanegraaff rails against “unbridled speculation, or subjective flights of fancy” (xvii) and encourages the reader concerning his own *The Apocalypse Code*: “In the pages that follow, you will answer these and a host of other questions by internalizing and applying the principles of a methodology called Exegetical

Eschatology. . . . In the process you will not only be equipped to interpret the Bible for all it's worth but you may well discover that you hold the key to the problem of terrorism in one hand and the fuse of Armageddon in the other" (xxvii). No, actually Jesus' words in Acts 1:7 offer a better theology of who knows the timing of end-time events: "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority."

To put such principles as Hanegraaff says he employs requires that Jesus Christ returned to earth at the latest on June 8, AD 68—the last full day of Nero's life—because if Nero is the Antichrist, he must be alive at the Lord's return. Either Nero meets this biblical requirement, or he must be discarded as a consideration for fulfilling the biblical requirements for the Antichrist. To accept that the death of Nero in anyway remotely matches this Scriptural requirement—plus dozens of other requirements—is contrary to Acts 1:7 and numerous other prophetic passages.

Gregory Harris. *The Cup and the Glory*. Woodland, Tex.: Kress Christian, 2006. 170 pp. \$12.00 (paper). Reviewed by Ray S. Mehringer, Director of Admissions and Placement.

Dr. Jim Rosscup says in his article on "The Priority of Prayer in Preaching" that "prayer is not an elective but the principal element in the kaleidoscope of spiritual characteristics that mark a preacher. These traits unite into a powerful spiritual force. They build a spokesman for God." In *The Cup and the Glory* written by the professor of Bible exposition at The Master's Seminary, Greg Harris presents a powerful spiritual force that challenges the reader to live out what Scripture reveals on the road of suffering. The lessons he draws are sign posts on this road that reveal the human heart, the depravity of man, the believer's ongoing struggle with trust, the walk of faith, the unexpected challenges, the bearing up under adversity, God's work of perfecting, and the sufferer's increased sensitivity to God's glory.

As I sat around the dinner table with several TMS men, the discussion of this book centered on the very personal nature of suffering and how Professor Harris' lessons on suffering caused many to examine wounds that had festered, but had never healed. One talked about the death of a believing father while dealing with the contempt for a hard-hearted, faithless mother; another discussed anger and disappointment with God over the suffering of his child; and still another added only tears for a brother dying of cancer. That, then, is the real strength of the book; it draws the reader into a biblical discussion of suffering and stimulates examination where pain may have been a roadblock. As Dr. Harris states, "Deep treasures lay embedded in God's Word, ready to be mined and assayed." This book is rich with spiritual principles mined by a prospector eagerly willing to share his nuggets of truth with biblical certainty. If you liked D. A. Carson's book on prayer, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, or D. Edmond Hiebert's book, *Working with God Through*

Prayer, you will thoroughly enjoy *The Cup and the Glory* . . . again and again and again.

Logos Bible Software 3. Libronix Digital Library System. 2000-2006. (Various levels of pricing). Reviewed by William Varner, Professor of Biblical Studies, The Master's College.

The following review of Logos Bible Software 3, the latest version of the most widely used computer Bible program, expresses the view of this reviewer and is not an official viewpoint of The Master's Seminary.

The reviewer remembers well the day that a 5 1/4 inch floppy disk arrived with the beta version of the very first Bible program designed for the Windows operating system. He has observed over nearly twenty years as the Logos program has developed into what it is today—the largest available digital library of biblical literature in the world. In its early days, Logos did not attempt to keep up with some of its more scholarly competitors, but sought to include various biblical works and sets and entire libraries that could serve the study needs of as wide an audience as possible. They succeeded in doing that and continue to publish an enormous library of digitized works for all levels of scholarly abilities.

However, creative people at Logos heard and responded to the requests of those interested in more serious original-language-based, scholarly works. They hired appropriate people and improved and expanded their scholarly resources with each upgrade to their Libronix system. Now Logos 3 reflects their commitment to serve both the scholarly community as well as the broader Christian community. With this version, Logos in some ways has positioned itself as the leader in computer Bible programs. Some programs may still be their equal in scholarly texts, but Logos 3 undoubtedly is the leader in all-round programs that include features that can serve every level of those engaged in biblical studies.

I have used *Logos 3—Scholars Library: Gold* for nearly ten months in preparation for classes, in preparing sermons, in personal study, and also in focused research for an academic commentary on James. Having migrated years ago to another Bible program, I wondered if Logos could measure up on the scholarly level. I am pleased to conclude that in this version it has not only measured up to the competition, but has surpassed it in many ways.

For those already familiar with the Windows interface of Logos, the friendly drop down menus are still there, with all the many standard works available in the program under the “My Library” tab. Also, the sizable windows holding the various Bible versions and texts can still be viewed and compared either horizontally, vertically (my favorite), cascading, or arranged according to one's preference.

Why do people use computer Bible programs? Some use them to compare different versions of a passage, perhaps with a commentary alongside. Logos still

fulfills that function well, with dozens of English Bible versions included as well as a growing number of commentaries and study Bible notes. I was very pleased that the Gold version includes the entire New International Greek Testament Commentary—enough to make the upgrade to the Gold version more than worth the additional cost. Some use the versions to do simple word searches as one would do in a Cruden's, Young's, or Strong's concordance. Logos does that type of search very well. What Logos adds to English Bible searches is the ability to search all of its many other resources for places where that word is also discussed. For example, if you search for the word *redemption*, Logos will not only find all the times it appears in a Bible version, but will direct you to the entry for *redemption* in the *New Bible Dictionary* and in many other study resources. This is a very helpful and timesaving function, especially when doing a topical study. That type of search through all the available resources in a program is, to my knowledge, a function unique with Logos. The sheer number of resources available in Logos, compared to some other Bible programs, makes it an excellent choice for those who desire those types of extensive researches.

Such are functions that can be performed with paper books also, but Logos helps do them with blazing speed and directs to resources about which one may be unaware. It also provides so many of the resources that laymen, and even many pastors, do not always have on hand. One imagines a Saturday evening in a pastor's home, a distance from his study at the church, when he needs to confer with some resource that he does not have at home. With that and many other resources available at the click of a mouse, no problem! Furthermore, the more complex the search becomes, the more likely one is not to perform that search in books because of time constraints. Logos saves time, not to encourage laziness, but so that time can be used in reflecting on the text rather than in data gathering.

For those who use the biblical languages, computer Bible programs have been a special boon. They can have the Masoretic Hebrew text, the Septuagint Greek translation, and an English Bible text all in parallel columns, with each linked and scrolling through the passage simultaneously. Searches can be done on both the form of the original word in the text and also on its *lemma* or lexical form. All original language texts are morphologically tagged, so a window with the parsing of each word opens with the mouse. Though we who teach the biblical languages are not excited about beginning students using such helps as crutches, busy pastors, whose language abilities are sometimes rusty, can again use those languages in sermon preparation. The frustration of figuring out the form of an irregular verb, for example, can be relieved by looking up that verb in a lexicon and discovering its various usages in the immediate context and also in its wider usage. Inclusion of the valuable *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Balz-Schneider) is another advantage of the Gold Version.

Such lexical and morphological searches have been available in Bible programs for years. When one wants to go beyond that function and desires to find a certain form of the Greek word and not just its *lemma* (for example, all third person

singular forms of λέγω), computer Bible programs start to show their value. That type of search can be done very easily and results in more accurate observations by the exegete. Again, this could be done with a good hard-back Greek concordance, but who will take the time to look up every third person singular form in the *Moulton and Geden Concordance* entry for λέγω?

Other programs can do this as well, so this discussion could apply to them. What does Logos offer uniquely in its new versions for more complex Greek and Hebrew searches? Research in this area of language study has been extensive in recent years. For example, OpenText.org has prepared an extensive syntactical analysis of the entire NT that is available Online. The various functions of words and phrases in the clause and sentence are identified and are fully searchable. Knowledgeable exegetes recognize that the value of word-based study for interpretation is enhanced when the words are studied, not in isolation, but as the basic components of larger phrases, clauses, and sentences. In addition to having the entire OpenText database, Logos 3 now includes another valuable database—the *Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament*—which draws more on traditional terminology used in Greek grammars to analyze NT syntax. The results of these syntactical analyses are presented in an attractive graphical format that will prove to be immensely helpful to the student/professor/pastor who wants to study more than just the individual words of their Greek NT.

In any case, one should already be doing this type of study as part of an analysis of any passage. Professors have taught exegesis students for years that they cannot stop at the word level, but must move on to view all the passage being studied at the clause, sentence, and paragraph levels. Some teachers call this a sentence flow analysis. Now searches can be done for entire syntactical constructions—not just for morphological forms. Furthermore, for those who prefer the traditional line diagramming approach to a passage, Logos provides that as well.

Finding something substantial to criticize in Logos 3 is hard. Perhaps its syntactical search engine could be more intuitive, but Logos has anticipated a learning curve and provided a step by step video instruction to help those at any level of language and computer ability. I also found a shortcut for doing a complex linguistic search apart from the command driven or the graphical search engine. Just placing the cursor on a Greek or Hebrew word, right clicking, choosing Bible Study, in a few seconds yields more information on that single word than one ever dreamed existed! Here the lexical and grammatical databases yield their best results by organizing the resulting information into simple categories.

My long experience in observing closely the development of nearly all the computer Bible programs and all their upgrades, as described above, permits me to respond to my students who constantly ask what program(s) I recommend. Some programs I recommend for those who want help only in scholarly language study. Some also are very versatile for those using the Mac environment. But, in this reviewer's opinion, if one is looking for the best all-round computer Bible program for both general and scholarly help, the new version of Logos is the one for an

individual, and also for those in his church. Furthermore, as evidence of their responsiveness to user requests, Logos is also developing a version for the Mac operating system. They have excellent pricing plans for the various levels of programs they offer also. I recommend at least the Scholars Library as a starter for serious study. Whatever level one chooses, looking at such a purchase as an investment for the future is wisest—and also one that can be enlarged since Logos will continue adding valuable resources in the years ahead.

I. Howard Marshall. *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004. 765 pp. \$40.00 (cloth). Reviewed by Keith Essex, Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition.

“Here is a New Testament theology that will not only guide students and delight teachers but reward expositors with a lavish fund of insights for preaching.” So promises the book jacket of this magnum opus from the well-known British NT scholar, I. Howard Marshall. For over forty years, a steady stream of writing has come from the pen of the honorary research professor of NT at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, including commentaries on Luke (NIGTC), Acts (TNTC), 1 & 2 Thessalonians (NCBC), the Pastoral Epistles (ICC) [see *TMSJ* (Fall 2002) 13:290-91], 1 Peter (IVPNTC) [see *TMSJ* (Fall 1991) 2:213-5] and the Epistles of John (NICNT). From this wealth of background study, Marshall has presented his conclusions concerning NT theology in his latest volume.

With so much material in print, the reader comes to the present work already knowing where the author stands on many historical, exegetical, and theological issues. In this volume many examples re-express previous viewpoints. Though Marshall has much to commend in his positions, the present reviewer rejects some of his statements. For instance, first, he holds that the Pastoral Epistles are best viewed as “allonymous,” i.e., “they contain Pauline materials that have been adapted within a Pauline circle after his death in order to make his teaching available in a form adapted to the needs of the congregations at the time when there was the danger of succumbing to a heresy compounded of Jewish and ascetic elements and some misrepresentation of Paul’s teaching” (398). Second, source criticism of the Synoptic Gospels is a given; Markan priority is assumed (Mark is the first Gospel discussed in the volume [57-94]) with Matthew and Luke basing their books on Mark, sayings of Jesus, and “Q,” a narrative about Jesus (51-53). Third, Marshall’s moderate Arminian position is evident when he states, “[T]he perseverance of believers is simultaneously dependent on their own steadfastness and on the activity of God” (242) and when he declares that the warning passages in Hebrews “seem to allow that a person who has been a believer and enjoyed the blessings of salvation can lapse into a state of unbelief” (619). Fourth, throughout the volume, the church is seen as the “new Israel,” although the author states, “Thus there is not so much a superses-

sion of the ancient promises to the Jews that they be God's people as rather a spiritual renewal of those promises in the new covenant . . . and the extension of the covenant people to include all who are spiritually descendants of Abraham through their faith in Messiah" (712). Thus, ultimately, he prefers to speak of the Christian believers as the "renewed Israel" (711-2). Though the discerning reader must have his antenna attuned to such viewpoints, profit in the author's approach to NT theology is still present.

Marshall begins his work with an introductory chapter entitled "How Do We Do New Testament Theology?" However, before he discusses how to write a theology of the NT, he first defends the legitimacy and possibility of the enterprise (17-23). The author claims that despite the problems of occasionality, diversity, and development, "it makes sense in the light of canonization to ask whether there is a common, basic theology in the set of books that the early church canonized" (20). Thus, "the aim of students of New Testament theology is to explore the New Testaments' writers developing understanding of God and the world" (23). Having defended the legitimacy of NT theology, Marshall describes how it can be accomplished (23-46), concluding the chapter with a helpful summary of his proposal (46-47). The scope of NT theology is the books in the canon of the NT. These books must be understood in historical, "jesusological/christological," and "missiological" contexts. The stage of description attempts to elucidate the theology of the individual books directed to the specific occasions or purposes for the writings. The stage of analysis seeks to find the central thrust of the books' theology and its detailed outworking. The stage of studying development explores the way in which these various expressions of theology have developed. The stage of synthesis determines the ways in which these books display common beliefs [unity, harmony] and/or a variety of beliefs [diversity, contradiction]. The stage of application, the ways this NT theology has been and should be taken up into the dogmatic theology of the church, lies beyond the task of the present volume. This methodical approach to NT theology explained and modeled is the strength of this work.

Chapters two through thirty proceed according to the proposal on how to do NT theology described in chapter one. Marshall breaks the NT into four sections: Jesus, the Synoptic Gospels, and Acts (49-206); the Pauline Letters (207-488); the Johannine Literature (489-601); Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, and Jude (603-704). Each section follows a basic pattern. The canonical books are first individually presented. The presentations begin with an introduction that gives data concerning the authorship, the occasion, and, most essentially, the purpose of the book. Then Marshall gives an overview of the book, which he calls "the theological story." Up to this point, these chapters read like a NT survey. With this "survey" foundation, the writer details the "theological themes" of the books. The book chapters conclude with helpful summaries in a conclusion. Having isolated the theological themes of the individual books, the writer synthesizes the theology of the individual books into a whole for the section in an individual chapter. Here, the common theological themes of the individual books are brought together. In sections two and three, the

Pauline Letters and the Johannine Literature respectively, he further synthesizes the theological material of that section with the previously discussed synthesis of the preceding section(s) in an additional chapter. A similar additional chapter in section four would have been helpful; as it is, Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, and Jude are not synthesized into the rest of the NT by the author.

The volume concludes with a chapter where Marshall discusses “Diversity and Unity in the New Testament” (705-32). He acknowledges, “[W]e have to recognize that the theological languages and concepts used by the early Christians developed and diversified” (711). But he continues by asking, “But to what extent were they still recognizably bearing testimony to the same things and the same experiences despite all the diversity” (711)? For Marshall, the answer lies in the fact that all of the NT writings emerged from and were directed toward mission. In essence, NT theology is missionary theology. The unity of the NT writings can be unpacked in the following way: the context of mission—God the Father; the center of mission—the saving event; the community of mission—the renewed Israel, the response of faith, the Holy Spirit, the church, and the love commandment; and the consummation of mission—the fullness of salvation.

The present volume takes its place in the heritage of the previous evangelical NT theologies of George Ladd (Eerdmans, 1974, 1993) and Donald Guthrie (1981). Many of Marshall’s conclusions echo and update what is in those works. However, he begins the discussion of NT theology with the individual books, whereas Ladd and Guthrie begin with and concentrate more on the theological synthesis. Ladd’s synthesis of the sections of the NT into the Synoptic Gospels, Paul, John, and other NT writings is echoed in Marshall. However, the present volume does not proceed to use the categories of dogmatic or systematic theology as its ultimate organizing principle as did Guthrie. The NT exegete and expositor can now gain a basic understanding of the contemporary “broad evangelical” discussions of and conclusions concerning NT theology by reading, in the following order, Marshall, Ladd, and Guthrie.

Two annoying characteristics of the present typeset of *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* make reading the book harder, particularly for American readers. First, the numeral “1” is consistently rendered by the capital “I” in the text, footnotes, and indexes. Second, in accord with British custom, commas and periods are placed outside, rather than inside, the quotation marks. But the NT expositor should not let these annoyances keep him from reading the volume.

Matt Jackson-McCabe, ed. *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007. 389 pp. \$35.00 (cloth). Reviewed by William Varner, Professor of Biblical Studies, The Master’s College.

It is encouraging to note that the study of early Jewish Christianity has

experienced something of a revival in recent years, after decades of serious neglect. The neglect can most likely be traced to the influence of such scholars as Adolph Harnack and Rudolph Bultmann, who saw Jewish Christianity as a primitive form of the faith that was quickly replaced by a Gentile Christianity, influenced by Paul. This volume could be viewed as something like a *status quaestionis* regarding the subject.

The book is an edited collection of papers, most of which were originally delivered in the Jewish Christianity Consultation at recent meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature. The chairman of that consultation, Matt Jackson-McCabe, is editor of the book. The first chapter by Jackson-McCabe discusses the problem of what to call this early movement—Jewish Christianity, Christian Judaism, etc. The following chapters are divided into two main sections: “Part I: Groups” and “Part II: Texts.” The authors, who evidently have thought deeply about their subjects, discuss familiar themes: the early composition of the Jerusalem church (Hebrews and Hellenists); the identity of the so-called Judaizers opposed by Paul; and the continuing history of those Jewish groups called by the Fathers “Ebionites” and “Nazarenes.” Later chapters deal with the Jewish-Christian character of the mythical “Q” document, the Gospels of Matthew and John, the Apocalypse, and the Didache. The final chapter is a very helpful discussion of what is often considered the last ancient writing by a Jewish Christian author, the Pseudo-Clementines, written by the world’s authority on that composite document, F. Stanley Jones.

As is always the case in a collection of different authors, the chapters are uneven, with some more valuable than others. In this reviewer’s opinion, the most insightful and helpful chapter for the non-specialist and/or pastor is the one by Patrick Hartin, “The Religious Context of the Letter of James.” It is so good in analyzing the thought of this neglected epistle that it alone is worth the price of the book. The chapter on the Didache by Jonathan Draper is also quite insightful, especially serving as an excellent introduction to the issues raised by the study of this unique little gem from the early church.

Sadly, the editor’s introduction is perhaps the weakest part of the book. Consider as one example the following biased and almost arrogant statement by Jackson-McCabe, “No serious scholar believes that the canonical Letter of James . . . was produced within the Jerusalem community, let alone by James himself” (11). Having been engaged in a serious study of this subject myself, I marvel at his describing such recognized scholars as Luke Johnson and Richard Bauckham as not being serious scholars, because they can offer no better alternative to the authorship of the epistle than James the Lord’s brother! These and other statements revealing his higher-critical bias may indicate that the title “no serious scholar” might apply to the editor himself.

This flaw is fortunately not indicative of the other excellent chapters. Readers will benefit greatly from becoming more familiar with a movement in the Christian world that sadly disappeared after ca. A.D. 400. The current revival of “Messianic Judaism” both in Israel and in the Diaspora is an indication that Christians need to pay greater attention to the deep Jewish roots of their faith. This

volume is a good place to do just that, as is the more conservative work by the evangelical Norwegian scholar, Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (InterVarsity, 2002).

John Piper. *What Jesus Demands from the World*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006. 400 pp. \$19.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Trevor Craigen, Associate Professor of Theology.

Diversity in writing style is surely confirmed by this book from the pen of John Piper. “Refreshing and personable” well describes his style this time. The introductory sections offer suggestions on how to read the book, advise on its aim, and inform the scholar that the fruitlessness of the quests for the historical Jesus caused him to set aside the conjectures and speculations of those seeking to get behind the Gospels somehow (29). Piper forthrightly assesses all those efforts as “massive minds assembling, with great scholarly touch, a house of cards,” to which he immediately adds, “It helps to be sixty years old. I have watched the cards collapse over and over” (31).

What he did read the Gospels, wherein is the only true, compelling portrayal of Jesus, and gather all the commands which came from Christ’s lips. Then, by eliminating those which would not have any abiding significance to one’s faith and life, he ended up with fifty different commands worthy of reflection. Crunched down into one sentence, his aim finds expression in these words: “My aim has been to probe the meaning and the motivation of Jesus’ commands in connection with his person and work” (19, emphasis original).

The treatments average about six pages per command, with each set within its context, the comments being marshalled under several headings covering the whole of the pericope in which it stands. Demand #1 is “You Must Be Born Again” with its Scripture references, John 3:5, 7 and John 3:3, placed in italics immediately beneath the chapter title. Demand #50 is “Make Disciples of All Nations” with its references, Matt 8:11-12; Luke 21:12-13; Luke 21:24, similarly placed. Demand #25 is “Your Righteousness Must Exceed that of the Pharisees, for it was Hypocritical and Ugly,” using Matt 5:20; 23:27-28; Mark 7:21-23; Matt 5:8, as its biblical base. The next demand builds on #25 so that #26 presents the Pharisees from another angle: “Your Righteousness Must Exceed that of the Pharisees—Clean the Inside of the Cup” (196). As one glances over the list of demands or the chapters, familiar subject’s are brought to mind: loving your neighbor, loving God, not being angry or proud, taking up one’s cross, praying always, striving to enter the narrow door, and laying up treasures in heaven.

A healthy blend of devotional warmth and orientation with careful study, as evidenced by quite a number of footnotes and careful exegesis has produced a book admirably suited, because of its set up, to be a series of informative, instructive, and

encouraging readings, either daily or weekly or whatever fits best with one's schedule, e.g., this reviewer, with anticipation of being blessed, will dip in bi-weekly.

Thanks to Bethlehem Baptist Church, who, in awarding their pastor (Piper) a five-month leave from preaching, provided the concentrated period needed to pull it all together, and gave to the Christian, evangelical world what must be rated as a very good and stimulating book. Read it, and it will become perhaps just as quickly a "favorite from Piper."

Stanley E. Porter, ed. *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. 268 pp. \$29.00 (paper). Reviewed by William Varner, Professor of Biblical Studies, The Master's College.

Stanley Porter must be the world's leader in the number of books that one person has edited. The amazing thing about them is the high degree of academic excellence that pervades his works. One of his recent edited collections of chapters by different authors is a compilation of addresses given as part of the H. H. Bingham Colloquium in New Testament at McMaster Divinity College, where Porter is president. Delivered as part of the 2005 Bingham Colloquium, the theme of the book is obvious from its title—a summation of recent scholarly work on the concept of the *Messiah* in both the Old and the New Testaments. Porter introduces the theme and the chapters in his opening chapter. Craig Evans sums up the conference and offers some brief concluding observations.

The material is handled canonically, with four chapters by Tremper Longman, Mark Boda, Al Wolters, and Loren Stuckenbruck on Messianic themes as traced through the Law, the Writings, the Prophets, the Qumran documents, and other Second Temple "apocalyptic" literature. While the chapters are serviceable as surveys, little fresh ground is plowed. The theological position that seems to be advocated in the chapters could be described as an evangelicalism broadly understood. Too much ground is conceded, in this writer's opinion, to higher critical views. Recognition of a eventual supernatural Messiah predicted by the OT writers is acknowledged, although some traditional texts are questioned as to their legitimate application to Jesus. Another work that is often mentioned by the writers (see 2, 4, 13, 20, 25, 46, 144) and one that better serves the theological character of these writings is *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, eds. Satterthwaite, Hess, and Wenham (London: Scholars Press, 1998).

The five authors who cover the Messianic themes of the NT, in my opinion, rescue the book from the level of academic mediocrity. I. Howard Marshall explores "Jesus as Messiah in Mark and Matthew" with his usual thoroughness and aplomb. Stanley Porter himself writes of "The Messiah in Luke and Acts: Forgiving the Captives" with his usual bibliographical thoroughness, while focusing on one theme of the Messiah's work in one author. Tom Thatcher covers what he calls the

“negative Christology” of the Gospel of John, while S.A. Cummins stresses Paul’s “Corporate Christology” of God, Jesus, and the covenant community. Cynthia Long Westfall effectively covers the Messianic ideas as expressed in Hebrews and the General Epistles in a marvelously compact fashion.

If you are a pastor preaching on this vital subject or a professor desiring an update on some current thinking about the Messiah, this book could serve you well. Better overall works are available (e.g., *The Lord’s Anointed* above), but Porter is to be thanked for his efforts, in this and many other volumes, to bring before readers stimulating chapters on similar themes. Also, for a more popular study of the subject that interacts with Jewish views, see this reviewer’s *The Messiah: Revealed, Rejected, Received* (Indianapolis, Ind.: AuthorHouse, 2004).

William Varner. *The Way of the Didache: The First Christian Handbook*. Lanham, Md.: University Press, 2007. 148 pp. \$33.00 (paper). Reviewed by Richard L. Mayhue, Senior Vice President and Dean; Professor of Pastoral Ministries and Theology.

Two early Christian documents supercede all others, except Scripture, by providing the earliest compendiums of the apostolic church’s preaching and practices. First, in regard to doctrine, is Irenaeus’ *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* (ca. A.D. 180) which provides an exposition of the biblical basis on which the apostolic preaching rested. Second, in regard to practice, is the anonymously authored *Didache* (ca. A.D. 90), which delivers the first Christian handbook. William Varner, Ed.D. (professor of biblical studies, The Master’s College), has devoted his considerable scholastic energies to the latter during a recent sabbatical, in order to produce this veritable goldmine.

Varner has written in such a way that serious laymen, pastors, and scholars alike will profit from engaging this work, which is at once provocative, deep, and readable. This piece of first-rate scholarship provides an extensive bibliography of *Didache* research (139–45), plus lexical (109–26), topical (127–30), and authorial (147) indexes.

Of particular value are two chapters which provide the Greek text (chap. 3) and the author’s translation (chap. 4). Three of the most interesting essays include “The Scriptures of the *Didache*” (chap. 5), “The Ministers of the *Didache*” (chap. 8), and “The Theology of the *Didache*” (chap. 9).

While reflecting his own personal “take away,” the author does lead the reader to some of the most practical lessons emphasized by this ancient document in “The Lessons of the *Didache*” (chap. 10).

All in all, this reviewer highly recommends this fresh study of such a critically important historical document. This is a must read for every pastor.