

THE GREAT COMMISSION: WHAT TO TEACH

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The words “all that I commanded you” (Matt 28:20) describe the substance of what Christian disciples are to teach in fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission. Since Jesus in the progress of His earthly ministry changed focus in response to Israel’s opposition to Him as their Messiah, understanding what disciples are to teach requires interpretive discernment regarding the historical and theological background of His various utterances. As a sample of His teaching, the Sermon on the Mount is appropriate. The Sermon came in the historical circumstances of Jesus’ emphasis on the coming kingdom promised to David in the OT, and lays down prerequisites for those who want to enter that kingdom. Qualities expressed in the beatitudes enumerate those prerequisites. One in particular in Matt 5:5b promises the privilege of inheriting the land promised to Abraham in Gen 12:7. The Sermon’s theme verse, Matt 5:20, is a rebuke to the scribes and Pharisees who so strongly opposed Jesus during His time on earth. The antitheses that follow in Matt 5:21-48 are corrections to their superficial rabbinic interpretations of the OT. In line with keeping the historical context in view, the term “brother” in the Sermon refers to fellow Israelites, not Christian brothers. Failure to interpret Christ’s instructions properly leads to impediments that hinder fulfillment of the Great Commission.

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In an A.D. 2000 article, “Historical Criticism and the Great Commission,” I pointed out the devastating effects of historical criticism in dismantling the Great Commission.¹ The article pointed out the close adherence to Christ’s instructions in Matthew 28:18-20 by the ancient church and the post-Reformation church, until the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment began raising doubts about whether Christ was the source of the whole Commission, doubts that have been picked up and shared by

¹“Historical Criticism and the Great Commission,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 11/1 (Spring 2000):39-52.

evangelical historical critics since the middle of the twentieth century.

In three places, Cyprian, the third-century church father, cited a portion of the Commission that was the theme for the 59th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, “Teaching Them to Obey” (Matt 28:20a).

The Lord, when, after His resurrection, He sent forth His apostles, charges them, saying, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: *teaching them to observe* all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”²

Lest therefore we should walk in darkness, we ought to follow Christ, and to observe His precepts, because He Himself told His apostles in another place, as He sent them forth, “All power is given unto me in heaven and earth. Go, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: *teaching them to observe* all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”³

Likewise in the Gospel, the Lord after His resurrection says to His disciples: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, *teaching them to observe* all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”⁴

In that ETS theme, the only difference from Cyprian’s translated quotes is the word “obey” instead of the word “observe,” a change which presumably came as the theme-excerpt was taken from an NIV rendering of τηρεῖν in v. 20.⁵

After a brief comment on “them” (αὐτούς) in v. 20a, this article investigates what the Lord intended by the words “all that I commanded you” (πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν).

THE OBJECTS OF THE TEACHING

The obvious antecedent of the pronoun “them” in v. 20 is “the nations” (τὰ ἔθνη) in v. 19a). In other contexts the word can refer to “Gentiles” as is true of

²*The Epistles of Cyprian* 24:2 (ANF, 5:302) [emphasis added].

³*Ibid.*, 62.18 (ANF, 5:363) [emphasis added].

⁴*The Treatises of Cyprian* 12.2.26 (ANF, 5:526) [emphasis added].

⁵Personally, I prefer the translation “observe” to the rendering of “obey,” because as subsequent discussion will show, Jesus choice of ἐντέλλω to designate the substance of His earlier teaching covers a much wider scope than just the imperatival commands that He had given the disciples.

ἔθνων in Matthew 10:5, but as part of the Great Commission, it includes Israel as well as the Gentiles, making “nations” the correct meaning here. Subsequent instructions to the disciples made plain to them that national Israel as well as the Gentile nations was to be included in their efforts to make disciples. For example, in Acts 1:8 they were told to begin in Jerusalem and eventually expand their efforts beyond territories limited to Jewish inhabitants. An all-inclusive sense of “nations” must be His intention here.

Included in the Commission with the “teaching them to obey all that I commanded you” is the command “Make disciples of all nations.” Clearly the objects of that command included anyone who had become a disciple through the discipling efforts of Jesus’ first disciples. Having become a disciple, everyone in turn is to obey the teaching command that Jesus gave on this occasion.

That obvious change in Jesus’ ministry illustrates the way that His ministry in response to His negative reception by His own people changed in other respects. He never withdrew the promises of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants, but He did provide for an interim movement to come between His ascension and His second advent, a movement that was unforeseen in the OT. The interim period was of such a nature that OT prophecies had to take on additional meanings to supply biblical support for God’s dealings during this interim period.⁶

“ALL THAT I COMMANDED YOU”

The Changing Focus of Jesus’ Ministry

The subject of what Jesus commanded His disciples to teach is not so easily defined as are the objects who received the command, but it is important to investigate, because it determines how disciples throughout the Christian era are to obey the Great Commission. The word Jesus used for “commanded” is a bit unusual. BDAG gives as a basic meaning for ἐντέλλω—the root from which ἐνετείλαμην comes—“to give or leave instructions.”⁷ The Lord chose not to use other words such as κελεύω, which speaks of verbal orders in general or παραγγέλλω, which has in view especially the commands of a military commander.⁸ Nor did he use τάσσω or

⁶For an elaboration on some of the OT passages dealing with Israel which are in the NT applied to the church, see my chapter 9 in *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old*, ed. Robert L. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002).

⁷BDAG, 339.

⁸G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1937) 156.

one of its compounds that speaks of fixed and abiding obligations.⁹ Rather, He chose a word that focuses on the contents of the directions, specific or occasional instructions and duties arising from an office instead of from the personal will of a superior.¹⁰

His choice of ἐντέλλω is appropriate in light of the frequency with which commentators have noticed the conflict between Jesus' command to go to the nations in Matthew 28 and His earlier command forbidding His disciples from going to the Gentiles and the Samaritans and telling them to go only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5-6).¹¹ Those commentators, including some who are evangelical, often assume that Jesus never gave the instructions to go to all nations, but hold that the command was added by the early church some time after Jesus' ascension.¹²

Quite obviously, the command of Matt 10:5-6 no longer applies because of a change that came in Jesus' ministry. Therefore, Jesus' intention was for "all that I commanded you" of Matthew 28:20 to be understood in light of the change that came in His teaching. His rejection by the leaders and people of Israel in His day caused Him to anticipate a later turn to a wider audience, i.e., "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold" (John 10:16). Subsequent to Jesus' resurrection, Paul describes in other words the change that came: "I say then, they [i.e., Israel] did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!" (Rom 11:11-12). The Lord's rejection by Israel at His first advent is paramount in understanding Jesus' later teachings in comparison to His earlier ones.

The true intention of Jesus must not have been for the disciples to teach the precise words He taught them, but that they should use discernment in interpreting what and how to teach. They needed to recall the historical context and the theological circumstances of His teachings and to make appropriate judgments as to how some of His commandments fit new circumstances such as going to all nations rather than just to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

To handle the commands and the teachings of Christ correctly, one must keep in mind His narrow focus in choosing listeners during His first advent. Clearly,

⁹ Joseph Henry Thayer, *The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Lafayette, Ind.: Archa, 1979) 343.

¹⁰Ibid.; Abbott-Smith, *Manual Greek Lexicon* 156.

¹¹E.g., C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 2 vols. (New York: KTAV, 1968) 1:357, 358; Alan Hugh M'Neile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1961) 435; Francis W. Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1981) 544-45; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 362.

¹²Thomas, "Historical Criticism and the Great Commission" 45-47, 50.

He came to serve, first of all, the lost sheep of the house of Israel. That fact is evident in several ways. For instance, He rarely ventured outside the geographical boundaries of that people. Once He went into the regions of Tyre and Sidon (Matt 15:21 = Mark 7:24). There a Canaanite (or Gentile) woman confronted Him with a request that He deliver her daughter from an unclean spirit. Jesus' first response to her was, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24). Because of her faith, however, He did heal her daughter.

Earlier He had gone into Samaritan territory and conversed with a woman there (John 4:4-30). He set her straight regarding the correct way to worship the Father and regarding her own loose lifestyle, but that was only a passing incident.

On another occasion, some Greeks came requesting an audience with Jesus, which He apparently did not grant. Rather, He implicitly pointed them to a time after His glorification when such an audience with Gentiles would be possible (John 12:20-33). He purposely focused His ministry on one people—the people of Israel—during His first advent.

At certain stages Jesus' commands and teachings as recorded in the Gospels need to be interpreted in light of the historical fact that they were directed most specifically to the people of Israel. How did Jesus expect the people of Israel to respond to Him? How did they understand His teachings? Too often, interpreters have disregarded the historical setting and theological circumstances of what Jesus commanded and taught.

In the Great Commission, not enough students of the Gospels have accepted the challenge of defining "all that I have commanded you." Understanding the expression is not as simple as most seem to make it. In light of changes in Jesus' teachings caused by a changing theological environment regarding ministry to Gentiles as reflected in the Great Commission, students of the Gospels would do well to investigate other commands and teachings of Jesus more carefully to see how further light can come to bear on their meanings. As a sample of such an investigation, His Sermon on the Mount with its setting furnishes appropriate excerpts to consider. A common error has been to interpret the Sermon as though Jesus were preaching it to the church. That, however, is the exegetical fallacy of substituting application for interpretation.¹³

The Setting of the Sermon

Regarding the Sermon and its connection with Matthew 4:17, Nolland has perceptively noted, "The content of the coming address is appropriately identified as teaching rather than proclamation, but what Jesus is to say is to be thought of as

¹³See Brian A. Shealy, "Redrawing the Line Between Hermeneutics and Application," in *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* 165-94.

grounded in his proclamation of the near approach of the kingdom of God and as clarifying what, for the disciple, lies beyond the repentance called for in 4:17.”¹⁴ Nolland also advocates studying the Sermon in light of Jesus’ proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom (Matt 4:32). But what Nolland does not clarify is the identity of the kingdom of heaven spoken of by John the Baptist (cf. Matt 3:2) and Jesus. The focus of Matthew on the continuity of the promise to David about a Davidic kingdom is pronounced. From the very first verse of his Gospel, Matthew has emphasized his interest in David in relation to God’s promises to Israel through the Davidic Covenant (cf. 2 Sam 7:8-17). That is the kingdom whose nearness was being proclaimed when Jesus gave His Sermon on the Mount.

That kingdom had special relevance to the people of Israel as did the command for them to repent. Repentance meant a certain thing to people of that particular first-century Israelite culture. If they wanted to enjoy the promised blessings of the Davidic kingdom, they needed to turn from their corrupt ways, an action in which—as leaders—the scribes and Pharisees should have led the way. Otherwise, that people could have no expectation of participation in what God had promised their nation through David.

The Sermon on the Mount was therefore an elaboration on what their repentance would entail. It laid down prerequisites for entering that Davidic kingdom.¹⁵ The commands of Jesus and John to repent had a particular meaning for the Jewish people of the days in which the commands were given, but to interpret the commands as having precisely the same meaning for the wider circle of Christ’s followers in the twenty-first century forces onto the text a meaning that Jesus never intended. The commands to repent have plenty of legitimate *applications* to believers of all subsequent ages, but those *applications* must differ from and be controlled by the correct *interpretation* of what John and Jesus explicitly intended for their listeners at the time.

¹⁴John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in the NIGTC, eds. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 193.

¹⁵Wilkins has the setting all wrong when, about the Sermon on the Mount, he writes, “Matthew now records an extensive message that develops in detail the kind of life available to those who respond to the arrival of God’s kingdom” (Michael J. Wilkins, “Original Meaning, Matthew,” in *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament*: [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004] 190). The Sermon does not describe the kind of life available to those who respond to the arrival of the kingdom; rather, it gives the qualifications of those who will gain admittance to the promised future kingdom. Wilkins also needs to qualify his statement, “He [i.e., Matthew] has gathered together a collection of Jesus’ messages that enable the church for all ages to carry out a crucial component of Jesus’ final commission: ‘teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you’ (28:20)” (ibid.). Is this a collection of Jesus’ messages, or is it a sermon given by Jesus on a single occasion, as Matthew frames it? Matthew must be right. Further, Wilkins and many others need to interpret Jesus’ commands and teachings in light of the historical and theological context in which they were given. Else, the church will fail miserably in carrying out this phase of the Great Commission.

The Sermon in part was also an instruction to Jesus' disciples, Simon Peter and Andrew, about what He meant in His command, "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt 4:19).¹⁶ It was also part of His proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom (Matt 4:32). In that historical context, Jesus was illustrating to them that fishing for men involved calling them to repentance from the sinful corruption of Judaism of the day so as to enjoy the blessings of the promised kingdom of David.

Davies and Allison typify a common exegetical mistake when they write,

In [Matt] 5:1, the unspecified disciples, who must be a group larger than the four of 4:18-22, are—and this is the key point—contrasted with the crowd and so represent the church. The disciples, in other words, stand for the faithful; they are transparent symbols of believers. So the sermon on the mount is spoken directly to Matthew's Christian readers.¹⁷

By assuming a significant role for the redactor who wrote Matthew, they remove the Sermon from its historical context in Jesus' time and place it in a historical setting several decades later, thereby changing the meaning of various parts. Among evangelical commentators, Wilkins and Gundry do essentially the same by making the crowd symbolic of the Christian church.¹⁸

The Beatitudes

To remove uncertainty about which kingdom Jesus referred to, He began His sermon with a series of beatitudes. Each beatitude related to an OT promise pertaining to the Davidic kingdom, a feature readily recognizable by His Jewish listeners. In identifying the individual with certain qualities, the Lord stirred up memories among His listeners regarding relationships to the predicted kingdom. The qualities describe a person who will be permitted a part in that kingdom.¹⁹

That raises the question as to whether Matthew has ethicized the beatitudes, i.e., turned what were once straightforward blessings into entrance requirements for

¹⁶Ibid., 196.

¹⁷W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC, eds. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988) 425.

¹⁸Michael J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel, As Reflected in the Use of the Term Mathētēs* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988) 149-50; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew, A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1994) 481. Note Gundry's remark, "We do not have in these beatitudes a gospel for the unevangelized, but a word of encouragement to the suffering church" (Gundry, *Matthew* 73).

¹⁹Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (reprint; Minneapolis: James & Family, n.d.) 115; John Albert Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990) 88.

the kingdom of God.²⁰ That redaction-critical suggestion must be dismissed by those who give credit to Jesus, not Matthew, for the Sermon on the Mount. Though they do not deny an element of imperatival function in Matt 5:3-12, Davies and Allison deny that Matthew's "makarisms" function primarily as imperatives for several reasons, reasons that include the absence of any direct imperatives among them and the beatitude in 5:10-12 in which one can hardly look upon persecution as being a self-achieved virtue.²¹ They rather see the beatitudes as encouragements rather than commands. Several of their other reasons relate to their historical-critical assumptions about Matthew. After granting their point about the absence of any direct commands, one who sees Jesus as the source of the Sermon must acknowledge that the qualities expressed in the beatitudes are prerequisites to entering the kingdom and see an undeniable compulsion to measure up to the standards they express as a primary function.

The first and last third-person beatitudes act as bookends because both pronounce the recipients blessed because of their possession of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:3, 10).²² "The poor in spirit" (5:3) recalls the words of Ps 34:19, "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit," where the phrase in the last line in the LXX (33:19) reads "humble in spirit" instead of "poor in spirit." It also recalls Matthew's citation of Isa 61:1 ("to preach good news to the poor," NIV) in 11:5, "the poor have the good news proclaimed to them."²³ Both OT passages, particularly the Isaiah passage, are in contexts of Messianic promise regarding the future of Israel. Listeners would recognize the promise of possessing the Davidic kingdom as the cause of the blessing pronounced.

"Those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness" (Matt 5:10) receive the same promise as "the poor in spirit," thus forming an *inclusio* between the first and eighth beatitudes. "The *inclusio* implies that the promises in beatitudes 2-7 are all different ways of saying the same thing, namely, 'theirs is the kingdom of heaven,' the promise of the first and eighth beatitudes."²⁴

Suggestions as to the correspondence of each beatitude to an OT promise of kingdom conditions are as follows:

²⁰Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew* 439.

²¹Ibid., 439-40.

²²The present tense ἐστίν (5:3) is a futuristic present as indicated by the future tenses in the second members of all the beatitudes to follow in vv. 4-9 (Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew* 446; Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1912) 40, Plummer, *Gospel According to S. Matthew* 50). The same is true for the present tense in 5:10.

²³Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* 199-200.

²⁴Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew* 460.

<i>Beatitude</i>	<i>OT Promise</i>
3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	Isa 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted [i.e., the poor]; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners;
4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.	Isa 61:2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn,
5 Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth [i.e., land].	Ps 37:11 But the humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.
6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.	Jer 31:25 For I satisfy the weary ones and refresh everyone who languishes. Isa 55:1 Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Ps 107:9 For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, and the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.
7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.	Ps 112:4 Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man. Ps 18:25a With the kind You show Yourself kind. Prov 14:21b But happy is he who is gracious to the poor.

<i>Beatitude</i>	<i>OT Promise</i>
<p>8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.</p>	<p>Ps 24:3-4 Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, and has not sworn deceitfully.</p>
<p>9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.</p>	<p>Isa 9:6-7 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of <i>His</i> government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.</p>
<p>10 Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p>	<p>Ps 69:4, 7, 9 Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me. I am forced to restore what I did not steal. . . . For I endure scorn for your sake, and shame covers my face. . . . for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.</p>

Discerning what Jesus meant in the beatitudes by γῆ in Matt 5:5b is extremely important, as illustrated by the rendering in most (if not all) English translations: “they shall inherit the earth.”²⁵ In observing the Messianic tone of the sermon, a few have noticed how misleading it is to translate τῆν γῆν by “earth” in light of God’s promise that Abraham and his descendants would inherit the land of

²⁵E.g., KJV, NASB, NIV, ESV, HCSB, RSV, NRSV.

Canaan.²⁶ Psalm 37:11 serves as the background for this beatitude, and in that psalm, $\gamma\eta$ certainly has the meaning of “land” rather than the whole earth. On this issue, Nolland writes,

In Ps. 36(37):11 the $\gamma\eta$ (‘land’) to be inherited is clearly the land of Israel, in the context of God’s covenant promise to his people. But since $\gamma\eta$ can also mean the ‘earth’, what about the meaning in Matthew? The interest in [Matt] 4:25 in the scope of historic Israel (see discussion there) and the evocation of exile and return in the opening beatitudes weigh in favour of Matthew’s also intending $\gamma\eta$ to refer to Israel as the land of covenant promise.²⁷

In contrast to Nolland and the historical background of the Sermon on the Mount, Davies and Allison raise similar questions, but have a different answer. They advance three main reasons for concluding that inheriting $\tau\eta\nu\ \gamma\eta\nu$ is “nothing more than a symbol for inheriting the spiritual kingdom of heaven.”²⁸ They continue. (1) “Throughout Matthew nationalistic hopes—which are otherwise absent from 5.3–12—are undone.”²⁹ (2) With one possible exception, the unqualified $\gamma\eta$ in Matthew does not refer to Palestine, but to the earth.³⁰ (3) “[B]ecause in some sense the kingdom is already in some sense present (see on 4:17), the βασιλεία is necessarily spiritualized and divorced from geography. It would seem to follow, then, that in Mt 5.5 ‘to inherit the land’ has been spiritualized. . . .”³¹

Yet their three reasons are without merit. As for reason (1), it has been shown that nationalistic hopes of Israel are thoroughly ingrained in the other beatitudes, and Israel’s hope of Abraham’s promises’ being fulfilled is very much alive in the remainder of Matthew’s Gospel. Reason (2) ignores the meaning of $\gamma\eta$ in Ps 37:11, the source of this beatitude. Reason (3) misrepresents the meaning of Matt 4:17; “the kingdom of heaven has drawn near” does not announce an already present kingdom. To a degree, the issue boils down to what Jesus meant when He

²⁶E.g., Broadus, *Gospel of Matthew* 90.

²⁷Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* 202.

²⁸Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew* 450. Hagner joins Davies and Allison in his conclusion: “The ‘earth’ ($\tau\eta\nu\ \gamma\eta\nu$) originally referred to the land of Israel, i.e., what was promised to the Jews beginning with the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Gen 13:15). But in the present context of messianic fulfillment it connotes the regenerated earth (19:28; cf. Rom 4:13, where κόσμος replaces $\gamma\eta$), promised by the eschatological passages in the prophets (e.g., Isa 65–66)” (Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, in vol. 33A of *Word Biblical Commentary*, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker [Dallas: Word, 1993] 92–93).

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

spoke the words versus what Matthew meant when he wrote the words. If they differ from each other—which they do not—the ballot has to favor Jesus.

Yet, how many have ever noticed the mistranslation “earth”? A recent issue of *Christianity Today* contained a page of eight quotations from well-known Christian leaders, which dealt with Matt 5:5, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”³² Not one of the quotations alluded to the historical background of Jesus’ words in reference to the particular territory promised to Abraham in the OT. Most of the quotes simply extolled the positive qualities of meekness, implying that the pronounced blessing results from practicing that virtue and without noticing that the blessedness actually stems from the last half of the verse: possessing the land promised to Israel throughout the OT. One of the contributors to that page, D. A. Carson, in his commentary on Matthew, tries to justify the rendering of “earth” instead of “land” by surveying various usages of the word in the Gospel,³³ but doing that ignores the historical context on the occasion when Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. What Jesus intended and what His listeners understood clearly was the land of Israel over which David’s descendant will reign in the future Messianic Kingdom.

The use of traditional grammatical-historical principles requires that τὴν γῆν be a reference to the land promised to Abraham as part of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:7).

As an introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes are an abbreviated review of OT promises to Israel regarding Israel’s Davidic kingdom.

The Theme Verse

Matthew 5:20 has long been recognized as the theme verse of the Sermon on the Mount:³⁴ “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.” To read into this verse a rebuke of Christian antinomianism on the basis of Matt 5:19 which precedes it, as does Gundry,³⁵ is another flagrant abuse of the historical situation in which Jesus preached this sermon. Verse 19 reads, “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus simply rebukes the superficial rabbinic interpretation of the law as

³²Richard A. Kauffman, compiler, “Reflections: Quotations to Stir Heart and Mind,” *Christianity Today* 51/8 (August 2007): 48.

³³D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 8:134, 136.

³⁴Broadus, *Gospel of Matthew* 101; Plummer, *Gospel According to S. Matthew* 77; M’Neile, *Gospel According to St. Matthew* 60; Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew* 499.

³⁵Gundry, *Matthew* 82. Davies and Allison do the same (*Saint Matthew* 500).

reflected in the six antitheses in 5:21-48. Christian antinomianism is far removed from the historical context of Jesus' utterances in the Sermon on the Mount. It may have become an issue later in church history, but an evangelical interpreter is looking for Jesus' meaning, not an application made by the early church at a much later time.

Furthermore, to reason that the Pharisees sought with sincerity to "maintain the purity of Jewish faith against the inroads of Hellenistic culture"³⁶ and "that their level of hostility with Jesus indicates that they held a great deal of commonality with Jesus"³⁷ is specious reasoning. Matthew's harsh picture of the Pharisees must be historically accurate. Otherwise, Scripture would not have painted them that way. To be sure, they were highly respected in Judaism of the day, but Jesus in His teaching dwelt on the high level of corruption characterizing their leadership (see Matt 23:4-36). Davies and Allison attribute Matthew's harsh language in speaking of the Pharisees "to the fact that Matthew's Jewish contemporaries and opponents considered themselves heirs of the Pharisees, in which case our author would see his own enemies in those of Jesus."³⁸ In other words, they say, animosity toward the Pharisees when Matthew wrote his Gospel caused the negative picture of Pharisaism in Matthew's Gospel. That is historically erroneous. The Pharisees of Jesus' own day were the ones against whom Jesus used such strong language. They were guilty of misrepresenting the teachings of the OT. That is the only way to do justice to the historical reliability of Matthew's Gospel.

Such extremism is expected from those with a low view of biblical inspiration, but when it spills into the ranks of evangelicals who should know better, that is tragic. Keener exemplifies such looseness in handling Matthew's historical reliability:

Because ancient biography normally included some level of historical intention, historical questions are relevant in evaluating the degree to which Matthew was able to achieve the intention his genre implies. This does not require us to demand a narrow precision regarding details, a precision foreign to ancient literature, but to evaluate the *general* fidelity of substance.³⁹

³⁶Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew* 224-25.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 225.

³⁸Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew* 302.

³⁹Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 2-3 (emphasis added). A recent comment about Keener's *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* was surprising and disappointing. In *Bibliotheca Sacra* 655 (July-September 2007):377, David K. Lowery, Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, in reviewing John Nolland's *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, writes, "Both pastors and students will find help in understanding Matthew by their use of this [i.e., Nolland's] commentary. However, the commentary on Matthew by Craig S. Keener (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) is very useful for expository preaching and teaching." Neither commentary endorses the detailed historical accuracy of Matthew.

“General fidelity of substance” is all that he expects from Matthew. He expects nothing better than *guesses* on Matthew’s part:

In some cases, Matthew may have been following rhetorical practices of speech-in-character and historical verisimilitude, making Jesus fit what was known about him in general . . . and, given Matthew’s proximity to Jesus’ situation, his *guesses* are more apt to be correct than ours. In other cases, however, I am reasonably sure that Matthew has re-Judaized Jesus based on solid traditions available to him.⁴⁰

When Jesus told his disciples to teach their disciples to observe all things He had commanded them, He did not intend for His disciples to *guess* what some of those commands and teachings were. Through inspiration of the Gospels, He left them reliable accounts, not approximations, of those commands and teachings. Distorted interpretations of those accounts deprive Jesus’ disciples of an ability to teach observance of and obedience to all that He commanded.

The First Antithesis

Davies and Allison raise a significant question in connection with the first antithesis in the Sermon on the Mount (5:21-26). Does the term “brother” in 5:22 refer to a spiritual relative or to a fellow Israelite? They note the difficulty of the former possibility: “[I]t is a bit awkward for the evangelist to go on to mention the sanhedrin (5.22), the altar (5.23–4, and the prison (5.25–6): these are not peculiarly Christian things.”⁴¹ They note the equation of “brother” with “Neighbour” or “fellow Israelite” in Jer 22:18 and Luke 6:41-42.⁴² M’Neile concurs with that identification, “ἀδελφός . . . , like ὁ πλησίον . . . , would to Jewish ears mean only a fellow Jew. . . .”⁴³ Jesus preached the sermon to Jewish listeners, necessitating such a meaning. That observation could well carry throughout the sermon whenever the word “brother” occurs. The same would hold true in Matt 5:47 and 7:4. Throughout, He does not refer to Christian brothers but to fellow Jews. A redactionist would say that Matthew in writing the book had Christian brothers of his own time in mind,⁴⁴ but the

⁴⁰Keener, *Gospel of Matthew* 13 (emphasis added).

⁴¹Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Matthew* 512-13.

⁴²Ibid., 513.

⁴³M’Neile, *Gospel According to St. Matthew* 61.

⁴⁴E.g., Wilkins takes “brother” as a reference to Jesus’ disciples in general (*Concept of Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel* 242; Donald A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *NIV Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994] 27; Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22 of *The New American Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery [Nashville: Broadman, 1992] 107).

issue from a historical standpoint is what Jesus meant by His use of “brother,” not something different that Matthew meant when he wrote the Gospel many years later.

Further indications of the historical inappropriateness in interpreting the Sermon on the Mount are the mentions of the Sanhedrin in 5:22 and the altar in 5:23-24. Jesus’ command to leave one’s offering at the altar until being reconciled with a brother was impossible to obey after destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. The altar no longer existed. Surely, Jesus did not expect His disciples to teach obedience to that command when He gave the Great Commission. Also, responsibility to the Sanhedrin taught in 5:22 was no longer in play after 70 because, for all practical purposes, the Great Sanhedrin ceased to function in Israel after the Romans destroyed the temple.

The importance of investigating historical background in the Gospels cannot be overstated. As Jesus conducted His public ministry, certain changes took place. A major change transpired when His own people refused to endorse His way of righteousness and were satisfied to continue in the corrupt ways they were being led. They refused to recognize His authority as their promised Messiah, forcing Jesus to pursue different courses of action as the ministry progressed. Failure to recognize the new courses of action has caused and will cause failure in an intelligent fulfilling of the Great Commission’s command to teach all nations to observe all that Jesus commanded.

IMPEDIMENTS SUMMARIZED

Impediments are currently at work in NT scholarship, both nonevangelical and evangelical, to keep the disciplined nations from fulfilling the Great Commission. Several illustrations from the Sermon on the Mount have shown “all that I commanded you” is not being taught in the purity intended by the Lord when He left the Great Commission.

A number of causes contribute to overly simplistic teaching of what Jesus commanded. Summarizing earlier comments, the following are impediments:

(1) Many sources fail to recognize that Jesus came to Israel first, and turned to Gentiles only after Israel’s rejection had become public and official. That failure has caused much misunderstanding of Jesus’ teachings through attempts to apply what He said to groups who are different from those whom Jesus encountered in Israel at His first advent. This is particularly true of the earlier phases of Jesus’ ministry, but has affected later phases as well.

(2) Rarely will one hear or read treatments on the Sermon on the Mount that take into account its close connection with God’s promises to David in 2 Samuel 7. In the context of Matthew 5–7, the Davidic kingdom is quite prominent. This neglect has resulted in many wrong approaches to that sermon and consequently also to all that Jesus told His disciples to observe.

(3) Another related impediment to teaching what the Great Commission requires is a misunderstanding of the purpose of the Beatitudes in tying the Sermon to the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants and their kingdom promises. How often have these “makarisms” been applied superficially, without regard for their promised reward that those who measure up to their standards are Israelites who will possess the kingdom promised to David! More specifically, that amounts to a misunderstanding of γῆ in Matt 5:5 and its specific reference to the land promises made to Abraham and David.

(4) More generally, neglect of the historical background of Jesus’ teachings and commands has resulted in a confusion of *application* to the church with the Sermon’s *interpretation* in relation to Israel. To be sure, interpreting the Sermon properly in the context of Christ’s ministry to Israel yields abundant legitimate applications to the church, but neglect of correct interpretation results in superficial and, often, erroneous applications to the church. Failures along historical lines include theological impediments also. Theologically, God has been and is dealing with Israel differently from the ways He is dealing with the body of Christ, the church.

(5) A further failure in fulfilling the Great Commission has a historical-critical understanding of Matt 5:17-20 to blame. When Jesus in 5:20 faults scribal and Pharisaic righteousness as insufficient for entering the kingdom of heaven, that blame has been shifted from Jesus’ immediate listeners and made to refer to problems confronting Matthew’s church at a time much later than Jesus’ personal sojourn on earth. Instead of faulting Israel’s leadership during Jesus time on earth, historical critics say Matthew fashioned the remarks in that verse to fit his own immediate readers.

(6) That mistake of faulting people of much later times accompanies recent trends among evangelical NT scholars in characterizing Matthew’s Gospel as only generally reliable. That concept, of course, relegates certain portions of the Gospel to the category of embellishments that are not historically accurate. Such an approach to Matthew as well as the rest of the Gospels makes impossible a carrying out of the teaching portion of the Great Commission.

In brief, the lesson in understanding what Jesus meant by “all that I commanded you” at the end of Matthew’s Gospel is a call to strive for a closer and more precise interpretation of Jesus’ teaching and commands in light of the circumstances in which they were given. “Teaching them to observe” requires no less than the disciples’ best efforts in understanding Jesus’ intent when He gave each of those teachings.

“GOD GAVE THEM UP”: A STUDY IN DIVINE RETRIBUTION

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*

Isaiah speaks of the judgment inflicted by God’s wrath as His strange act and His strange work. The Pauline picture of human history in Rom 1:18–3:20 tells more about God’s judgment and why it is “strange.” His threefold use of paredōken tells of God’s giving mankind over to deserved punishment, which is more than a permissive divine action and more than a privative action—a withholding of common grace. It must be a judicial act of God in imposing His wrath on mankind. The devolution in human history is reflected in the more recent tendency of society to accept the sin of homosexuality and other sexual deviations as a mere sickness and not as sin. Civilizations throughout the world, particularly in the United States, are hurrying to their destruction by neglecting the righteousness of God in Christ, thus bringing on themselves the judgment of God as described in Rom 1:18–3:20. This is God’s temporal judgment which is preliminary to His eternal judgment on a rebellious human race. Retributive justice is an attribute of God and a necessary feature of His actions toward unbelieving humanity.

* * * * *

Preaching to his Sunday congregation on Rom 1:18-32 in Bern, Switzerland, at the Münster, Walter Lüthi said, “In the words that we have just read we are told the whole truth about our condition. There may well be people among us who cannot bear to hear the truth, and would like to creep quietly away out of this church. Let them do so if they wish.”¹ There is much justification for Lüthi’s words, for Paul’s canvas upon which he has painted his picture—dark, foreboding, threatening, flashing with

*This article by a one-time Professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary is reprinted by permission from *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129/114 (April 1972):124-33.

¹Walter Lüthi, *The Letter to the Romans: An Exposition*, trans. Kurt Schoenenberger (Richmond, Va.: 1961)19.

lightning and crashing with thunder—is crammed with forms and figures, fights and shadows, of sin, wrath, and judgment. And the revelation of wrath is total and complete, encompassing all and rendering all without excuse and under condemnation, both individually and collectively.

Isaiah has spoken of judgment as God's "strange work" and His "strange act"² (cf. Isa 28:21, AV), and the idea that it is strange because contrary to His goodness and grace, while a popular contemporary misunderstanding of his words, is not only out of harmony with the context of Isa 28:21, but it also does not agree with the total picture of the being and attributes of God in Scripture. His retributive justice is one of His essential properties, and in this passage in Romans it comes to the center of the stage. In the threefold *paredōken* (AV, "gave up"; vv. 24, 26, 28) the problem is plainly before the reader. It is the purpose of this article to analyze and, if possible, clarify the meaning of the term, setting it within the context of the theology of the being and attributes of God. But first, a word regarding the flow of the Pauline thought in this section of the letter.

After having introduced this message to the Romans (cf. 1:1-7) and stated his theme, the gospel (1:16-17), the apostle skillfully and in detail develops the case-history of human sin and condemnation (1:18-3:20). The section moves from the declaration of Gentile sin³ (1:18-32) through Jewish sin (2:1—3:8) to the climax of the apostolic diagnosis that "all the world" is guilty, with every mouth stopped, speechless in the terror of condemnation before a holy and righteous God (3:9-20).

In the immediate context Paul, in his endeavor to prove that the only righteousness available to man is that obtained by faith, declared that God's displeasure toward sin has been revealed from heaven (1:18). It follows, of course, that all who are charged with ungodliness or unrighteousness stand under His wrath and cannot obtain acceptance before God by their character or conduct. That the Gentiles are guilty and, therefore, inexcusable is evident, because they have enjoyed a revelation of God's eternal power and deity and yet have rejected it (1:19-20).⁴ And

²There is nothing unusual about the Hebrew adjectives זר and נכריה, translated "strange" in the AV, except perhaps their emphatic position. That is their meaning. The NASB has "unusual" and "extraordinary."

³Martin prefers to define the subjects as "the Greek religious type, man without special revelation," but the sense is the same. Cf. James P. Martin, "The Kerygma of Romans," *Interpretation* xxv (July, 1971):311

⁴In an earlier article it was pointed out that natural revelation exists, but its light is not fully appropriated because of human sin. *Notitia* and *assensus*, two of the basic elements of faith, may be present as a result of God's revelation of Himself in nature, but the vital element of faith, *fiducia*, is never given through natural revelation. In its place is the rebellion of suppression. Cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill and trans. by Ford Lewis Battles, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol. xx (2 vols.; Philadelphia, 1960); T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Grand Rapids, 1959); Edward A. Dowey, Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York and London, 1965). A recent article of some worth by Gerald J. Postema is

not only have they rejected the light of this truth, they have given themselves up to idolatry (1:21-23). The Pauline picture of the religious history of mankind is one of retrogression, not progression, of devolution, not evolution, downward, not upward. In unbelief man has passed from light to futility to folly. Thus, the divine wrath has found its justification in human rejection of “the truth of God” (1:18, 25).

There remains, therefore, only one alternative for God and man, divine retribution, and it is this that the apostle so solemnly, and yet vigorously,⁵ proclaims in the final section of chapter one (1:24-32). The *dio* (AV, “wherefore”) makes the connection. In the light of the rebellion just described, the inference of vindictory justice is drawn. Sin justly brings judgment,⁶ a judgment expressed most clearly in the following three verses of this final section of chapter one.

The Biblical Revelation

24 Wherefore God *gave them over* (Gr., *paredōken*) in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them.

26 For this reason God *gave them over* (Gr., *paredōken*) to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for the unnatural.

28 And just as they did not see fit to retain the full knowledge of God, God *gave them over* (Gr., *paredōken*) to a depraved mind, to do the things which are not proper (Rom 1:24, 26, 28).

The Interpretation of the Revelation

The essence, the heart, the *Leit Motif* of the passage and the divine judgment is expressed in the threefold *paredōken* (AV, “gave up,” vv. 24, 26 ; “gave over,” v. 28), repeated as a terrifying refrain.⁷ It is a term over which there has raged considerable debate, and it is to the elucidation of it that this article is addressed.

“Calvin’s Alleged Rejection of Natural Revelation,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* xxiv (November 1971):423-34.

⁵ Godet thinks there is more than vigor here; there is a feeling of indignation. He writes, “The verses have something of that *παροξυσμός*, that *exasperation of heart*, of which the author of the Acts speaks (xvii.16) when describing Paul’s impressions during his stay at Athens” (F. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. by A. Cusin [2 vols.; Edinburgh, 1881] 1:177).

⁶ The Byzantine text and some of the leading representatives of the Western text have a *καί* (AV, “also”) following *διό*. If this were genuine, it would suggest the harmony of the nature of the punishment and the offence. Godet has put it well, “They sinned, *wherefore* God punished them; they sinned by degrading God, *wherefore also* God degraded them” (1:177). Zahn appears to incline towards its genuineness, too. Cf. Theodor Zahn, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* (Leipzig, 1910) 96.

⁷ Cf. M.-J. Lagrange, *Saint Paul Épître aux Romains* (4th ed.; Paris, 1930), p. 28. He remarks that the term’s threefold occurrence is not climactic, but is a kind of refrain.

Generally speaking, there are three contending viewpoints.

First, perhaps the favorite interpretation of the term is that which has prevailed since the time of Origen and Chrysostom, in which the *paredōken* is taken in the permissive sense. According to this view God passively permitted men to fall into the retributive consequences of their infidelity and apostasy. The active force of *paredōken* is surely contrary to this view. It is not that God permitted rebellious men to fall into uncleanness and bodily dishonor; He actively, although justly in view of their sin, consigned them to the consequences of their acts. It is His divine arrangement that men by their apostasy should fall into moral impurity, sin being punished by further sin, and He himself maintains the moral connection between apostasy and impurity by carrying out the judgment Himself.⁸

Second, another popular view, which became current after the time of Augustine, takes the *paredōken* in the privative sense. According to this interpretation God deprived man of an aspect of His work of common grace. He withdrew His hand that had restrained men from evil. Godet has expressed and illustrated this interpretation about as well as it can be set forth. "Wherein did His action consist?" he asks. And the answer follows, "He positively withdrew His hand; He ceased to hold the boat as it was dragged by the current of the river. This is the meaning of the term used by the apostle, Acts xiv.16 : 'He *suffered* the Gentiles to walk in their own ways,' by not doing for them what He never ceased to do for His own people. It is not a case of simple abstention, it is the positive withdrawal of a force."⁹

At bottom this view is the practical equivalent of the permissive view. This is evident from the fact that Godet uses Acts 14:16 as illustrative of the sense. However, in that passage the verb used is *eiasen* (AV, "suffered"), which normally means simply to permit. As Meyer pointed out a long time ago, "Therefore Chrysostom not only explains it by *eiasen*, but illustrates the matter by the instance of a general who leaves his soldiers in the battle, and thus deprives them of his aid, and abandons them to the enemy. Theodoret explains it: τῆς οἰκειίας προμηδείασε γύμνωσε,¹⁰ and employs the comparison of an abandoned vessel. Theophylact illustrates the *παρέδωκεν* by the example of a physician who gives up a refractory patient (*παραδίδωσιν αὐτὸν τῷ ἐπὶ πλέον νοσεῖν*¹¹)."¹² These illustrations express quite well the privative view, but the Pauline language is stronger than this. The

⁸Cf. Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. John C. Moore from 5th German ed. (2 vols.; Edinburgh, 1881) 1:86.

⁹Godet, *Epistle to the Romans* 1:177-78.

¹⁰The clause may be translated, *he stripped (them) of his own foresight*.

¹¹The words may be rendered, *he delivers him over for further suffering*.

¹²Meyer, *Epistle to the Romans* 1:86.

expression, “God gave them up to uncleanness,” describes a judicial act,¹³ a “judicial abandonment.”¹⁴ The active force of *paredōken* must not be glossed over.¹⁵

Therefore, finally, it becomes clear that the term must be given a judicial sense.¹⁶ The meaning is not simply that God withdrew from the wicked the restraining force of His providence and common grace, although that privative sense is included in the judicial sense, but that He positively gave men over to the judgment of “more intensified and aggravated cultivation of the lusts of their own hearts with the result that they reap for themselves a correspondingly greater toll of retributive vengeance.”¹⁷ The usage of the word in both this epistle (4:25 ; 6:17 ; 8:32) and other Pauline Epistles (cf. 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20) supports this force.¹⁸ The interpretation is also in harmony with the occurrence of the precisely identical form in Acts 7:42, where, in speaking of Israel’s apostasy in the days of Moses, Stephen says, “Then God turned, and *gave them up* (Gr., *paredōken*) to worship the host of heaven.” Both the Romans and the Acts passages describe the act of God as a penal infliction of retribution, the expression of an essential attribute of God’s nature and being, and it is thoroughly consistent with His holiness.

There is another striking occurrence of the identical form of the verb in Eph 4:19, and that passage serves to remind the interpreter that the infliction of punitive justice does not compromise the free agency and responsibility of man. In that passage Paul, speaking of the sin of the Gentiles, writes, “Who being past feeling have given themselves over (Gr., *paredōken*) unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” In the midst of the retributive action of God there is no coercion of man. God does not entice or compel to evil.¹⁹ Man remains responsible and can even be said to be giving himself over to uncleanness while God gives him up to the judgment of his sin.

¹³John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) 1:44.

¹⁴Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1909) 58; Zahn, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* 96-97.

¹⁵Cf. Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer* (11th ed.; Göttingen, 1957) 58; Zahn, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* 96-97. Both point out that Paul’s expression must not be weakened, but neither develops the question theologically.

¹⁶Schlatter points out that *παρέδωκεν* is the usual word for the sentence of a judge. Cf. A. Schlatter, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit* (Stuttgart, 1959) 66.

¹⁷Murray, *Epistle to the Romans* 1:44-45.

¹⁸See Friedrich Büchsel, “*δίδωμι et al.*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 2:170.

¹⁹Hodge, *Epistle to the Romans* 45.

Concluding Questions

There is hardly any passage in the Bible that says plainer than this one that moral depravity is the result of the judgment of God. And this raises an interesting question that concerns the present moral condition of the nations of the world, and particularly of the United States of America. The question is this: What is the real significance of the spread of immorality, crime, and violence in western civilization? To compound the problem, the newspapers are filled with stories of clergymen encouraging sexual license. Many Christian ministers, contrary to the Apostle Paul's teaching, no longer regard homosexuality and other sexual aberrations as a sin. It is rather a sickness, or a weakness. In an article in one of the national news magazines a few years ago homosexuality was referred to by the author as "an undesirable handicap."²⁰ To many today it is nothing more than a deviation from the customary sexual patterns, a third sex. Occasionally, in what must seem to the Christian the ultimate evil, homosexuality is traced to God Himself, for, it is said, He made men and women what they are!²¹

Some thirty years ago the famous Harvard sociologist, Pitirim Sorokin, in his book *The Crisis of Our Age*, warned that increases in crime, suicides, mental breakdowns, revolutions, and war have been symptoms of civilizations in the midst of death pangs. In another article on homosexuals in *Time* magazine the author wrote, "At their fullest flowering, the Persian, Greek, Roman and Moslem civilizations permitted a measure of homosexuality; as they decayed, it became more prevalent."²² Later Sorokin in his *The American Sex Revolution* pointed out that sex anarchy leads to mental breakdowns, rather than the other way around, as the Freudian psychologists have taught.²³ Further, he pointed out that increasing sexual license leads to decreasing creativity and productivity in the intellectual, artistic, and economic spheres of life.

What, then, are the sources of the problems of the present age? As Howard indicates, "Spengler had a biological answer: civilizations grow old and die like any other living thing. Toynbee has a religious answer: civilizations fail to respond to the higher challenges of the Spirit and therefore fossilize. In his *Civilization and Ethics*, Albert Schweitzer tried to find an ethical answer. St. Paul had still a different

²⁰"Homosexuality," *Time* (October 24, 1969):82.

²¹Of course, the truth of the matter is that homosexuality is a perversion of the created order. Cf. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957) 39.

²²"The Homosexual: Newly Visible, Newly Understood," *Time* (October 31, 1969):65.

²³Cf. I. E. Howard, "The Fever Chart of a Sick Society," *Christian Economics* (April 6, 1965):4. Howard's brief article is very suggestive, and the writer is deeply indebted to it.

answer.”²⁴

The Pauline answer is plain, and Romans 1:24 expresses it most impressively and succinctly. When man rebelled and sinned, God “gave them up” to uncleanness in the lusts of their hearts that by their own activities their bodies might be dishonored. In other words, sexual rebellion, license, and anarchy is the retributive judgment of God. The civilization of the western world, including the particular civilization of the United States of America, is not a civilization in danger of contracting a fatal disease. That civilization has already contracted a malignant and fatal cancer through its unbelief of the message of God in Christ. It is now hurrying on with increasing speed to final climactic destruction. Civilizations do not die because of violence, crime, immorality, and anarchy. These things are the evidences that death is already at work, a death brought on by disobedience to the revelation of God. Charles Hodge was referring to these principles when he said, almost one hundred years ago in reference to the Christian body of truth, “Religion is the only true foundation, and the only effectual safeguard for morality. Those who abandon God, He abandons. Irreligion and immorality. therefore, have ever been found inseparably connected.”²⁵

It should be carefully noted that the apostle is not speaking of eternal punishment in these three verses. What he has specifically in mind is a judgment that pertains to this life, not to the life to come. But, on the other hand, it is also plain that Paul’s words lead on to the doctrine of everlasting torment (cf. v. 32).²⁶ The vindictory judgment inflicted by God is continued in the life to come in a more terrible and permanent form if the escape through the gospel of the cross is neglected. The doctrine of eternal punishment has never been popular, and it is less so now. Even evangelical seminaries seem embarrassed by it.²⁷ There is an old story about Boswell and Dr. Samuel Johnson that contains solemn truth. When the latter once appeared overfearful as to his future, Boswell said, “Think of the mercy of your Savior.” “Sir,” replied Johnson. “my Savior has said that He will place some on his right hand, and some on his left.”

It is doubtful that there is a doctrine in the Bible easier to prove than that of eternal punishment (cf. Matt 25:46²⁸), a fact that reminds one of an incident involving Henry Ward Beecher and William G. T. Shedd, both eminent leaders of their day.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Hodge, *Epistle to the Romans* 45.

²⁶Cf. Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans* 38. He writes, “God’s judgment has already broken forth; only he has consigned sinners not to hell but to sin—if indeed these be alternatives.”

²⁷Cf. “Doctrinal Changes at Fuller,” *Christianity Today* (May 7, 1971):39-40 (767-68).

²⁸The twofold use of the adjective *aīōnion* (AV, “everlasting” and “eternal”) with *kolasin* (AV, “punishment”) and *zōēn* (AV, “life”) indicates that the punishment for sin is just as long as the life that God gives the faithful. Both are eternal. Many other passages express the same truth.

The *North American Review* engaged the two men for articles on the subject of eternal punishment, knowing the views of the two men. Beecher had once commented, "I believe that punishment exists, both here and hereafter; but it will not continue after it ceases to do good. With a God who could give pain for pain's sake, this world would go out like a candle." Shedd was asked to write an article supporting the doctrine, and Beecher was asked to answer it. When the proof sheets of Shedd's article were sent to Beecher he telegraphed from Denver to the magazine's editors, "Cancel engagement. Shedd is too much for me. I half believe in eternal punishment now myself. Get somebody else." The reply was never written by anyone. Shedd remained unanswered.²⁹ There is no answer, biblically, logically, or philosophically to the doctrine of eternal punishment.

There is a final question that one might ask regarding Rom 1:24 and its declaration of divine retribution. When did the retribution occur? When did God "give up" the nations? Is the apostle referring to a specific event or time in the past, or is he simply interpreting broadly man's history? In the collective sense the rebellion of men against God had its inception at Babylon, and it has been surmised that Paul may have had in mind the construction of the tower of Babylon and its destruction, with man's scattering, by God (cf. Gen 11:1-9). It is doubtful that Paul had this in mind. On the other hand, there are two things that point to the fall of man in the Garden of Eden as the event the apostle was thinking about. In the first place, the fact that Paul traces the entrance of sin into the human race specifically to Eden in Romans 5:12 suggests that 1:24 is to be understood in the light of that important event. It was there that man rebelled against light, the light of both natural and special revelation, and turned to darkness. And it was there that judgment was inflicted on account of his sin, a judgment that consisted of wrath and death, accompanied by consequent immorality and wickedness, as history indicates.

In the second place, the terminology of verses 22-23 points fairly clearly to the Genesis account. For example, the phrases "to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (v. 23) is surely reminiscent of "the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen 1:26; cf. vv. 20-25). And, further, the phrases "the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image (lit., *the likeness of an image*) made like to corruptible man" appear to come from the Genesis account's "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (1:26). It thus seems that Paul was thinking of the Genesis record in the Romans passage, and this would support the view that he regarded God's giving up of man to uncleanness as occurring at the time of the fall, recorded in the early part of that same Genesis record.³⁰ There, then, man fell into sin,

²⁹Cf. Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (rev. ed.; 3 vols.; Philadelphia: Judson, 1907) 3:1052-53.

³⁰Cf. M. D. Hooker, "Adam in Romans i," *New Testament Studies* 6 (July 1960):301.

judgment, and condemnation, with their inevitable companion, the retributive justice of immorality, crime, and all manner of evil.

In conclusion, one must conclude from Romans 1:24, 26 and 28 that retributive justice is an attribute of the living God and a necessary feature of His actions toward unbelieving man. To the question, “Can God really give man up to judgment?,” this passage provides a resounding “yes” answer. But, in fact, it is not the final and convincing answer to the question. That comes from the cross of Jesus Christ, which in the cry it elicits from our Lord, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” unmistakably affirms the fact that God can give man up to judgment. It was there that the sinless Man bore the judgment of God upon sin, and it forever proclaims the true nature of sin—it is worthy of the penalty of spiritual and physical death—and God’s hatred of it with His necessary condemnation of it.

One might say, “Does God, then, really care?” The answer to this question also is obvious, and it, too, comes from the cross. It was God who gave the Son as the vicarious sacrifice; it was He who initiated the work that produced the remedy for sin and condemnation. And it was the Son who voluntarily bore in agony the depths of the vindicatory judgment for sinners. And if that is not sufficient evidence of God’s love and concern, reflect further upon the fact that it is also He who has revealed to men their lost condition and the significance of the atoning death, inscribed its interpretation in the written Word of God and preserved that Word for countless millions to read and ponder. Isaiah was right. Although righteous and necessary, judgment is His “strange work” and His “strange act.”

A TEST CASE FOR CONJECTURAL EMENDATION: 2 PETER 3:10d

Aaron K. Tresham*

Bart Ehrman has raised a question as to whether some portions of the original NT have been lost while through the years the text has been copied. The process of trying to restore words that may have been lost is called conjectural emendation. Among scholars, three views about the need for conjectural emendation have arisen: the optimistic view which contends that no words have been lost, the mixed perspective which says that perhaps a few but not many words have been lost, and the pessimistic view that many words have been lost. Since conjectural emendation is so subjective, an effort to reach a firm conclusion is fruitless, but it is helpful to observe that no text exists for which the need for emendation is universally acknowledged. A more helpful approach is to select 2 Pet 3:10d for examination because many scholars have suggested the need for emendation of this text. The textual problem in that verse centers in the reading of the last word εὑρεθήσεται. This word finds good support in the external witnesses, but is quite problematic in regard to how it fits its context. Numerous conjectures regarding how to replace the word have emerged, some of them quite insufficient and some of them more plausible. The best explanation which comes from Bauckham accepts the correctness of the reading εὑρεθήσεται and assigns it the meaning of "discovered." Thus the need for conjectural emendation in 2 Pet 3:10d is erased.

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The topic of textual criticism, usually reserved for a small group of scholars and their students, came to the public's attention through the surprising success of

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Bart Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus*.¹ The first four chapters present a popular introduction to textual criticism, and according to Daniel Wallace, "a very good one at that."² The last three chapters popularize one of Ehrman's earlier works,³ in which he argued that ancient scribes intentionally altered the words of Scripture. He suggests that the original text of the New Testament may have been lost in some places.⁴ What good are the doctrines of inerrancy and inspiration if the original text is unavailable today? According to Ehrman, since God failed to preserve the words of Scripture (in the way Ehrman thinks He should have), God never inspired those words in the first place.⁵

Ehrman's conclusion does not follow from the evidence he presents, but Ehrman does raise an interesting question. Over the centuries, have some of the original words of the NT been lost through the process of copying? Is there a particular passage for which scribal corruptions (intentional or not) have rendered every extant manuscript incorrect? If so, modern scholars would be forced to restore the original text by making an educated guess, a process known as "conjectural emendation."

The Need for Conjectural Emendation

Scholarly opinion regarding the need for conjectural emendation in textual criticism of the NT can be divided into three camps. Some scholars are very optimistic about the textual tradition and deny the need for conjectural emendation. Other scholars are more pessimistic and claim that emendation should be one of the regular tools of the textual critic. The third camp, which might be called "mixed" for lack of a better term, falls between the other two. Great variety exists in this camp, but these scholars tend to be generally optimistic while admitting the need for conjectural emendation in some cases. The "mixed" scholars accept emendation in theory, but tend to deny it in practice.

¹Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005). This book reached number five on the *New York Times* best seller list (nonfiction) in April 2006.

²Daniel B. Wallace, "The Gospel according to Bart: A Review of Bart D. Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*," Summer 2006, http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=4000 (accessed 14 Aug. 2008).

³Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁴Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus* 211.

⁵*Ibid.*, 11, 211.

Optimistic Perspective

Among the major scholars of textual criticism, only Kurt and Barbara Aland present a completely optimistic view. They claim that tenacity is one impressive characteristic of the transmission of the text of the NT. They note, "Once a reading occurs it will persist with obstinacy."⁶ If errors prove to be so tenacious, then certainly original readings must endure as well. Perhaps this is one reason they write, "Textual difficulties should not be solved by conjecture."⁷ A second reason that conjectural emendation in the NT is unnecessary is the tremendous amount of external evidence (as compared with any other ancient writings). Noting the overwhelming number of manuscripts, lectionaries, early versions, and patristic quotations currently extant, they conclude, "We can be certain that among these there is still a group of witnesses which preserves the original form of the text, despite the pervasive authority of ecclesiastical tradition and the prestige of the later text."⁸ It is interesting that the Alands hold to such a position without any reference to the preservation of the text by divine providence. Instead, they seem to have been convinced by years of study of the documentary evidence itself.⁹

Mixed Perspective

Most textual critics do not share the Alands' optimism. B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort are generally optimistic. After Hort discusses primitive errors (i.e., errors for which the original is unattested in the extant textual tradition) and conjectural emendation for several pages,¹⁰ he concludes, "The place of Conjectural Emendation in the textual criticism of the New Testament is however so inconsiderable that we should have hesitated to say even thus much about it."¹¹ However, he takes up the issue again later in the book.¹² He notes the argument of some that it is

⁶Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theology and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, 2nd ed., trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 291.

⁷Ibid., 280.

⁸Ibid., 292.

⁹However, one may wonder if the Alands' optimism is based, at least in part, on holding a high view (perhaps too high) of the resources available at the Institute for New Testament Textual Research in Münster (which are impressive, indeed).

¹⁰B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek with Notes on Selected Readings* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1882; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988) 66-72.

¹¹Ibid., 72.

¹²Ibid., 276-84.

inconceivable that any true words of Scripture have been lost. Hort responds,

In reply it is a sufficient *argumentum ad hominem* to point to the existence of various readings, forming part of various texts accepted for long ages, and the frequent difficulty of deciding between them, even though we say nothing of difficulties of interpretation: on any view many important churches for long ages have had only an approximately pure New Testament, so that we have no right to treat it as antecedently incredible that only an approximately pure New Testament should be attainable now, or even in all future time.¹³

A second argument offered against emendation is the numerous incorrect conjectures proposed in the past. Hort argues that just because someone made a wrong emendation, this does not imply that no emendation was necessary.¹⁴ On the other hand, Hort acknowledges the overwhelming evidence for the text of the NT. Thus he adds, “The external evidence is therefore such that on the one hand perfect purity is not *a priori* improbable, and a singularly high degree of purity is highly probable; and yet the conditions are not such—it is difficult to see how they could ever be such—as to exclude the possibility of textual errors.”¹⁵ Therefore, Westcott and Hort were of the opinion that conjectural emendation may be necessary, but only rarely.¹⁶

In their well-known work, Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman also discuss conjectural emendation. They suggest caution:

A typical emendation involves the removal of an anomaly. It must not be overlooked, however, that though some anomalies are the result of corruption in the transmission of the text, others may have been either intended or tolerated by the author himself. Before resorting to conjectural emendation, therefore, the critic must be so thoroughly acquainted with the style and thought of the author that a certain anomaly must be judged to be foreign to the author’s intention.¹⁷

They add that too many scholars resort to conjectural emendation prematurely: “Corruptions in the Greek and Latin classics (including the New Testament) have

¹³Ibid., 276-77.

¹⁴Ibid., 277.

¹⁵Ibid., 279.

¹⁶Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman note that Westcott and Hort marked about 60 passages where they suspected a primitive error (*The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005] 229; they provide a full list [ibid., n. 54]). A. T. Robertson says 65 passages were marked by Westcott and Hort as primitive errors (*An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* [Nashville: Broadman, 1925] 238-39); his list disagrees with that of Metzger and Ehrman in eight verses. By way of comparison, the editions of Tregelles, Tischendorf, and Weiss each have one conjectural emendation, although not in the same place (Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament* 230).

¹⁷Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament* 227.

frequently been assumed without adequate reason—as though, indeed, for the mere sake of showing off one’s cleverness in proposing an alternative reading.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, they believe that emendation does have a role to play: “One must admit the theoretical legitimacy of applying to the New Testament a process that has so often been found essential in the restoration of the right text in classical authors.” However, they also note that because of the nature of the external evidence “the necessity of resorting to emendation is reduced to the smallest dimensions.”¹⁹

French textual critic Leon Vaganay observes, “Conjectural emendation is not uncommon in the field of classical philology.” Since there are a small number of texts available, at times the text is so incomprehensible that it has to be restored by conjecture.²⁰ He admits that emendation of the NT has been abused. He notes, “As early as 1772, W. Bowyer, in his *Conjectures on the New Testament collected from various authors*, gives a great many tenuous and even puerile corrections. . . . And yet this does not mean that conjectural emendation must be ruled out in establishing the text of the New Testament.”²¹ He believes that modern scholars are better equipped to deal with the text than ancient scribes: “It is worth remembering that some particular manuscript variant that is widely attested may well be nothing more than a conjectural emendation made by an inexpert reviser, and consequently carries less weight than the hypothesis of a modern philologist.”²² Thus, Vaganay does not rule out the need for conjectural emendation, although he believes that it should be used only with “wisdom and restraint.” He also makes an interesting suggestion: “It would be sensible to confine conjectural emendations, even the best of them, to the critical apparatus of the editions of the Greek New Testament, until such time as new discoveries provide evidence for them.”²³ It is evident that emendation is an uncertain exercise.

A. T. Robertson, the great Greek grammarian, also believes that conjectural

¹⁸Ibid., 228.

¹⁹Ibid., 230. Based on Ehrman’s own writings (cited above), it seems that he is more pessimistic than Metzger. In the fourth edition of *Text of the New Testament*, it is suggested that the amanuensis who recorded Paul’s dictation could have made a mistake (ibid., 273). In that case, the autograph itself would require emendation! One might surmise that this suggestion reflects the influence of Ehrman. The chapter in which this appears was not present in the third edition written by Metzger alone (Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: It’s Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992]).

²⁰Leon Vaganay, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 2nd ed., rev. and updated by Christian-Bernard Amphoux, trans. Jenny Heimerdinger, English ed. amplified and updated by Christian-Bernard Amphoux and Jenny Heimerdinger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 84.

²¹Ibid., 85.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 85-86.

emendation may be necessary: "We possess no Greek ms. and no early version that are free from errors of some kind. It cannot be assumed therefore that no errors were made by copyists during the hundred or two hundred years intervening between the autographs and our earliest documentary evidence."²⁴ Robertson would acknowledge far fewer primitive errors than Westcott and Hort; nevertheless, "in some cases it is highly probable that all the mss. known to us have been led astray."²⁵ However, Robertson suggests caution: "Conjectural emendation is not to be employed until all the methods of textual criticism have been exhausted and unless clear occasion for its use can be shown in each instance. . . . No conjecture can be considered that does not satisfy the demands of both transcriptional and intrinsic evidence."²⁶ Moreover, "Speculation is inevitable where so much is at stake as in the New Testament. But certainly sobriety of judgment is constantly needed."²⁷

Benjamin Warfield (upon whom Robertson depends) presents a similar viewpoint. He also thinks that Westcott's and Hort's list of proposed primitive errors is much too long, and he insists that conjectural emendation should be used only as a last resort, after all the other tools of textual criticism have been exhausted. He adds, "The only test of a successful conjecture is that it shall approve itself as inevitable."²⁸ By this criterion, it seems likely that no conjectural emendation will ever be approved. If the history of emendation is any guide, there will always be nearly as many emendations as there are textual critics. If scholars cannot agree on the emendation, then clearly none has proven to be "inevitable." Nevertheless, Warfield discusses two areas where conjectural emendation may be necessary: (1) in the case of a disputed reading, where the evidence for the variants is too conflicted to be harmonized, and (2) in the case where there are no variant readings, but for which internal evidence indicates the presence of corruption.²⁹ This theoretical position is more extreme than Warfield's practical position. Emending the text when no variants exist is even more dangerous than emending the text when variants do exist. Every word becomes subject to the whims of scholars bent on producing a NT text that satisfies their own desires. Warfield cautions that two extremes must be avoided: (1) finding errors everywhere, even when good sense can be made of the text, and (2) denying the presence of any corruptions, no matter how great the

²⁴Robertson, *Introduction to Textual Criticism* 237-38.

²⁵Ibid., 239.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., 241.

²⁸Benjamin B. Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 5th ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1896) 209.

²⁹Ibid., 206-7.

evidence.³⁰ This may be fine in theory, but in practice no passages have evidence so overwhelming that the need for emendation is universally accepted.

Frederic Kenyon, a well-known scholar of the text from a century ago, claims that textual criticism has two methods: “the comparison of documentary evidence, and conjecture.” He notes that conjecture will be less frequent when the documentary evidence is more substantial. Conversely, when documentary evidence is lacking, conjecture will have to take a larger role. However, he admits, “In the case of the New Testament the documentary evidence is so full that conjecture is almost excluded.”³¹ Some have said that there is no place for conjectural emendation in the textual criticism of the NT, since there is so much documentary evidence. However, the prevailing view sees the majority of manuscripts as representing a late recension (i.e., the Byzantine text) with little textual value.³² Kenyon observes, “The number of authorities which remain is thus comparatively small, and they differ considerably among themselves; and hence critics of this school are prepared to admit that, here and there, the original readings may have been wholly lost.”³³ He continues, “It is universally agreed, however, that the sphere of conjecture in the case of the New Testament is infinitesimal; and it may further be added that for practical purposes it must be treated as non-existent.” Kenyon also notes a practical reason for this: “No authority could be attached to words which rested only upon conjecture; and a critic who should devote himself to editing the Scriptures on conjectural lines would be merely wasting his time.”³⁴

David Black examines a number of proposed emendations of the text of Matthew’s Gospel. He concludes, “Of the seventeen proposed emendations examined here, only one was judged to be viable, and even this conjecture cannot be raised to the level of certitude. The other suggestions represent genuine but purely speculative efforts to deal with the problems in these texts.”³⁵ Black does not reject emendation *a priori*, but he thinks that emendation should not “be exercised in a vacuum, leaving out many plausible interpretations which deal with the Greek MS tradition in its extant form.” He believes, “Rather than resorting to conjecture, it is more scientific, not to say more humble, to admit that in some instances we may not understand enough about the transmitted text to be able to grasp exactly what it says.” Too many scholars

³⁰Ibid., 208.

³¹Frederic G. Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1912) 7.

³²Ibid., 16.

³³Ibid., 17.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵David Alan Black, “Conjectural Emendations in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Novum Testamentum* 31/1 (January 1989):14.

seem to assume that if they have difficulty understanding the text, then the text is wrong, and of course they know how to correct it.³⁶ The evidence that suggests a corruption to some scholars may simply demonstrate that those scholars have misunderstood the text as it stands. There is always a danger that the modern critic could “correct” an original reading, assuming that he understands what should have been written better than the original author of inspired Scripture.

Pessimistic Perspective

Michael W. Holmes supports the need for conjectural emendation not only in theory but also in practice. He asserts that external evidence may not lead back to the autographs, so intrinsic probability is needed, including textual emendation if necessary.³⁷ Holmes observes that even those textual critics who admit the theoretical need for emendation rarely, if ever, resort to it in practice. He asserts, “This failure amounts to a squandering of our resources, a neglect of evidence entrusted to us by the accidents of history that could, if properly used, enable us to penetrate beyond the limits of the extant tradition.” He admits that there is less need for emendation of the NT than other ancient documents, “but we must not confuse *less* need with *no* need.”³⁸ Holmes provides the example of Lightfoot’s work on *1 Clement*. For his first edition, he had only one manuscript (Codex Alexandrinus). He detected several errors and suggested emendations. Between the first and second edition, new evidence came to light which supported several of Lightfoot’s conjectures.³⁹ On the other hand, Holmes admits that there were also places where the “original” reading (as preserved in the newly discovered manuscripts) could not have been reasonably conjectured.⁴⁰ This should raise questions about emendation in general. If the external evidence does not lead to the autograph, there is no guarantee that it leads anywhere close enough to make an accurate conjecture. Indeed, emendation is subjective and lacks adequate controls. Every word is potentially subject to emendation, and there is no guarantee that any proposed emendation is correct, or that any reasonable emendation could possibly be correct given the state of external evidence available.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Michael W. Holmes, “Reasoned Eclecticism in New Testament Textual Criticism,” in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, eds. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes, 336-60 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 347-48.

³⁸Ibid., 348.

³⁹Ibid., 349. Holmes cites J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers, Part I: S. Clement of Rome*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1869; 2nd ed., 1890).

⁴⁰Holmes, “Reasoned Eclecticism” 349 n. 63.

John Strugnell offers the least optimistic view of the text.⁴¹ Of those who claim that emendation is never necessary he asks, “Is there any *special* condition affecting the history of the NT’s transmission which *guarantees* that no conjectural emendation is necessary or possible?” His answer is clearly, “No.” Of those who admit that emendation may be necessary, but only rarely, he asks, “Is there any *special* condition affecting its attestation or transmission that renders emendation, in practice, *infinitely rarer* than in the other texts of classical antiquity?”⁴² It is evident that he offers the same answer to this question. He observes that the attestation of the NT “is to be contrasted, we are told, with that of the classics (where the legitimacy of emendation is universally granted) by the variety, comparative excellence, and antiquity of the witnesses to the text.”⁴³ He denies these three arguments, asking, “Is the case of the NT any different from that of one of the better-preserved classical texts?”⁴⁴ Strugnell does not think so. He admits that employing conjectural emendation always comes with the inevitable danger of correcting the original author. However, he thinks the author himself may have been mistaken. The critic may be able to fix “any irrationalities of the author, or accidents in his autograph, that the author would himself have corrected had his attention been drawn to them.”⁴⁵ He suggests that the assumption that the original reading is preserved somewhere in the tradition implies “a manner of transmission of the NT text that is both inconsistent with what we know historically of early Christianity and distinct from the manner of transmission of all other books.” For this assumption to be correct, there must have been supernatural help in the transmission of the text, “a theologoumenon whose necessity escapes me.”⁴⁶ Strugnell argues that “even if one maintains strongly the verbal inspiration of Scripture, this need not entail the impropriety of textual criticism or even conjecture, unless one declares one particular form of text or MS to be inspired—and again we ask ‘what form, and what are the criteria for choosing it?’”⁴⁷

G. D. Kilpatrick offers a response to Strugnell.⁴⁸ He agrees with Strugnell that one should not believe that “some special Providence” has ensured that at any

⁴¹John Strugnell, “A Plea for Conjectural Emendation in the New Testament: With a Coda on 1 Cor 4:6.,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36/4 (October 1974):543-58. The title of his article makes his position clear.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 545 (emphasis in the original).

⁴³*Ibid.*, 548.

⁴⁴*Ibid.* He offers the works of Virgil as an example.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 550.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 551.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 554 n. 25.

⁴⁸Kilpatrick may belong under the “mixed” category (although he would be closer to the pessimistic side), but he will be included here since his essay responds to Strugnell.

particular point the original text has survived somewhere in the textual tradition. He writes, "If such were the case, we might wonder why this Providence has not exerted itself a little further to ensure that at each point of variation the original reading would be manifest and immediately demonstrable."⁴⁹ Kilpatrick argues as follows: Suppose one accepts that an original reading has survived in only one extant witness. Then how does he know that another original reading was not contained only in a portion of that same witness that is no longer extant? For example, among Greek manuscripts ρ ⁷⁵ alone has $\pi\lambda\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$ at John 4:41, which Kilpatrick suggests is original (although it is not adopted by UBS⁴). If so, then how does one know whether another original reading was preserved only in another part of ρ ⁷⁵, which has now been lost?⁵⁰ Kilpatrick concludes, "We cannot assert that the original form of the text has for certain survived at every point somewhere or other among our witnesses." Thus, he admits the theoretical necessity of emendation. However, he also adds, "If we want to go beyond this and argue that in fact there are passages where the original form of the text has been lost, then we must produce convincing examples where this has happened."⁵¹ Theory is not enough; clear examples must be found. Moreover, Kilpatrick states, "We must admit that even if we are agreed that the text of a passage is corrupt it does not follow that we are agreed about the emendation."⁵² This raises some doubt about the supposition that the text is corrupt.

Kilpatrick believes, "Probably the majority of deliberate changes in the early years of the transmission of the NT were linguistic."⁵³ Ancient copyists tended to correct the text if it seemed to be in error. In other words, "they were altering the text by conjecture, but probably regarded themselves as restoring what authors had written."⁵⁴ Therefore, many errors in the text arose through ancient conjectural emendation, and Kilpatrick's solution to the problem is more conjectural emendation! If none of the ancient emendations are correct, then why should one trust Kilpatrick to make the correct emendation centuries later, especially since many of the alleged emendations were made by copyists from cultural and linguistic backgrounds much closer to the original authors' than Kilpatrick's?

⁴⁹G. D. Kilpatrick, "Conjectural Emendation in the New Testament," in *The Principles and Practice of New Testament Textual Criticism: Collected Essays of G. D. Kilpatrick*, ed. J. K. Elliott, 98-109, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 96 (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1990) 99.

⁵⁰Ibid., 99.

⁵¹Ibid., 100.

⁵²Ibid., 101.

⁵³Ibid., 106.

⁵⁴Ibid., 107.

Kilpatrick admits the uncertain nature of this exercise: “Time and time again we find indications that our conjectures are themselves unsatisfactory. We may put the difficulty this way. If the conjectures were transmitted text instead of being a conjecture, we could have seen reason for calling this transmitted text into question.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, since he believes that most deliberate changes were linguistic, he expects “that a large proportion of our conjectures in the NT would be linguistic.” However, this does not turn out to be the case. “Linguistic conjectures are few and far between. The majority of conjectures deal with marginal matters which constitute only a small proportion of variant readings. These considerations imply that the direction of much conjectural emendation is misdirected, an implication that strengthens our doubts about much conjectural emendation as practised.”⁵⁶ He concludes, “Basically I think conjecture in the NT a dubious enterprise.”⁵⁷ Kilpatrick thinks that conjectural emendation should not be rejected *a priori*, but he sees it as merely one way (among many) of dealing with textual problems.⁵⁸

Conclusion

It is evident that experienced textual critics disagree about the state of the evidence. Some are very optimistic about the tenacity of the textual tradition and are certain that the vast amount of textual evidence is sufficient for establishing the original. Others cannot rule out the presence of primitive errors, which would require conjectural emendation. One would like to assume that the Holy Spirit preserved His Word, but the existence of variants in the first place should make one cautious about assuming what God “must have done.” In fact, many Christians throughout history never had access to a text of the NT apart from one which is now known to have been corrupt. Be that as it may, there is a difference between the theoretical usefulness of emendation and actually finding a passage where emendation is necessary. In practice, emendation is a very subjective enterprise. There is no text for which the need for emendation is universally acknowledged, and even if there were, it is highly unlikely that scholars would agree on the correct emendation.

This article is not intended to solve the theoretical question; instead, the focus of this article is the text of 2 Pet 3:10d, which many scholars believe requires conjectural emendation. Despite the claims of many scholars, the best attested reading of this verse does make sense in context, and thus conjectural emendation should not be pursued in this case.

⁵⁵Ibid., 107-8.

⁵⁶Ibid., 108.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid., 109.

External Evidence for the Text of 2 Peter 3:10d

It is clear that ancient scribes had difficulty understanding the text of 2 Pet 3:10d, and so they resorted to a number of conjectural emendations which have been preserved in the textual tradition. In the UBS⁴, the clause reads καὶ γῆ καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ ἔργα εὐρεθήσεται. The extant variants replace the underlined portion:⁵⁹

Text	English Translation	Major Witnesses
εὐρεθήσεται	will be found	ⲛ B K P 424 ^c 117 1739 ^{txt} 1852 syr ^{ph, h_{ms}} arm Origen
κατακαήσεται	will be burned up	A 048 049 056 0142 33 614 <i>Byz Lect</i> syr ^h cop ^{bo} eth
ἄφανισθήσεται	will disappear	C
οὐχ εὐρεθήσεται	will <i>not</i> be found	Sahidic and one MS of Harclean Syriac
εὐρεθήσεται λυόμενα	will be found <i>dissolved</i>	ρ ⁷²
omit the whole clause		Ψ vg Pelagius

The external evidence clearly favors the reading εὐρεθήσεται. Metzger writes, “The oldest reading, and the one which best explains the origin of the others that have been preserved, is εὐρεθήσεται.”⁶⁰ Hort claims, “External evidence is here strongly favorable to εὐρεθήσεται. . . . Internal evidence of transcription is absolutely certain on the same side, for εὐρεθήσεται fully accounts for all four other readings . . . while no other reading will account for the rest.”⁶¹ The problem with this clear choice is making sense of it in the context. Omanson observes, “It is hard to make any sense of this reading, so it is not surprising that copyists and translators of ancient

⁵⁹Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) 636; Roger L. Omanson, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006) 500-501.

⁶⁰Metzger, *Textual Commentary* 636.

⁶¹Westcott and Hort, *Introduction*, 280.

versions introduced a variety of changes.”⁶²

This difficulty is reflected in modern English translations. Some try to make sense of εὑρεθήσεται: “will be disclosed” (NRSV; HCSB), “will be laid bare” (NIV; NET Bible), “will be exposed” (ESV; NCV), “will be found to deserve judgment” (NLT), or “will be brought to judgment” (REB). Some translate κατακαήσεται (NASU; RSV; NKJV),⁶³ while one translates ἀφανισθήσεται (TEV).

J. B. Mayor notes that οὐχ εὐρίσκομαι denotes “disappearance” in Ps 37:36 (LXX); Job 20:8 (LXX); Dan 11:19 (Θ); Rev 18:21.⁶⁴ Indeed, Charles Bigg concludes that οὐχ εὑρεθήσεται is probably correct.⁶⁵ Tord Fornberg is sympathetic with this view. He believes that the reading εὑρεθήσεται is so difficult that it must be rejected despite good manuscript support. Thus, he suggests that οὐχ εὑρεθήσεται makes better sense (cf. Rev 16:20; 18:21), although he admits, “The great weakness of the reading is of course the lack of Greek manuscript support.”⁶⁶ However, he thinks the reading of ρ⁷² (εὑρεθήσεται λυόμενα) communicates the same idea. Fornberg concludes, “It appears impossible to decide which reading is original. Since the introduction to v11 seems to assume that v10 refers to destruction or nonexistence, the wording of ρ⁷² and the Sahidic translation must carry a significance akin to that intended.”⁶⁷ Richard Bauckham agrees that οὐχ εὑρεθήσεται “gives excellent sense,” but he insists, “It should properly be considered as an emendation rather than a variant reading. Its two occurrences (in ancient versions, not in Greek MSS) have no chance of preserving the original reading, but they might be correct *emendations* of the text.”⁶⁸ He adds, “As an emendation, the addition of οὐχ is the simplest proposed, and yields such an excellent sense that it must be considered the best solution unless

⁶²Omanon, *Textual Guide*, 500.

⁶³One commentator notes, “κατακαήσεται (‘will be burned up’) has found little support among the commentators (von Soden), but more support than it deserves among the English translations (AV, RV, RSV, JB). It cannot be original because it would then be impossible to explain the other readings” (Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary 50 [Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983] 317).

⁶⁴J. B. Mayor, “Notes on the Text of the Second Epistle of Peter,” *The Expositor*, 6th series, 10 (1904):292. Mayor has “Dan ii. 19,” but he intends “Dan xi. 19.” The correct reference appears in idem, *The Epistle of St. Jude and the Second Epistle of St. Peter: Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Comments* (New York: Macmillan, 1907; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978) cc.

⁶⁵Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, 2nd ed., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902) 213.

⁶⁶Tord Fornberg, *An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society: A Study of 2 Peter*, trans. Jean Gray, Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series 9 (Lund, Sweden: GWK Gleerup, 1977) 76.

⁶⁷Ibid., 76-77.

⁶⁸Bauckham, *2 Peter* 317 (emphasis in the original).

the reading εὑρεθήσεται can be given a satisfactory interpretation.”⁶⁹

Some suggest that the same effect as οὐχ εὑρεθήσεται could be obtained without the negative by punctuating as a question: “Will the earth and the works in it be found?” J. N. D. Kelly adopts this interpretation. He writes, “In the Bible ‘find’ or ‘be found’ frequently approximates to ‘be’ or ‘exist,’ and when used in the negative or cast in the form of a question can convey the sense of non-existence.”⁷⁰ However, he admits that there are problems with this understanding, “notably the abrupt switch to an interrogation.”⁷¹ Mayor comments, “I do not think we can give this force to the simple question.”⁷² Similarly, Metzger believes this solution “fails to commend itself.”⁷³

Likewise, the reading of ρ⁷² has found few proponents, despite offering the earliest known copy of 2 Peter.⁷⁴ It seems to have added the participle based on λυθήσεται earlier in verse 10 or λυόμενων in verse 11, but this overloads the context with three occurrences of the same verb.⁷⁵

Conjectural Emendations of the Text of 2 Peter 3:10d

Hort is certain that the best attested reading is εὑρεθήσεται. However, “it is hardly less certain by intrinsic probability that εὑρεθήσεται cannot be right: in other words, it is the most original of recorded readings, the parent of the rest, and yet itself corrupt.”⁷⁶ Similarly, G. van den Heever insists that εὑρεθήσεται is a corruption: “If εὑρεθήσεται did make sense, the major part of the tradition would not have found it

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 365.

⁷¹Ibid., 366.

⁷²Mayor, “Notes on the Text,” 292; idem, *Second Epistle of St. Peter* cc. Mayor asserts that punctuating as a question “is extremely harsh: it should at least have had a ποῦ prefixed, as in 1 Pet. 4¹⁸” (ibid., 160).

⁷³Metzger, *Textual Commentary* 636. Fornberg adds, “The suggestion that it is a rhetorical question is far-fetched” (*Early Church in a Pluralistic Society* 75), and Bauckham concludes, “This is forced” (2 Peter 318).

⁷⁴Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament* 58. They suggest this papyrus dates to the third century.

⁷⁵Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 636; G. van den Heever, “In Purifying Fire: World View and 2 Peter 3:10,” *Neotestamentica* 27 (1993):108. Bauckham adds that the reading of ρ⁷² “seems not to have commended itself to any scholar. In spite of our author’s tendency to repeat words, the clumsy repetition of λύεσθαι three times in vv 10-11 is unlikely” (2 Peter 317).

⁷⁶Westcott and Hort, *Introduction* 280.

necessary to change the text into something more intelligible.”⁷⁷ Metzger also thinks εὔρεθήσεται “seems to be devoid of meaning in the context.”⁷⁸

Modern scholars are not satisfied with the ancient emendations, so they make conjectures of their own. Metzger and Omanson provide a thorough list of the various suggestions,⁷⁹ reproduced on the next page. Bauckham concludes, “Some of these proposed emendations are more plausible than others, but we should not resort to emendation unless εὔρεθήσεται proves incapable of a satisfactory sense.”⁸⁰ This seems to be the best way to deal with any such textual issue.

⁷⁷Van den Heever, “In Purifying Fire” 116.

⁷⁸Metzger, *Textual Commentary* 636.

⁷⁹Ibid., 636-37; Omanson, *Textual Guide* 501. Mayor adds, and rejects, ἃ ἐν αὐτῇ ἔργα εὔρεθήσεται. (“Notes on the Text” 292; idem, *Second Epistle of St. Peter* cc). Bauckham also cites εὔσεται, “will be singed,” and γῆ καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ ἀγρὰ εὔρεθήσεται, “the earth and all that is in it will be found as chaos” (2 *Peter* 317-18).

⁸⁰Bauckham, 2 *Peter* 318.

Emendation	English Translation	Emender
after ἔργα the word ἀγρά has fallen out	the earth and the things in it will be found <i>useless</i>	Bradshaw
replace εὔρεθήσεται with ρύησεται or ῥεύσεται	the earth and the things in it will <i>flow</i>	Hort**
replace εὔρεθήσεται with συρρῦσεται	the earth and the things in it will <i>flow together</i>	Naber
replace εὔρεθήσεται with ἐκπυρωθήσεται	the earth and the things in it will be <i>burnt to ashes</i>	Olivier***
replace εὔρεθήσεται with ἀρθήσεται	the earth and the things in it will be <i>taken away</i>	J. B. Mayor****
replace εὔρεθήσεται with κριθήσεται	the earth and the things in it will be <i>judged</i>	Eberhard Nestle
replace εὔρεθήσεται with ἰαθήσεται (or ἐξιαθήσεται)	the earth and the things in it will be <i>healed (thoroughly)</i>	Chase*****
replace εὔρεθήσεται with πυρωθήσεται	the earth and the things in it will be <i>burned</i>	Vansittart*****

**See also Hort, *Notes on Select Readings*, 103. Mayor says, “The required sense would be given by καταρῦσεται or διαρῦσεται, but not, I think, by the simpler ρύησεται. . . . Dr. Chase thinks that διαρῦσεται receives some support from Enoch i. 6, and also that it is nearer to εὔρεθήσεται than καταρῦσεται” (*Second Epistle of St. Peter* cc).

***G. Milligan also draws attention to this emendation of Olivier, who suggested that ΕΚΠΥΡΩΘΗΣΕΤΑΙ was mistakenly written as ΕΥΡΩΘΗΣΕΤΑΙ with ΚΠ written above the line as a correction. Later this became ΕΥΡΕΘΗΣΕΤΑΙ, when the letters above the line were omitted and E was substituted for Ω (“2 Peter iii. 10,” *Expository Times* 32/7 [April 1921]:331).

****See also Mayor, “Notes on the Text” 292; idem, *Second Epistle of St. Peter* 160.

*****Mayor writes, “[Chase] suggests, however, that possibly ἰαθήσεται or ἐξιαθήσεται may be the true reading, in accordance with the words addressed to Gabriel in Enoch x. 7, ἴασον τὴν γῆν ἣν ἠφάνισαν οἱ ἐγγήγοροι, and in anticipation of καινὴν γῆν in ver. 13 below (the three clauses in vv. 12b, 13, answering to the three clauses in v. 10); but he allows that ‘ver. 11 seems to require some verb implying destruction at the end of ver. 10’” (“Notes on the Text” 292; idem, *Second Epistle of St. Peter* cc).

*****Mayor observes, “Dr. Abbott suggests πυρωθήσεται, as in v. 12, or πυρευθήσεται, as in Plat. *Legg.* 843 E” (*Second Epistle of St. Peter* 160 n. 4). According to Mayor, Vansittart proposed that the variants may be explained by supposing the archetype had become illegible in places. For example, after the first and fourth letters had disappeared, a scribe conjectured [ε]υρ[ε]θήσεται (ibid., cc).

The Interpretation of 2 Peter 3:10d

None of the conjectural emendations listed above has found widespread support. In spite of the claim that the best reading (εὐρεθήσεται) makes no sense, a number of scholars have sought to demonstrate that an acceptable interpretation can be made without emending the text. Some of the suggested interpretations of εὐρεθήσεται will not commend themselves, but others will provide sufficient evidence to reject the need for conjectural emendation.

Insufficient Explanations

Rawson Lumby suggested that 2 Pet 3:10 should be interpreted in light of Eccles 12:14: “For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (NASU). No matter how much something tries to stay hidden on the Day of the Lord, it still “will be found.”⁸¹ Larry Overstreet finds two problems with this suggestion. First, there is no clear connection between the Day of the Lord and Eccles 12:14. “Second, the judgment in Eccles 12:14 applies only to every work ‘of man’ (see v. 13), while the reference in 2 Pet 3:10 refers to the earth in addition to all the works therein.”⁸²

Joseph Leach appeals to Rev 20:11-15 and refers the “will be found” of 2 Pet 3:10 only to the works, which will be discovered at the great white throne judgment.⁸³ Overstreet agrees that there is a connection between this verse and the great white throne judgment. However, Leach is mistaken when he limits “will be found” to the works in the earth. Leach makes a second mistake “in referring the works here in Peter to Revelation 20:12-13 and the works of man, for in Revelation 20:11 the earth and the heaven ‘fled away’ from the great white throne. If the earth has already fled away and no place is found for it (v. 11), how could it and the works therein be referred to in verses 12-13?”⁸⁴

Overstreet suggests that 2 Pet 3:10d should be punctuated as a question. As was seen above, this approach is rejected by most commentators. However, Overstreet argues that a solemn, thought-provoking question would fit the solemn context. He writes, “This was a question to which Peter did not expect a simple yes or no answer, but a question designed to cause his readers to stop and ponder on this

⁸¹J. Rawson Lumby, *An Exposition of the Bible*, 6 vols. (Hartford, Conn.: S. S. Scranton, 1910) 6:750, cited by R. Larry Overstreet, “A Study of 2 Peter 3:10-13,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137/548 (October 1980):356.

⁸²Overstreet, “2 Peter 3:10-13” 356.

⁸³Joseph V. Leach, “The Biblical Theology of Peter” (research paper, San Francisco Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964) 25, cited by Overstreet, “2 Peter 3:10-13” 356.

⁸⁴Overstreet, “2 Peter 3:10-13” 356.

cataclysmic event which was to come. It was a question which would prepare them for the following statement concerning their own life of godliness.”⁸⁵

Frederick Danker notes, “Most commentators . . . insist that a word is required which characterizes the destruction of the earth and of the achievements wrought in it. All the variants and conjectures, with the exception of Eberhard Nestle’s κριθήσεται, point in the same direction, emphasis being placed on the *mode* of judgment.”⁸⁶ However, Danker examines the context and concludes, “In the concluding phrase of vs. 10 we anticipate not a verb which describes the *mode* of judgment, but one which expresses the fact of a *judicial process*.”⁸⁷ He notes that Psalm of Solomon 17:10 (Rahlfs, 17:8) reads: κατὰ τὰ ἀμαρτήματα αὐτῶν ἀποδώσεις αὐτοῖς, ὁ θεός, εὐρεθῆναι αὐτοῖς κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν. He states, “The *parallelismus membrorum* leaves no doubt that the word εὐρεθῆναι is here understood in the sense of judicial inquiry culminating in a penal pronouncement. This is precisely the meaning that makes the Petrine passage intelligible.”⁸⁸ However, the parallel is not exact, so Danker emends 2 Pet 3:10 in light of Psalm of Solomon.

In place of

ΚΑΙ ΓΗ ΚΑΙ ΤΑ ΕΝ ΑΥΤΗ ΕΡΓΑ ΕΥΡΕΘΗΣΕΤΑΙ,

ΚΑΙ ΓΗ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΑ ΕΝ ΑΥΤΗ ΕΡΓΑ ΕΥΡΕΘΗΣΕΤΑΙ is to be read.⁸⁹

The change from *κατα τα* to *και τα* is a simple scribal error. Danker observes, “Indeed, this precise phenomenon appears in the textual tradition of vs. 13! Alexandrinus, which is among the manuscripts that read εὐρεθῆσεται [sic] in vs. 10, here reads *καί* in place of *κατά*.”⁹⁰ However, this is still not quite parallel to Psalm of Solomon 17, which has an impersonal construction with the dative. On the other hand, once the allegedly original *κατά* is restored, then it is a simple matter to replace *γη* with *γη*. Later scribes failed to understand, and interpreted ΓΗ as nominative rather than dative. Thus, the original text was: καὶ γη κατὰ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ ἔργα εὐρεθῆσεται. Danker concludes, “The text as restored requires no philological straining, ‘And it shall be found to the earth according to the works in it,’ i.e. ‘The earth shall be *judged* according to the deeds done in it.’”⁹¹ Danker’s solution is

⁸⁵Ibid., 358.

⁸⁶Frederick W. Danker, “II Peter 3:10 and Psalm of Solomon 17:10,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 53 (1962):83 (emphasis in the original).

⁸⁷Ibid., 84 (emphasis in the original).

⁸⁸Ibid., 85.

⁸⁹Ibid., 85-86.

⁹⁰Ibid., 86.

⁹¹Ibid. (emphasis in the original).

interesting, but replacing emendations of εὑρεθήσεται with conjectural emendations of other parts of the clause does not make such a solution acceptable.

Al Wolters accepts the reading εὑρεθήσεται, but he rejects the idea that the context envisions the coming judgment as cosmic annihilation. Instead, he sees the judgment “as a smelting process from which the world will emerge purified.” In light of this, he suggests that εὑρεθήσεται “is a metallurgical term appropriate to smelting and refining.”⁹² According to Wolters, in the Day of the Lord the cosmic elements will not “burn up”; instead, they will melt. Wolters suggests that Peter had Mal 3:2-4 in mind:

But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years (NASU).

Malachi pictures the Lord as a refiner purifying metals in the melting pot. In 2 Peter, the image is extended from the Levites to the entire cosmos.⁹³

Wolters notes that the passive of εὐρίσκω occurs again in verse 14 in the context of the Christian’s character. He writes, “The argument here explicitly connects the ethical blamelessness for which Christians are exhorted to strive to the newness of the future world of righteousness which will emerge from the crucible. The expression ‘to be found,’ like the phrase ‘without spot or blemish,’ apparently refers to the *eschatological survival* in the third world of righteousness begun in the second.”⁹⁴ Wolters believes that the passive of εὐρίσκω can have the connotation “to have survived, to have stood the test, to have proved genuine.” He finds support for this in the use of the passive of εὐρίσκω in 1 Pet 1:7, where surviving a purifying fire is mentioned: “So that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found [εὑρεθῆ] to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (NASU). Here the verb is used without a predicate, as in 2 Pet 3:10. Wolters believes that all three uses of the passive of εὐρίσκω (1 Pet 1:7; 2 Pet 3:10, 14) refer to “the eschatological result of a purification process.”⁹⁵ He finds further support in *Epistle of Barnabas* 21:6 and 2

⁹² Al Wolters, “Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 49/2 (Fall 1987):408.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 409.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 410 (emphasis in the original).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Clement 16:3.⁹⁶ Wolters suggests that the verb εὐρίσκω has a technical sense in the context of metallurgy. “Its meaning would then be something like ‘emerge purified (from the crucible),’ with the connotation of having stood the test, of being tried and true.”⁹⁷

However, van den Heever is not convinced. He argues that the alleged parallels (1 Pet 1:7; 2 Pet 3:14; *Barnabas* 21:6) do not have absolute uses of εὐρίσκω, as in 2 Pet 3:10. He claims, “In those contexts the use of εὐρίσκω is perfectly natural, being good idiomatic Greek. That would make 2 Pt 3:10 the only occurrence of the word where it carries the pregnant meaning of ‘found/was shown to be’ (in a metalworking sense).”⁹⁸ Thomas Schreiner also rejects Wolters’ interpretation. He thinks that Wolters provides a good explanation of the meaning of “earth,” but Wolters’ view does not seem to fit with the term “works.” Moreover, the Malachi passage does not refer to purification of the cosmos but of human beings. Schreiner also believes Wolters’ understanding of 2 Pet 3:14 is inadequate.⁹⁹

Better Explanations

William Wilson asks, “Is not εὐρεθήσεται alone really after all not only the best attested but also the most suitable, and in fact the original reading?”¹⁰⁰ He offers two arguments in defense of this reading. (1) The passage is understandable as it stands: “the earth and its works (i.e. men and their deeds) are laid bare before God. This is quite naturally stated from the Divine point of view in the word ‘discovered.’” (2) The context confirms this. Verses 11-13 return to the destruction of things (cf. v. 10a), then in verse 14 Peter urges his readers to watch and to “be found” in peace, spotless and blameless. One should compare Rev 6:15-16 (cf. Isa 2:19; Hos 10:8), which describe the wicked trying to hide from God; the worst thing for them is to be found.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶Ibid., 411.

⁹⁷Ibid., 412.

⁹⁸Van den Heever, “In Purifying Fire” 109.

⁹⁹Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003) 387.

¹⁰⁰William E. Wilson, “Εὐρεθήσεται in 2 Pet. iii. 10,” *Expository Times* 32/1 (October 1920):44.

¹⁰¹Ibid. Albert Bonus accepts Wilson’s approach, and he finds some support in Jer 10:18, Ezek 28:15, and 2 *Clem* 2:16. He concludes, “Thus εὐρεθήσεται is made to mean φανερωθήσεται” (Albert Bonus, “2 Peter iii. 10,” *Expository Times* 32/6 [March 1921]:281). With a similar approach, Hellmut Lenhard accepts εὐρεθήσεται, and he considers the use of the niphal of נָצַח in the OT. He also suggests “be found” means something like “become manifest.” He offers Jer 50:20 as the clearest parallel to 2 Pet 3:10 (“In those days . . . search will be made . . . for the sins of Judah, but they will not be found” [NASU]). He concludes: (1) the absolute use of εὐρίσκομαι is supported by the OT; (2) not only persons

Jerome Neyrey's approach is similar. He translates 2 Pet 3:10d, "The earth and all its works will be found out."¹⁰² He writes, "In light of forensic procedure, 'being found' is a plausible and contextually appropriate term. Evidently it implies that something will be revealed, uncovered, and brought to light, which might be goodness to be rewarded or evil to be requited."¹⁰³ He notes several biblical examples of "finding" (Acts 5:39; 13:28; 23:9; 24:20; 24:5; 1 Cor 4:2; Gal 2:17; Phil 3:9; 1 Pet 1:17; 15:15; 2 Pet 3:14),¹⁰⁴ and he concludes, "In the context of judgment, rewards, and punishments, then, 'being found' suggests forensic investigation of the heart, a quality regularly credited to God."¹⁰⁵

A potential problem with these approaches is that they seem to require that "the earth and the works in it" refer to people and their deeds. Douglas Moo notes that the context supports a reference to the judgment of the physical earth and things on it, such as buildings. "'Heavens' and 'earth' refer to the physical universe throughout this passage (see also vv. 5 and 7). And the continuation of Peter's thought in verse 11 also suggests that physical dissolution has been his point in verse 10."¹⁰⁶ Kelly agrees: "By the earth is meant, of course, our planet and not, as some advocate, its inhabitants; while the works which fill it are not human actions (inaptly described as 'the works in it,' and in any case they follow their authors to eternity—Rev. xiv. 13), but all the products of nature and, above all, of human culture, civilization, art and technology."¹⁰⁷ Fornberg adds, "If the author had had the sinful deeds of men in mind, the unity of the verse would be broken, since it otherwise describes God's creation."¹⁰⁸ He insists, "Nor is the possibility of giving the verb a juridical meaning ('to reveal' or 'to discover') plausible. This meaning of the verb εὐρίσκεισθαι is first documented in Byzantine times, and can hardly be

and things, but also acts can "be found"; (3) it is particularly true in the eschaton that certain acts are "found," that is "become manifest" (Hellmut Lenhard, "Noch einmal zu 2 Petr 3 10d," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 69 [1978]:136).

¹⁰²Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, Anchor Bible 37C (New York: Doubleday, 1993) 236.

¹⁰³Ibid., 243.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 243-44.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 244.

¹⁰⁶Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 191. Mayor agrees: "ἔργα is to be understood here of all that man has wrought on the surface of the globe" (*Second Epistle of St. Peter* 160).

¹⁰⁷Kelly, *Epistles of Peter* 364-65.

¹⁰⁸Fornberg, *Early Church in a Pluralistic Society* 75.

expected when the earth and God's creations thereon is the subject."¹⁰⁹

Richard Bauckham's Explanation

Richard Bauckham provides an extensive discussion of the textual issue.¹¹⁰ He defends the reading εὑρεθήσεται as the most difficult reading and as that reading which best explains the origin of the others.¹¹¹ However, unlike so many other commentators, he does not think that this reading is so difficult as to be impossible. He notes the attempt of some scholars, who accept the reading εὑρεθήσεται, to give it the sense of "will be made manifest before God and his judgment." However, "The attempt to find a comparable usage of ἔσται ('to find') in the OT and εὕρισκον ('to find') in the LXX is not wholly successful. These verbs are certainly common in contexts concerned with moral and judicial scrutiny, but are not used in quite the same way as 2 Pet 3:10 uses εὑρεθήσεται."¹¹² He observes three relevant categories, none of which fit the usage found here: (1) sin or righteousness is found (e.g., 1 Sam 25:28; 26:18; etc.); (2) someone is found righteous (e.g., Sir 44:17, 20; Dan 5:27 Q); (3) a criminal is found, that is, discovered or caught (e.g., Exod 22:8; Deut 22:22, 28; etc.).¹¹³ Despite the lack of exact parallels, Bauckham thinks that OT usage could have influenced the choice of words in 2 Peter: "At least it could provide the word with generally judicial overtones, and when full weight is given to the passive form as a 'divine' passive, meaning 'will be discovered by God,' a plausible sense is obtained."¹¹⁴ Bauckham suggests that "εὑρεθήσεται is being used synonymously with φανήσεται ('will appear'), φανερωθήσεται ('will be made manifest') or φανερόν γενήσεται ('will become manifest'), as used in similar contexts (Mark 4:22; Luke 18:17; John 3:21; 1 Cor 3:13; 14:25; Eph 5:13; 2 Clem 16:3), but with the added connotation that it is God, the Judge, who will 'discover' the earth and its works."¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 75-76. Similarly, Kelly rejects interpreting εὑρεθήσεται as "will be laid bare" in the sense of "discovered and exposed to divine judgment." The problem is that "here, apart from the great difficulty of giving 'will be found' the sense proposed, the idea which looms in the foreground is rather the annihilation of the earth and all it contains; this is demanded both by the preceding two verses and by the opening words of verse 11" (*Epistles of Peter* 365).

¹¹⁰Bauckham, *2 Peter* 316-21.

¹¹¹Ibid., 303 n. c.

¹¹²Ibid., 318.

¹¹³Ibid., 318-19.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 319, emphasis in original. Similarly, Moo says of εὑρεθήσεται, "The word can have the connotation 'be manifest,' and the passive form of the verb probably has the nuance here of 'be manifest before God.' That is, the earth and 'all its works' will be manifest, disclosed in their fullness to God, at the time of judgment" (*2 Peter* 191).

¹¹⁵Bauckham, *2 Peter* 319.

Bauckham claims that the context supports his interpretation: “The section 3:5-10 is by no means concerned solely with the Parousia as cosmic dissolution, but is primarily concerned with the Parousia as judgment of the wicked. The destruction of the universe is of interest to the author only as the means of judgment of men and women.”¹¹⁶ Moreover, verses 11-14 “focus very explicitly on the moral dimension of eschatology.”¹¹⁷ In fact, there may be a deliberate contrast between εὑρεθήσεται in verse 10 and εὑρεθῆναι in verse 14.

Bauckham notes two major objections to this interpretation. First, “the context demands a reference to the annihilation of the earth.” As has already been noted, the focus of this passage is the judgment of the wicked; thus, Bauckham believes a reference to the judgment of the wicked is a more appropriate climax to verse 10. However, it is argued that the opening words of verse 11 (“Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way”; NASU) imply a reference to dissolution at the end of verse 10.¹¹⁸ Bauckham believes the author has a good reason for referring back to the destruction of the heavens in verse 11 instead of back to the judgment of humanity (v. 10d):

In vv 11-14 the author wishes to base his exhortation to his readers not only on the threat of judgment, but more broadly on the eschatological expectation of a new world of righteousness (v 13). Since the present world, the scene of human wickedness, is to disappear and be replaced by a new world, the home of righteousness, his readers should be the kind of people who will be able to live in that new world. Then when they face the judgment of God they will be found to be fit, not to perish with the old world, but to enter the new (v 14).¹¹⁹

Bauckham also cites a parallel passage found in *2 Clem* 16:3, “which proves that a description of the eschatological conflagration which climaxes in the exposure of human deeds to judgment need not be thought surprising in 2 Pet 3:10.”¹²⁰

The second objection is that following “heavens,” “earth” must be a reference to the physical earth and “the works on it” must refer to the contents of the earth, not to the deeds of humans. Bauckham responds, “It is true that in this context γῆ cannot be given the sense simply of ‘humanity,’ but it can easily mean the physical earth *as the scene of human history*, the earth as the dwelling-place of humanity.”

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 320.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 324.

¹²⁰Ibid., 321. The text reads, “The day of judgment is now coming like a burning oven, and some of the heavens will melt, and all the earth [will be] like lead melting in fire, and then the secret and open works of men will appear [φανήσεται]” (ibid., 320).

Since the author is thinking of the cosmic conflagration as a means of judgment, this usage of γῆ is natural.¹²¹

David Wenham believes Bauckham “argues persuasively that the reference is to divine judgment of human actions at the end of time—they will be ‘discovered’ by God.”¹²² Wenham admits that it is difficult to find parallels to this use of the verb εὑρίσκω. He suggests that the possible source is the eschatological teaching of Jesus:

Jesus’ eschatological parables refer on several occasions to the returning lord ‘finding’ his servants (Mt 24. 46/Lk 12. 43, Mk 13. 36, Lk 12. 37, 38). It is not specifically said that the master ‘finds the works’ of his servants, but this is certainly the meaning of the parables in question, since they refer to the master as leaving his servants with tasks to do. (The word ἔργον used in 2 Peter 3. 10 is actually found in Mk 13. 34 and in verbal form in Mt 25. 16, Lk 19. 16).¹²³

Wenham finds several other echoes of Jesus’ teaching in 2 Peter 3, such as the day of the Lord coming like a thief (an echo of Jesus’ parable of the thief) and the heavens and elements being dissolved and burned up (an echo of Matt 24:29 and parallels).¹²⁴ Wenham suggests that “εὑρίσκεσθαι is almost a technical term for being ‘discovered’ at the parousia.”¹²⁵

Conclusion

In his recent work on 2 Peter (published in 2003), Schreiner surveys all the data, and in the end he agrees with Bauckham. Schreiner writes,

The phrase refers, then, to the consequence of the burning of the heavens and the earth in the first part of v. 10. The earth and the works performed in it will be laid bare before God, and so the NIV translation [“will be laid bare”] effectively communicates the notion of divine judgment in the divine passive verb “will be found.” We should observe that in v. 7 the same pattern exists. The heavens and earth will be burned, and judgment will come upon the ungodly.¹²⁶

¹²¹Ibid. (emphasis in the original)

¹²²David Wenham, “Being ‘Found’ on the Last Day: New Light on 2 Peter 3. 10 and 2 Corinthians 5. 3,” *New Testament Studies* 33/3 (July 1987):477.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Ibid. One might also compare 2 Peter 3 with Rev 3:2-3, in which the image of a thief is used in the context of works being “found.”

¹²⁵Ibid., 479 n. 3; cf. Phil 3:9; 1 Pet 1:7; 2 Pet 3:14.

¹²⁶Schreiner, *2 Peter* 386.

Schreiner concludes, “It seems that this is the most satisfying way to explicate this remarkably difficult phrase.”¹²⁷

Whether Bauckham’s defense of the reading εὐρεθήσεται will stand the test of time and further scholarly scrutiny remains to be seen. There is always the possibility that further textual evidence could change the scholarly evaluation of the known variants. Nevertheless, it is clear that sense can be made of this difficult reading. Conjectural emendation would be both unnecessary and dangerous in this situation. Whether conjectural emendation is theoretically necessary or not, emendation is not helpful for establishing the text of 2 Pet 3:10.

Despite the pessimism of some scholars (such as Ehrman expresses in *Misquoting Jesus*), the text of the NT has been preserved remarkably well. Although no extant manuscript is free from error, the combined weight of evidence provides the highest level of confidence that God’s Word is available in an accurate form today. Any Christian can trust the modern critical Greek text and the translations which adhere to it. They effectively communicate the essence of God’s inspired, inerrant, and authoritative revelation to his church.

¹²⁷Ibid., 387.

DOES HEBREWS HAVE A COVENANT THEOLOGY?

Elliott Johnson*

The federal covenant theology posits a heavenly pre-existent covenant of grace which differs from the biblical New Covenant as stated in Jer 31:31-34. To answer the question, “Does Hebrews have a Covenant Theology?,” four themes for evaluating the federal theological covenant of grace are (1) the use of Scripture and the one people of God, (2) the unity between the Old and New Covenants, (3) the discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants, and (4) the warning passages and the doctrine of predestination. The epistle does not support the replacement of the houses of Israel and Judah by another people. Nor does Hebrews equate the New Covenant with one theological covenant existing from eternity past. It does support a discontinuity in moving from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. The federal theology model fails to allow for contingency found in the warning passages of the book. The federal covenant theology neglects Hebrews’ omission of any mention of a federal covenant established in eternity past, but the biblical covenant model does find textual support in four areas: (1) Scripture and the application of the New Covenant, being based on Hebrew’s extensive use of relevant OT texts; (2) covenant ratification and the coherent relationship between the first and the New Covenant, since the epistle bases the two covenants on different priesthoods; (3) discontinuity between the New Covenant and the last will and testament, since the last will and testament (9:16-17) is based on the death of Christ; (4) warning passages and the doctrine of inheritance, since there is contingency as well as predestination involved in receiving the promised blessings. The federal covenant theology model fails through a lack of textual support, but the biblical covenant model receives support because it recognizes distinct priests supported by distinct covenants for distinct services.

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“The most developed ‘new covenant theology’ in the NT is found in Hebrews.”¹ About that judgment there is little doubt. The question that remains is what is the New Covenant theology in Hebrews? Geerhardus Vos, an eminent federal covenant theologian at the beginning of the twentieth century, framed the parameters of the discussion that continues until today.² On one axis is what he called “the philosophy of the history of revelation.”³ By this he referred to the viewpoint taken about the historical sequence between the Old and New Covenants. The second axis he captured in the question, “what is the stable, the constant substance that underlies the ceaseless never-resting change”⁴ in history?

His answer to this question combined with the first axis posits his view of the covenant theology of Hebrews. “The bond that links the old and the new covenants together is not a purely evolutionary one, inasmuch as the one has grown out of the other; it is, if we may so call it, a *transcendental bond*: the New Covenant in its preexistent, heavenly state reaches back and stretches its *eternal* wings over the old and the Old Testament people of God were one with us in religious dignity and privilege; they were to speak in a Pauline figure, sons of the Jerusalem above, which is mother of all.”⁵ In other words, the stable element is a heavenly theological New Covenant of grace expressed in the essence of the historical New Covenant. The changeable elements are the historical expressions of the Mosaic and the New Covenant. It is this model of a pre-existent, eternal state of the New Covenant that covenant theologians find in Hebrews.

However, before examination of this claim in the literature, a definition of a biblical covenant⁶ will be considered. Hebrews does not define the term as Vos uses it, but Hebrews’ use is consistent with the following proposed definition.

¹ Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2007) 201.

² Geerhardus Vos, “Hebrews, The Epistle of the Diathēkē,” *The Princeton Theological Review* XIII (1915): 587-632; idem, “Hebrews, The Epistle of the Diathēkē,” *The Princeton Theological Review* XIV (1916): 1-61.

³ Vos, “Hebrews, The Epistle of the Diathēkē,” *The Princeton Theological Review* XIV 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶ This definition is formulated based upon consultation of these sources: M. Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” *JAOS* 90/2 (1970):194-203; G. Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” *Biblical Archaeology* 17 (1954); and D. J. McCarthy, “Treaty and Covenant,” *Analecta Biblica* 21 (1963).

A *biblical covenant* is an arrangement⁷ unilaterally revealed by God specifying the human party or partner⁸ participating in the arrangement. A formal ceremony ratifies⁹ the arrangement by oath and/or sacrifice.

Based on this definition, the new arrangement in Hebrews was enacted or established¹⁰ on better promises (8:6). This enactment is by divine decree and does not include the stated parties, the house of Israel and the house of Judah (8:8), according to Jer 31:31. The ratification rests on the establishment of only One Party, God. The other party is quoted (8:8) and further specified in the summary (10:16). It is a covenant *with them* rather than *with us* (10:16, 17). Thus Hebrews views the New Covenant blessings as applied to those who are called (3:1; 9:15) and who receive the benefits (9:15) as beneficiaries. But the called ones are not textually specified as covenant partners.

Further, the covenant is *not* ratified with Jesus Christ as the second party to the covenant, as though He needed the benefits. Rather He with God mediated the ratification (8:6; 9:15; 12:24). He assures the covenant function as the Surety of the better covenant (7:22). The stress in Hebrews is on Jesus' Melchizedekian priesthood (Hebrews 7), whose ministry assures the proper functioning of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8 and 10). The Epistle is more appropriately viewed as teaching a priestly theology which assures a New Covenant ministry.

The question of this article is: Does Hebrews have a covenant theology? Two models will be considered. The first model to be considered bases the theology

⁷"Arrangement" rather than "agreement" specifies the substance of a covenant because the terms are unilaterally revealed without any consultation with the participating partner. Even in Israel's acceptance of the terms: "all that the Lord has said we will do" (Exod 19:3 and 24:3, 7), there was no negotiated agreement. The existence of the arrangement was conditioned on Israel's acceptance, but substance of arrangement was not influenced.

⁸*Metechoi* (3:1, 14) described the participation in some common privilege rather than *koinōnos*, which describes a shared relationship. While it can be translated, "partners," as in Luke 5:7—"his partners' in the other boat"—most translations and commentaries view the verb in Hebrews as "partake" or "share." That partaking emphasizes benefiting in the privileges.

⁹*Ratify* means the endorsement involved in "cutting a covenant" as formulated in the Hebrew Scripture. Although *ratify* is commonly used as a synonym for *inaugurate*, distinguishing between the two terms is better. *Ratify* is accomplished in the ceremony which formalizes the arrangement as legal. *Inaugurate* originates the functioning of the arrangements in some sense. It is often associated with degrees of fulfillment. As an example, the Abrahamic covenant was *ratified* as Abram slept (Gen 15:9-21). The covenant was inaugurated with the birth of Isaac, the initial heir (Gen 21:1-7), or inaugurated more completely in the initial possessing of the land (Joshua 5-11).

¹⁰*Nenomothētai*—"The verb ('to fix by a law') makes no allusion to the *Torah*. 'Nomos' here has the wide sense of 'divine decree'" (Jean Hering, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* [London: Epworth, 1970] 67). The term emphasizes One Party who ratifies the arrangement by decree.

of Hebrews on the federal theological covenant of grace.¹¹ And this covenant of grace exists in a pre-existent form before it was revealed by Jeremiah as the New Covenant.

Four themes will facilitate an evaluation of the claim:

1. The use of Scripture and the one people of God
2. The unity between the Old and the New Covenants
3. The discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants
4. The warning passages and the doctrine of predestination

Three of the themes assume continuity and one discontinuity.

Federal Covenant Theology Model

1. Scripture and the one household of God

Hebrews uses Scripture in two distinct ways. One use applies Scripture to Jesus. Hebrews introduced the Son as the One through whom God now speaks in the last days (1:2). At least, this refers to the One who first announced salvation (2:3), none other than Christ Jesus (3:1). Following the prologue (1:1-4), Hebrews applies various Scriptures to Jesus which were originally addressed to or spoke about the Son (1:5-14).

An example is Ps 2:7 (1:5). Though Hebrews does not specify when this applied, Paul had applied the psalm at the climax of His first advent and at His ascension (Acts 13:33). This was not to say that Jesus did not bear the name of God's Son during the days of His humiliation (Luke 3:25; 9:25; Heb 5:8). As a father begets a son, so the process of begetting Jesus reached a climax when the Father resurrected Him from the dead and when the Father elevated Jesus into glory. And though Hebrews does not specify fulfillment, these applications imply fulfillment in reference to Jesus (1:5, "Today I have begotten You").

In the second use, Hebrews applies Scripture to its readers. The question is whether the Scriptures are also to be taken as fulfilled in the readers. Psalm 95, contained in the canonical Psalter, was originally used by or addressed to Israel in worship. Jeremiah 31:31 specifically states that the New Covenant was addressed "to the house of Israel and the house of Judah." Hebrews applies these passages that Jeremiah had promised to Israel to its readers as called ones (3:1 and 9:15).

However, the writer of Hebrews also viewed himself and his readers as "of

¹¹The reasoning of Covenant Theology is derived from theological covenants. It represents the whole of Scripture as being governed by two covenants: (1) The covenant of works between God and the first Adam, (2) The covenant of grace treated under two aspects, (a) the Godward aspect between God and Christ (covenant of redemption), and (b) the manward aspect between God and the believer (the promise of eternal life) (George N. M. Collins, "Covenant Theology," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Harrison and Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960] 144).

the same house” (3:6) as Israel. Does he mean the people of the same house replace the people of Israel? Does he further mean that since the Tabernacle of the first covenant is fulfilled in God’s heavenly dwelling, that the New Covenant now fulfills the first covenant, or that the New Covenant has always existed as God’s dwelling has always existed and just now has been revealed?

The image of “house” refers to both a building and to the people who use it (household).¹² In the original generation, God’s house referred to both the Tabernacle and to Israel who served God through it. Moses was featured as faithful in that generation of God’s people as a servant. Both in building the Tabernacle and in speaking, he was faithful “to testifying to the things that were to be spoken later” (3:5). In the Hebrews generation, God’s house refers both to the actual heavenly dwelling of God and to that new generation who now serves God.

So “we are the same house” means that we are God’s people today who serve God through a priesthood who represents us in God’s actual dwelling. But we must examine whether what is happening today is a fulfillment of what Moses and Israel experienced.

First, we are not a new Israel as the quotation by Hebrews of the New Covenant makes clear (8:8; 10:16).¹³ Second, the Melchizedekian priesthood is not a fulfillment of the Aaronic priesthood. And third, the New Covenant is not a fulfillment of the first covenant. Rather, Jeremiah says that the New Covenant is not according to the old (31:32). The old covenant Israel broke. And finally, the fact that God’s heavenly dwelling existed at the time of the original generation of Israel does not mean that the New Covenant also existed at the time of the revelation of the first covenant. The Tabernacle was a type of God’s heavenly dwelling. That does not imply that the Mosaic covenant was a type of a heavenly covenant.

Yet that is precisely what the literature supporting a covenant theology is claiming. The ambiguity of the image of “house” contributes to the confusion. Stanley’s proposal reflected in the title, “A New Covenant Hermeneutic: The Use of Scripture in Hebrews 8–10,” needs to be examined. He summarized the hermeneutic: “filtered through the grid of ‘fulfillment,’ God’s revelation in Scripture still has meaning, significance, and authority for the readers of Hebrews as New Covenant believers.”¹⁴ However, the relevance and authority of Scripture need not demand fulfillment. Authority rests on the fact that God has spoken. Relevance rests on the fact that what God did then in Israel is an *example* of what God is doing now. Thus,

¹²Ray C. Stedman, *Hebrews* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992) 48-50.

¹³The statement of the New Covenant in Jeremiah is addressed to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The author of Hebrews does not change this. It is quoted as a covenant whose partner remains the same.

¹⁴Steven K. Stanley, “A New Covenant Hermeneutic: The Use of Scripture in Hebrews 8–10,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 46 (1995):201.

the Scriptures may simply be applied to people of God in the church. But the New Covenant is not treated as fulfilled in the church.

Robertson similarly proposed “a multi-staged fulfillment based on the typical/actual contrast of Scripture.”¹⁵ He sketched the stages of fulfillment which began with the symbolically represented reestablishment of the people of God in the return from Persia. “A fuller realization of the provisions of the New Covenant is being experienced by the people of God in the present age. A new Israel of God has been constituted on the basis of the heart revitalization of Jews and Gentiles through the new covenant provisions. . . .”¹⁶ Based on the text of Hebrews, Robertson claims more than the text warrants. The text does not make a claim about a “new Israel of God,” nor does receiving some covenant benefits equal covenant fulfillment.

Williamson also adopted a similar hermeneutic and spoke of the final stage: “[W]hile the new covenant is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the ultimate eschatological reality awaits the ‘new heavens and new earth, where righteousness is at home.’”¹⁷ The irony of this proposal is that the prophecy speaking of Israel in history (Jer 31:31-34) is said to be ultimately fulfilled outside history, in a new earth; rather than in the climax of history with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

So the passages of Scripture applied to the people of God are used differently than those applied to Jesus. They are not fulfilled. The application of New Covenant benefits to the people of God does not replace the expectation of inauguration with the houses of Israel and Judah (Jer 31:31, quoted in 8:8 and 10:16).

2. *Covenant Formula and the Coherence between Biblical Covenants*

Though the New Covenant is established on better promises, the old and the New Covenant shared one promise in common. In Exod 6:7, the text says, “I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God,” which was God’s promise while Israelites were still in Egypt. After He had given them the law in the wilderness, He promised, “I . . . will be your God, and you will be my people” (Exod 29:45, 46). In substance, the covenant formula is the same (Jer 31:33). “But while the ‘formula’ of the covenant remains the same from age to age, it is capable of being filled with fresh meaning to a point where it can be described as a new covenant.”¹⁸ The New Covenant based on the better promises, implies the full sense of who God will be as their God and who His people will be as a fully blessed people.

¹⁵O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980) 298.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁷Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath* 210.

¹⁸F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 173, 174.

This common promise in the old covenant and in the New Covenant has contributed to both covenants being identified with an eternal covenant (13:20). Some have proposed that this eternal covenant is none other than the one theological covenant of grace. *The New Geneva Study Bible* makes that case: “God revealed His covenant of grace by promising a Savior (Gen 3:15). . . . The covenant of Sinai . . . was a continuation of the covenant of grace (Exod 3:15; Deut 7:7; 9:5, 6). . . . As Hebrews 7–10 explains, . . . God inaugurated a better version of His one eternal covenant with sinners (Heb 13:10).”¹⁹

Mayhue challenged this interpretation by raising the question whether the phrase *diathēkē aiōniou* in Heb 13:20 actually refers to “one eternal covenant” made in eternity past.²⁰ In doing so, he made a strong case that the everlasting covenant (13:20) is the historic New Covenant alone (8:4-12 and 10:16, 17). In addition, he argues that the everlasting covenant cannot be both the New Covenant and the covenant of grace. He advanced exegetical evidence to support his point. First, there is “no explicit, uncontested exegetical evidence in either the Old or New Testaments which refers to any covenant made in eternity past.” Second, the term “eternal” (*aiōnios*) in the NT does not necessarily mean “eternity past.” In fact, the common usage refers to an unending future, as in eternal life. He supported Kent’s interpretation: “It is eternal in the sense that it secures eternal life for its beneficiaries and will never be invalidated nor superseded.”²¹ Interpreted in this sense, the eternal covenant is identical with the New Covenant which promises a coming to know God eternally (Jer 31:34 and John 17:3).

This interpretation of “eternal” is also compatible with the use of the term in reference to a number of related uses in Hebrews. The Lord’s death “secured eternal redemption” (9:12). In this case eternal refers to the past history as well as the future. But it is not eternity past. His death is sufficient “for redemption of transgressions under the first covenant” (9:15). His death has unlimited value for sin committed in the past history, in the present, and in the future. Jesus Christ offered Himself to God through the “eternal Spirit” (9:14). At a minimum, the word “eternal” refers to the Spirit’s deity. In that case, “eternal” means without temporal constraint. Finally, there is “the promise of eternal inheritance” (9:15) which, as with the New Covenant’s eternity, “eternal” looks to the future. Thus, the word’s usage reinforces the longevity and benefit made possible by the eternal covenant (13:20). Old covenant rituals served for the ceremonially unclean and only made them outwardly clean. But the blood of Christ can do much more. Such a theological truth ought to

¹⁹R. C. Sproul, ed., *God’s Covenant of Grace*, New Geneva Study Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995) 30.

²⁰Richard L. Mayhue, “Hebrews 13:20: Covenant or Grace of New Covenant?” *MSJ* 7/2 (Fall 1996):254-55.

²¹Homer A. Kent Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Winona Lake, Ind: BMH, 1972) 293.

lead to a believer's boldness in the presence of God's throne. Hebrews' exhortation is based on this eternal forgiveness (10:19-25).²²

Finally, the scope of influence of the eternal covenant (13:20) and the eternal redemption (9:12) needs attention. The benefactors are individually called (3:1; 9:15). They are not specified in the text as the party with whom the covenant was ratified, but are benefactors of God's last will and testament (9:15-17). "The phrase οἱ κληκνοι which occurs nowhere else in the epistles, is an echo of the Parables: Matt. xxii:3, 4, 8; Luke xiv:17, 24; compared to Apoc. xix:9."²³ Whereas in the Gospels the word is simply an invitation, in this context it is an effectual call.²⁴ Such a call, it might be inferred, is common throughout biblical history. However, ones who receive the call under the period of the Mosaic Covenant are called to different blessings than ones who receive the call after Christ's first advent and ratification of the New Covenant. An examination of these differences will help to clarify the scope of influence of the New Covenant.

Not only has *The New Geneva Study Bible* mistakenly equated the textual "eternal covenant" (13:20) with one theological covenant existing in eternity past, it has failed to consider the formal differences between the covenant at Sinai and the New Covenant. In the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, the definition of *berith* (covenant) distinguishes between a promissory covenant (New Covenant) and an obligatory covenant (Sinai Covenant).²⁵ It is difficult to see how an obligatory and a promissory covenant are both expressions of the one theological covenant of grace, even though they share a common covenant formula.

3. *Discontinuity between the Old and the New Covenant*

Both Vos and Robertson interpret the discontinuity as the distinction

²²Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 244-47.

²³B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 264.

²⁴The construction οἱ κληκνοι, when it means invitation, denotes an invitation that is not effectual. It is followed by another call which is determinative of a response. An effectual call wins a positive response. Paul uses καλέω as an effectual call which implements God's election (Rom 8:29, 30) in history. Hebrews reflects the same work of God that His Son "might be the first born among many brethren" (Rom 8:29). In Hebrews, when God's call was introduced (3:1), "the readers were addressed as holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling. This form of address gathered up the strands of truth which the author dealt with in chapter 2. They were indeed 'brothers' (cf. 3:12, 10:19) not only with one another but with the Captain (2:11-12), and they were 'holy' because He had made them so (2:11). They did 'share in the heavenly calling' because God was bringing' them 'to glory' (2:10)" (Zane C. Hodges, "Hebrews," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* [Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1983] 785.)

²⁵*berith* (Moise Winfeld, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. II, eds. Botterweck and Ringgren [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975] 265-75). "Abraham (Gen. 15:17) and the covenant with David (25.7, . . .) which are concerned with the gift. . . . In contradistinction to the Mosaic covenants, which are of an obligatory type . . ." (ibid., 270).

between a type and the reality. The fact that “two worlds exist and have existed side by side from the beginning, enables the author of Hebrews to solve the chief problem of the history of redemption and revelation.”²⁶ Then Vos develops his answer based on Augustine’s formula.²⁷ He explains the discontinuity: “[T]he latent existence of the verities and potencies of the Christian religion in the old dispensation are due to no other cause than that the Christian religion lived even at that time as redemptive truth and redemptive power in the heavenly world and from there created for itself an embryonic form of existence in the life of Israel.”²⁸ Again the inferred presence of a theological covenant of grace raises questions. What is the latent or the embryonic form in the life of Israel? Though the Tabernacle qualifies as an embryonic form of the heavenly reality, the remainder of the Mosaic Covenant raises a question. Can a covenant with obligations be embryonic in form of a promissory New Covenant? In addition, Gräbe recognizes that a trajectory in meaning beyond the text is required. Gräbe poses an explanation in an article, “Trajectories for a ‘theology of the new covenant.’”²⁹ He views discontinuity as “the reinterpetive dynamic expressed by both the Old Testament and New Testament authors.”³⁰ Thus Jeremiah reinterprets the old covenant in light of Judah’s pending captivity. Or Hebrews reinterprets Jeremiah in light of Jesus’ first advent. As he summarizes it, “The newness of the new covenant finds its locus in Christ. The Old Testament tradition of the new covenant is reinterpreted in light of the life and death of Christ.”³¹

As a result, new trajectories of meaning are posited. For instance, without any textual basis in Jeremiah, the partnership of Israel and Judah is reinterpreted as expanded to mean universal beneficiaries in a new sociological dimension.³² Or, not based on the text of Exodus but going beyond Exodus, the law is new with an internal circumcision of the heart.³³

Both conceptions of the discontinuity are instructive. Vos and Robertson have correctly recognized that Hebrews has interpreted the relationship between the *house* (tabernacle, 3:2, 6) and the *house* (heavenlies) as a type/reality relationship. God’s house in which Moses was faithful was a kind of miniature representation of “everything,” that is, of the greater house over which the Son presides at God’s right

²⁶Vos, “Hebrews, The Epistle of the Diathēkē,” *The Princeton Theological Review* XIV 11.

²⁷The NT is latent in the OT and the OT is open in the New.

²⁸Vos, “Hebrews, The Epistle of the Diathēkē,” *The Princeton Theological Review* XIV 12.

²⁹Petrus J. Gräbe, *New Covenant, New Community* (Waynesboro, U.K.: Paternoster, 2006) 206.

³⁰Ibid. “A vibrant church needs to be in touch with a living confession if it is to avoid having its message become only a ‘museum of truths.’”

³¹Ibid., 200.

³²Ibid., 210.

³³Ibid., 210-12.

hand in heaven (3:2-6 and 1:3 with 4:14). The “‘holy of holies’ in His earthly house was but a shadow of heaven itself where Christ has now gone ‘to appear for us in God’s presence’ (9:24).”³⁴ However, Gräbe posits that a trajectory in meaning beyond the text is also required to address the other aspects of discontinuity. This undermines any claim that a covenant of grace is based on the biblical text.

4. *Warning Passages: The Doctrine of Predestination*

Contingency found in the warning passages is perhaps the most puzzling aspect of the message of Hebrews. The interpretation of these warnings necessarily draws upon broader conclusions reached, based upon the meaning of the homily as a whole. This involves considering a broader context than simply a reading of the warning by itself. For that reason, perhaps the greatest influence that a presupposed federal covenant theology brings to a reading of the book features the meaning of contingency in the warning passages. Weir posits that the construction of a federal theology arose out of questions concerning predestination, for one of the great themes of sixteenth-century thought is that of theodicy.³⁵ Vos posits that in the federal theology system all things are of God. “His is the originality in conceiving, His the initiative in inaugurating, His the monergism in carrying out.”³⁶ And it is for the carrying out of God’s will that the warnings are addressed. Since His is the monergism in carrying out, then failure to keep the commands means God’s work is not present to accomplish His will.

Yet an examination of the text to discover whom the author is addressing challenges this perspective on the warning passages. The author says the warnings include an address to himself in whom the work of God is clearly present (2:1; 3:6; 6:1; 10:26; 12:9). Further, the warnings address those who had received blessings of salvation to some extent (3:1, 6; 6:4-5; 10:35-39). It is evident that a human author does not know the spiritual state of every recipient of “the word of exhortation” (13:22). But if he addresses them as called and as spiritually blessed, it follows that what he says appropriately applies to those called and blessed. The warnings are intended to encourage them to persevere by warning of the consequences if they do not persevere. The consequences are severe, but are not an indication that their original response was not genuine.

³⁴Hodges, “Hebrews” 786.

³⁵David Weir, *The Origins of Federal Theology in Sixteenth Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon, 1990) 155.

³⁶Vos, “Hebrews, The Epistle of the Diathēkē,” *The Princeton Theological Review* XIV 58.

Biblical Covenant Model of Theology

The case presented for a federal covenant theology has one striking omission. Hebrews does not mention a federal covenant established in eternity past. Even Vos acknowledged that a federal form of the covenant of grace is not expressed in Hebrews,³⁷ even though some who follow him make that claim.³⁸

According to Vos, there must be a stable core of God's work in salvation history. That claim is correct. But rather than that work being related to a pre-existent covenant of grace, redemption is related to *promise*. In the OT, Israel was *promised* redemption (Exod 6:6), and redemption was provided through the Passover celebration and the sacrifice of the lamb (Exod 15:13). This all happened before the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 19–24) was ratified. The death of the Passover lamb corresponded to Hebrews' announcement that by means of His own blood He secured eternal redemption (9:11, 12). This is what is monergistic in salvation in Hebrews. Thus what was promised through Moses of "the things to be spoken later" (3:5), was identified in Hebrews as Jesus' procuring of eternal redemption in His sacrifice.

As a result, the Mosaic Covenant was ratified with a redeemed people (Exodus 19–24). This collective redemption of the people by promise preceded the ratification of the national covenant with the people. In Hebrews, Jesus "is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant" (9:15). What was sequential in history (the promise of collective redemption and the corporate Mosaic covenant) now is combined in the death of Christ. Individual redemption is provided for beneficiaries of the New Covenant. Both now rest on the death of Christ through which the ratification of the New Covenant is mediated and redemption is provided in the gift of life.

Now that redemption and covenant ratification are provided jointly in Christ, the stage is set for both a present application and a future inauguration of fulfillment of the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34). As already indicated in the quotation and summary of the covenant terms by Hebrews, the party is stated as "the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Heb 8:8) and as "with them" (10:16). This invites a reader to anticipate a future fulfillment.

Next, this article will advance to support this viewpoint of salvation history as found in Hebrews. The case will be formulated using the same four themes. Hebrews views the biblical covenants each as framing a priestly ministry, a past operation of the Mosaic Covenant supporting the Aaronic ministry and a present

³⁷Ibid., 57. He sees a "covenantal concept of religion" undergirding the three stated themes in the epistle: faith, teaching on revelation, and on the priesthood.

³⁸Sproul, ed., *God's Covenant of Grace* 30.

application of the New Covenant and the Melchizedekian ministry. In each age, this ministry enabled God's people to serve God in a manner that would honor Him. But the Melchizedekian priesthood and the New Covenant blessings are far superior so that no one should consider returning to the past.

1. Scripture and the Application of the New Covenant

God has spoken. "This initial affirmation is basic to the whole argument of the epistle."³⁹ The Epistle makes extensive use of the Hebrew Scriptures (LXX), using an exegetical understanding which interprets God speaking directly to or concerning His Son (1:5-14). But it is by His Son that God has spoken to Christians in these last days (1:2). In the Epistle, His Son's words are not quoted. Rather the voice of the Son is heard through His role in fulfillment of Scripture. And that is the role of One who had the rank of Son,⁴⁰ that is, Heir (1:4-5). He was designated in advance as Heir but appointed as such only after His ascension.⁴¹ The appointment may well "echo the oracle of Ps 2:8, addressed to one who is both the Lord's Anointed and acclaimed by God as His Son: 'Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Your possession.'"⁴²

His position as Heir of the creation (all things) is then substantiated in a series of quotations in which God addressed Him directly (1:4-15). He has the right to claim this position and role because He *inherited* the name Son (1:4-5). The fact that He inherited the name carries with it a number of implications. First, the angels in their superior created form did not inherit that name. Second, even though He was Son from eternity (implied in 1:2), and as Son, He learned obedience by the things He suffered (5:8), yet He inherited the name only after He completed the Father's will (1:13). He completed the Father's will because He was willing to receive the promised inheritance no matter what the cost under the Mosaic Covenant. And that cost was death. Thus, "only the revelation by the Son is complete and definitive."⁴³

A third implication concerns the status of the present world. Westcott claims, "The writer of the Epistle has already assumed the establishment of a new order corresponding with the fulfillment of the purpose of creation."⁴⁴ If Westcott claims that the purpose of creation is now fulfilled with Jesus in heaven, the author

³⁹Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 1.

⁴⁰Jean Hering, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock (London: Epworth, 1970) 3.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 4.

⁴³Hering, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 1.

⁴⁴Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 41.

of Hebrews had a greater expectation. Based on Psalm 8, the author concludes that “we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (2:8b). So at best, the new order has been established in the status of Christ, but it has not yet been shared by a redeemed mankind on earth.

That leads to a final implication: “We see Jesus who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor” (2:9). “It was fitting that the Son, for whom and by whom all things exist, brings many sons with Him to glory” (2:10). And it was fitting to make this Captain of their salvation perfect for service as High Priest through suffering (2:10, 17). This implication indicates that God’s purposes for the present creation are not yet fulfilled.

Jesus’ service as High Priest constitutes the core teaching of this Epistle (Hebrews 7–10). In anticipating the effectiveness of this service, the author had already quoted the Scripture which envisioned the outcome (2:12-13, quoting Ps 22:22 and Isa 8:17, 18). Jesus will not be ashamed to call the sons, brothers, and to present them along with Himself as God’s children. How can those who are called achieve such a status?

That status is promised in both the Old and the New covenants: “I will be their God and they shall be My people” (8:10). Jesus received this promise living under the Mosaic covenant. Called ones today have this promise applied to them based on the better promises of the New Covenant (9:7-13; 10:16-17). The promise is applied but not fulfilled. The better promises may be appropriated through the High Priestly ministry of Jesus.

However, on what grounds does the author to the Hebrews *apply* promises from this covenant to those who are not designated in the text as party to the covenant? It is not as a covenant inaugurated in fulfillment. While that question is not answered directly, the answer is implied in a traditional *crux interpretum* of NT exegesis concerning the use of *diathēkē*.⁴⁵ The featured text is Hebrews 9:15-17. However, to appreciate better the thought development, the whole context (9:11-28) is in order. The broad context features the cross of Christ which is the basis for the ratification of the New Covenant (9:15) and for the inauguration of the last will and testament arrangements (9:16-17).

2. *Covenant Ratification and the Coherent Relationship Between the First and the New Covenant*

The High Priestly service based on Christ’s personal blood sacrifice (9:11-14)

The covenant functions based on the priesthood. The priest specifies the

⁴⁵Scott W. Hahn, “A Broken Covenant and the Curse of Death: A Study of Hebrews 9:15-22,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66 (2004):416-36.

place where the worshiper meets God and blood-sacrifice provides the right for that meeting. Unlike the old covenant's earthly sanctuary, Christ's tabernacle is not man-made; it is not part of the earthly creation (9:11). Christ ministers in the greater and more perfect tabernacle (9:11), the real thing. The good things to come involved entering into very presence of God. So He entered the Most Holy Place in heaven once and for all (9:12). His sufficient sacrifice obtained eternal redemption.

Israel's animal sacrifices, insofar as they did any good, provided priests and worshipers with ceremonial cleansing for their bodies (9:13). They were educational, teaching the concepts of defilement and cleansing. In addition, they included God's implied commitment to provide someday the sufficient sacrifice. Again, this is what is monergistic in salvation in this Epistle. Thus, Israel's faith in God also involved faith in God's commitment to forgive, left at that time unrevealed in complete expression. Now, the blood of Christ (9:14) has provided that sacrifice. This revelation was introduced in Isaiah's revelation of the Servant when God said, "I will put my Spirit upon him" (Isa 42:1). "It is in the power of the Divine Spirit, accordingly, that the Servant accomplishes every phase of his ministry, including the crowning phase in which he accepts death for transgression of his people, filling the twofold role of priest and victim, as Christ does in this epistle."⁴⁶

This service of Christ as High Priest and as sacrifice enables believers to have a conscience clear of any guilt, free from any sense that they would somehow have to work or contribute to acceptance before God. Further, it enables them to serve the living God within the benefits of a New Covenant ministry.

The ratification of the New Covenant based on Christ's mediation (9:15)

Westcott clarifies the connection between 9:14 and 15: "And for this reason, even that the Blood of Christ purifies the soul with a view to divine service, *He is mediator of a new covenant.*"⁴⁷ As a worshiper served according to the arrangements of the first covenant, so the called ones may serve according to the new arrangement. But how did the written New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34) receive ratification?⁴⁸ God as one party wrote the terms of the covenant, and the houses of Israel and Judah were specified as the other party. However, as with the Abrahamic Covenant, the terms consisted of a series of promises, so the arrangement that was ratified was unconditional with respect to Israel. That means that ratification was conditioned only on the

⁴⁶Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 205.

⁴⁷Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 263.

⁴⁸Ratification is the approval and sanction especially in a formal sense. The Abrahamic covenant was ratified with pieces of the sacrificed animals forming a path through which a smoking oven and a burning torch passed, even with Abraham asleep (Gen 15:9-21). It too was ratified without Abraham assuming a condition for the covenant's existence.

Party who wrote the terms and made the commitments stated in the promises. There was no condition placed upon Israel for ratification. And it is clear the Jews in Judaism of that day had not accepted any condition as they continued to offer animal sacrifices, relying on an Aaronic priesthood.

By means of Christ's death, the New Covenant was formally ratified.⁴⁹ The role that Jesus had was that of Mediator, which "describes his function as the one who was used by God to enact a New Covenant which established a new relationship between God and his people, but entirely on God's terms; it was not a negotiated settlement."⁵⁰ The New Covenant had been introduced in 8:8-12 in a complete quotation from Jer 31:31-34. Jesus Christ is identified as Mediator in three passages: 8:6, 9:15, and 12:24, a role in which He enacted the covenant.

The Lord's death also freed those called from all guilt derived from transgressions committed under the first covenant. "Thus, the death of Christ appears under a twofold aspect. His blood is the means of atonement (redemption) and the ratification of the Covenant which followed upon it."⁵¹ The transgressions of the first covenant which had been brought to light could not be ignored if a New Covenant arrangement was ratified. So Christ's death was both a substitute for the penalty of transgressions and, in the same death, a mediation of the New Covenant.

The ratification of the New Covenant arrangement had the purpose that those who would be called might receive "the promise of eternal inheritance."⁵² The fact that the full purpose remains something promised indicates that the inheritance is yet future. Though a promise involves a commitment on the part of the Speaker to act and to accomplish what was promised, the recipient is responsible to receive what had been promised. In an evil world, that responsibility to receive would be challenged. So the author of Hebrews had already written: "[W]e desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (6:11-12).

3. *Discontinuity Between the New Covenant and the Last Will and Testament (9:16-28)*

⁴⁹Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 264; Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 209.

⁵⁰Michael D. Morrison, *Who Needs a New Covenant? Rhetorical Function of the Covenant Motif in the Argument of Hebrews*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, eds. K. C. Hanson, Charles M. Collier, and Christopher D. Spinks, vol. 85 (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2008), 575.

⁵¹Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 264.

⁵²The eternal inheritance is only implied in the New Covenant. The stated promises are received once the covenant was ratified at the time of faith. The eternal inheritance is what was promised to Israel about her full future possession. At the time of the writing of Hebrews, this was still future and awaited the age to come. Some of this inheritance will be shared by these believers.

Vos has acknowledged discontinuity between the priestly ministry under the first covenant and the priestly ministry under the New Covenant. Discontinuity exists also in the application of the New Covenant benefits. The discontinuity is present because the party to the New Covenant is specified as the house of Israel and the house of Judah (8:8 and 10:16). And Judaism had not accepted a partnership in the New Covenant since they continued to practice their worship under the terms set by the first covenant. Hebrews views the recipients (3:1 and 9:15) as merely beneficiaries. Benefits promised in the New Covenant have now been applied to called ones because of the death and ministry of Jesus Christ.

A Covenant Theology model sees the New Covenant as fulfilled in the Hebrews text. Thus it describes the discontinuity as supersession or replacement. Those in the church who are called supersede Israel or replace the house of Israel and the house of Judah as party to the covenant. But what is inaugurated is not the New Covenant, but the last will and testament.

*The application of the last will and testament
based on the death of the Testator, Christ (9:16, 17)*

The transition from 9:15 to 9:16-17 introduces a strange anomaly in the use of *diathēkē*. The term is translated as “covenant” in 9:15 as it is in the remainder of the book. But in 9:16-17, and only there in Hebrews, it has the sense of last “will” or “testament” according to the majority of translations and interpreters.⁵³

Strong contextual reasons necessitate the change in translation.⁵⁴ In 9:15 the

⁵³See NEB, JB, TEV, NIV, NAB, and NKJ (only the NASB translates “covenant” in vv. 16, 17). Many of the commentaries: Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of the Epistle to Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) 27-48; G. W. Buchanan, ed., *To the Hebrews*, AB 36 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972) 151; Thomas C. Long, *Hebrews*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1997) 99; Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1993) 253-56; Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 462-63; Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997) 131; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, AB 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001) 418; Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 209-14.

⁵⁴A minority of interpreters reject the change in translation: B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 264-66; George Milligan, *The Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh, U.K.: James Family, 1978) 166-70; John Brown, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh, U.K.: Oliphant, 1899) 407-19; John Hughes, “Hebrews ix 15 ff. and Galatians iii 15 ff.,” *Nov T21* (1976-1977):28-66; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, vol. 478, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1991) 226-52; Darrell Pursiful, *The Cultic Motif in the Spirituality of the Book of Hebrews* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1993) 77-79; Scott W. Hahn, “A Broken Covenant and the Curse of Death: A Study of Hebrews 9:15-22,” *CBQ* 66 (2004):416-36. The clarity of the description of *diathēkē* as “testament” in 9:16, 17 is not overridden by the arguments advanced for the translation of “covenant”: (1) the attribution of the translation of “testament” to the Vulgate is not persuasive in the argument for “covenant”; (2) the coherence of thought derived from a consistent biblical-theological model is not dismissed by recognizing a Hellenistic model used to

context warrants the sense of “covenant,” since only covenants have mediators and the writer refers to the first *diathēkē*, which the author clearly regards as a covenant. However, in 9:16 the “death of the one who made it” most naturally requires a sense of “last will” or “testament,” since covenants did not involve the death of their makers before being inaugurated. Likewise, in 9:17 the statement that a *diathēkē* takes effect at death and is not in force while the maker is alive applies only to a testament. In 9:18, however, the topic returns again to the first *diathēkē*, that is, the Sinai arrangement, which is clearly regarded as a covenant.

Accepting such a change in translation suggests profound implications in the hermeneutics of Hebrews. It is not a change in arrangement but a change in perspective in looking at the same arrangement. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is presented as an unconditional covenant because the terms of the arrangement were exclusively promises from God. Thus, the second party, the house of Israel and the house of Judah did not assume any condition by oath in its ratification. That does not mean that the second party is unnecessary, or subject to change,⁵⁵ or that the New Covenant had only one party.

Rather, the houses of Israel and Judah are the second party by divine promise, and a future realization will not divest them of their role or ethnic identity. The ones who propose a change in ethnicity often do so on the basis of Paul’s claim that “not all Israel is Israel” (Rom 9:6).⁵⁶ But Paul also makes the point that not all natural descendants of Abraham are called (Rom 9:7ff.). This is the same point Hebrews makes (Heb 9:15) in addressing those who are beneficiaries as those who are called. And Hebrews’ quotation of the passage from Jeremiah (8:8:12 and 10:16-17) leaves open the expectation, as the quotations claim, that the houses of Israel and Judah will be called in the future. That would then involve a fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy of the covenant at some future time, in the same terms as prophesied. This correlates with the expectation of “the world to come” (2:5) as the time and place of consummation.

For the time being, Hebrews applies the prophesied arrangement from a different perspective. A covenant named unconditional means that the covenant is

communicate a point in 9:16, 17; (3) Christ’s death may be described by various metaphors in relation to the *diathēkē*; mediator, testator, or surety without one contradicting another. Christ is also both the High Priest and the sacrificial victim; (4) Hebrews directly states that Christ’s death was presented to God as a sacrifice for sin (9:14). This is clearly expressed rather than the theory that God “identified with the victim by whose representative death the covenant is ordinarily ratified” (Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 267). The symbolism in covenant ratification is a death to be invoked as the penalty for possible future violation. Though death may be associated with both covenant ceremony and testament, death means something different in either context; (5) yet Christ’s death remains a mystery: Christ as the Divine-human person died.

⁵⁵Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath* 146.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 189-91.

ratified, conditioned on only one party. A last will and testament is also ratified and conditioned on only one party. The one party or testator writes the will or testament. It does not come into force until that party dies. When he dies, the will takes force and the beneficiaries receive what was promised them. In the case of the biblical New Covenant, Christ as the Word authored the covenant and as Son died to offer Himself to God.⁵⁷ Hebrews 9:14 indicates how the three Persons in the Godhead are all involved in the blood sacrifice of Christ presented to God.

The profound implication is that Hebrews presents the New Covenant as ratified in the death of Christ and applied to the beneficiaries based on the death of Christ. The beneficiaries are not written into the will and testament, but are called in history to receive the benefits (3:1; 9:15). This applies the promises of the Hebrew Scripture, not at the level of their textual address with the stated parties but at the level of God's election and call of individuals to be beneficiaries. The promises within the covenant are applied without commenting on the scriptural form of the address in the Hebrew texts. This form of hermeneutics does not argue for a fulfillment of the New Covenant, nor does the text of Hebrews claim such a fulfillment. Rather it recognizes, in the church age, that believers who are recipients of God's mercy are called. It is the testament that is inaugurated or takes effect⁵⁸ at the death of Christ (9:17).

The acceptance of Israel's obligation based on eternal redemption (9:18-22)

Since Christ's death redeemed them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant (9:15), Hebrews clarifies that all the people of Israel had originally accepted that obligation (Exod 24:3, 7) when the Mosaic Covenant was ratified (9:18). This was the case because the Mosaic Covenant was a conditional covenant with obligations of fulfillment for both God ("the book itself") and Israel ("all the people," 9:19-20). Through the symbolism of animal sacrifices, the two parties of the covenant assumed the obligation of death for covenant violation. Thus, Christ's procuring of an eternal redemption even addressed the original obligation assumed by the people of Israel and the obligation for fulfillment.

The necessity of Christ's sacrifice in order to complete God's plan (9:23-28)

The key word in this subunit (9:16-28) is "necessary" (*anagkē*, 9:16, 23). Christ's death was necessary. Judaism had stubbornly refused to leave the covenant

⁵⁷Bruce quotes E. K. Simpson, *EQ* xviii (1946):212-13 n. 126: "His 'obedience unto death' fills up the breach with heaven as nothing else could . . . accruing to His brethren through death of the Testator, who in this unique transaction lives again to be the Administrator of His own mediatorial work."

⁵⁸*Bebaia*, "take effect, (becomes) valid or certain" (9:17).

that was growing old and ready to vanish (8:13). Therefore, the New Covenant was ratified in His death (9:15) and this last testament was necessarily put in force or inaugurated by His death (9:16-17).

Since a sacrifice was necessary (9:23), what kind of sacrifice would address issues raised by heaven? The answer was that Christ could offer nothing less than Himself which alone would “do away” with sin (9:26). Because of the finality of His sacrifice, it did not need to be offered repeatedly throughout history, but once at the end of the age. Now “He appears eternally in heaven for His people on the basis of the ‘sacrifice of Himself,’ presented and accepted once for all.”⁵⁹

Next the author moves in thought to the completion of God’s purpose. Vos recognizes that the New Covenant connects with eschatology.⁶⁰ Men die once, by divine appointment, and in their case death is followed by judgment. Christ died once, by divine appointment, and His death was followed by salvation to those who wait eagerly for Him. The salvation reaches a climax in this fallen world. It will be discussed more fully below.

4. *Warning Passages: the Doctrine of Inheritance*

“Inheritance” (*klēronomia, klēronomeō*) is used in a range of ways in Hebrews. Inheritance refers to what fathers give to eligible heirs. One limit to eligibility is that the recipient be an actual son. Another limit that a father may impose is that the heir be faithful to the father’s will. So what a son would inherit would be contingent on continuation in doing what the father wants. Support for this distinction rests on Israel’s experience in possessing the land. In applying the image to Israel, the land was promised as an inheritance (Gen 15:7-8). Israel had to claim their inheritance by faithful obedience (Josh 1:2-9). They had failed at Kadesh Barnea (Numbers 13–14). The promised inheritance is also described in Hebrews 11:8-16, but the final realization remained unfulfilled in the lives of OT believers.

The term “Son” is used first in reference to Jesus. He obtained the name Son by inheritance (1:4). The Son had been appointed heir of all things (1:2). Yet following the first advent, He obtained what had been appointed when He completed the Father’s will (1:3-4).

The term is used secondarily in reference to recipients of New Covenant life. They received the promise of eternal inheritance (9:15). And that promise relates to the fact that they will inherit salvation (1:14). The salvation inherited is contingent on persevering in faith and patience (6:12). What does this contingency mean?

The answer relates to the *salvation* sons will inherit in all its dimensions. As the Son’s role and inheritance was found in the Hebrew Scripture, so the sense of

⁵⁹Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 221.

⁶⁰Vos, “Hebrews, The Epistle of the Diathēkē,” *The Princeton Theological Review* XIV:3.

salvation would likely be found there as well. Hebrew worshipers repeatedly acknowledged that God would save His people from their enemies and then bless them (Pss 3:2, 8; 18:2, 35, 46, 50; 35:3; 37:39; 71:15; 118:14, 15, 21; 132:16).

This *salvation* will be inherited, meaning that the deliverance will be completed in the future. However, it is possible to neglect *salvation* in the present (2:3). Thus this salvation involves both the fact of the deliverance from the penalty of sin and the present potential to be delivered from the power of sin. This potential needs to be appropriated through Jesus' present high priestly ministry. It involves entering the Holiest to find help (10:19), drawing near to God with a true heart in full assurance (10:22), holding fast the confession of hope (10:23), and considering each other to stir up love (10:24). Then the extent of the present appropriation of salvation will influence the future inheritance of salvation. Therefore, the warning is not to neglect salvation because of a dynamic relationship between the present and the future salvation. Both aspects will be examined.

- **Sons as benefactors of New Covenant life (8:7-13)**

The message in Hebrews is that New Covenant benefits are now for the believers to have individually and that the Mosaic Covenant is now obsolete (8:7-13). The benefits as they were first promised to Jeremiah are as follows.

My laws are put in their mind and are written on their heart (8:10)

The mention of the law provides continuity between the two covenants. However, the law is not to be understood in the particularity of the Mosaic national system, but in the essence of Christ's own interpretation (Matt 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34). This is evident in light of reading the text in light of Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant. Though this provides continuity, the role of law in each of God's provisions is distinct. The law in the first covenant with its penalties faced Israel, demanding that each law be obeyed. Then those which were not applied and obeyed stood against Israel, pronouncing condemnation for failure.

Now the believer is redeemed from every transgression committed under the first covenant (9:14). They are now free from the condemnation of law. Nevertheless, the law is now in their heart providing a predisposition to obey. That predisposition is a desire to conform, but not a self-causation to do so. Hence, the warning sections in Hebrews (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 6:1-8: 10:26-39; 12:3-11) provide a means (of grace) to induce obedience. Theologians describe this desire which expresses a human partnership (3:1, 8) and responsibility as *compatible* with divine sovereignty. "According to this view, people perform free acts when they do what they want to do, not when they have power to self causation, or some other version of indeterminism. That is, they are not constrained or compelled in their actions, but what they do flows

unimpeded from their wants, desires, preferences, goals and the like.”⁶¹ Thus the presence of the law does not exclude a continuing conflict brought by sin, but does provide wants and desires.

Each one shall know Me (8:11)

This is a promise of a personal relationship with God which involves shared life as sons in knowing God. But as distinct from Jeremiah, the promise of “all shall know” has no collective application in the discussion of the Book of Hebrews. The warnings, although given in the confidence that the author believes that everyone to whom he writes knows the Lord (6:9-12 and 10:39), provide no guarantee that “all” do. The promise in Jer 31:33 has that force, but Hebrews does not apply that meaning to the church. Rather, the “shall know” refers to an individual relationship and refers to those who are called. Each individual who believes that Jesus’ death on the cross satisfies God’s judgment against his sin knows the Lord. This individual application, rather than a collective application of the promise to the church as a whole, indicates the presence of a “testamentary will” providing individual beneficiaries with life. It is not the collective unity involved in covenant partnership as prescribed in Jeremiah with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

Their sins. . . I will remember no more (8:12)

This forgiveness is the fact of salvation from the penalty of sin. Many come to realize that the promise of forgiveness “is the basis upon which all of the other provisions of the new covenant are to be realized.”⁶² Ronald Diprose summarizes, “[T]he real possibility of forgiveness distinguishes the new covenant from every other proposal that attempts to counter the existential anxiety so prevalent in our time. Eternal forgiveness frees a person from what alienates him or her from God and from what causes his or her best intentions to fail (Mark 7:14-23).”⁶³

• **Sons as heirs of eternal inheritance**

The promise of eternal inheritance includes the ultimate promise of deliverance from an eternal presence of sin. This promise starts with a promise of life which involves becoming a son. As the Son’s inheritance of His name was contingent on His obedience (2:10), so is the son’s inheritance of salvation in its fullness (1:14). The contingency is related to the warnings. To take the warning personally in obedience brings an increasing deliverance from the power of sin. To disregard the warning opens oneself to an increasing influence of the power of sin. When one

⁶¹Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994) 67.

⁶²Mark Saucy, “The Matrix of the New Covenant for contextualizing the Gospel among the Slavic Peoples,” *Theological Reflects* 1 (2006):98.

⁶³Donald E. Diprose, “A Theology of the New Covenant,” *EMJ* 15 (2006):75.

finally inherits salvation, what one receives is related to the grip that the power of sin had maintained in the individual. If sin still has a powerful hold on the individual, the final deliverance of the remaining presence of sin leaves an individual fully redeemed but not mature. He will be completely free from sin eternally, but as a spiritual midget. The reverse would be true of the one who has grown to maturity in the present age. At the point of glorification, a difference in glory would prevail as there is a difference between a rosebud and a fully developed rose.

In order to stimulate appropriate responses to the power of sin, the author to the Hebrews presents a series of warnings.

1. The peril of ignoring the word of salvation (2:1-4)

The world's rushing currents press individuals to disobey and threaten to persuade them to ignore the word. The word of salvation is reliable and was forcefully presented with divine confirmation.

2. The peril of refusing to believe God's promise of rest in spite of an opportune time (3:6-4:13)

As a functioning house, believers need to participate actively in approaching God. Otherwise, they are in danger of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and of failing to participate fully in God's future Sabbath rest.

3. The peril of failing to persevere to maturity (5:12-6:8)

Seeing that Jesus has passed into the heavenlies as High Priest, believers have His promised help to grow, if they come boldly to the throne of grace. Ordained according to the pattern of Melchizedek, He ministers as those he represents are blessed by the New Covenant. This covenant was ratified in Christ's death and following His death, inaugurated as testamentary disposition.

4. The peril of abandoning the sacrifice of Christ (10:26-39)

Having reflected on the Old and New Covenants, the writer has detailed the sacrifices of ratification and inauguration. In the discussion, the absolute necessity and glorious superiority of Christ's death shines forth. Therefore, the tragic temptation for the readers to abandon His sacrifice is featured.

5. The peril of refusing God's chastening (12:3-17)

A historic trail of witnesses repeatedly testify to their faith in spite of not receiving their inheritance while they waited on earth. To the recipients of the letter, they must first consider their Lord who suffered at the hands of sinners and compare that with their struggle against sin. God uses this struggle as a chastening of His sons.

These warnings had been preceded by an assurance that Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers (2:10-18). "For sanctification is glory begun, and glory is sanctification completed. And since those who are sanctified to God through His death are sons of God, the Son of God is not ashamed to acknowledge them as His

brothers.”⁶⁴

CONCLUSION

The case for a federal covenant theology in Hebrews lacks consistent textual support. The case rests either on the presupposition of a unified pre-existent New Covenant or on a reinterpretation of textual claims to fit a theological model. Rather the case for biblical covenants has been made which naturally rests on the textual contrast between two priestly ministries supported by two different covenants. The preference between the two falls conclusively in favor of the Melchizedekian priesthood based on Christ’s sacrifice of Himself. The spiritual benefits derive from an application of the New Covenant as a will and testament benefiting those who are called. That ministry supports the growth of sons whom the Son leads to glory. Nevertheless, evidence seemed to support one unified theological covenant that will be accessed in conclusion.

First, there is one people of God (household) throughout the history of salvation (3:6). It is this people among whom Moses was faithful (3:2). Believers today as called ones are also in that household (3:6). Yet in quoting the New Covenant, the author acknowledges that the house of Israel and the house of Judah remain as the stated party of the New Covenant (8:10; 10:16). The assembly to whom the author wrote is, by distinction, the church (12:23). Thus, the church is distinguished from the people of God who will be party to the New Covenant (3:1-6).

Second, there is one actual house as the people serve God. But there are distinct priests supported by distinct covenants for distinct services. Aaronic priests were pressed into service by transgressions exposed by the Mosaic Covenant. On the other hand, the Melchizedekian Priest was vaulted into service by the value of His own personal sacrifice. His death on the cross redeemed believers from the transgressions committed under the old covenant (9:12). This sacrificial death also ratified the New Covenant before God (9:15). As author of the covenant, Christ’s death inaugurated the last will and testament to provide benefits to those who are called (9:16-17). These historic distinctions influenced the way Scripture is used in Hebrews. The Scriptures taken as referring to Jesus are fulfilled in His first advent ministry. His present ministry as high priest, represents believers in that actual house. Again, that is distinct from the Aaronic ministry in the type-house, the Tabernacle.

Finally, salvation is a repeated theme in Hebrews (1:14; 2:3, 10; 5:9; 6:9; 9:28), which adds to the consideration of unity in salvation history. Vos acknowledges that “the writer entertains a firm belief in the effectiveness of doctrinal enlightenment which features the theme of salvation.”⁶⁵ Yet the salvation under the

⁶⁴Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 45.

⁶⁵Vos, “Hebrews, The Epistle of the Diathēkē,” *The Princeton Theological Review* XIV:1.4.

old covenant (i.e., for Israel) is not identical in every respect with that under the New Covenant (i.e., for Israel and the church). According to Vos, both stem from a pre-existent covenant of grace, but the truth is that neither does so. The New Covenant which bases salvation on God's promise is the basis for both. The distinctions between the benefits provided under the Mosaic covenant ministry and the better benefits under the New Covenant indicate that they are different. One relates to the present only, but the other relates to both the present and the future. Although believers in both ages are redeemed, salvation in the full sense is not the same. Thus no basis remains to infer a theological covenant of grace that determines an identical salvation in both ages.

Inter-covenantal Truth and Relevance: Leviticus 26 and the Biblical Covenants

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Leviticus 26 provides a key to advancing the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants by showing how the two relate to each other. The parenthetical nature of the chapter shows its inter-covenantal character in six areas: (1) covenant, (2) law, (3) Yahweh, (4) promise, (5) repentance, and (6) revelation. The word for “covenant” used therein always relates to God’s sovereignty and His binding relationship to Israel, sometimes in relation to the Abrahamic Covenant, sometimes in relation to the Mosaic Covenant, and sometimes in relation to a possible future Deuteronomic Covenant. The use of law in Leviticus 26 supplements the use of covenant by reflecting the wisdom and moral character of the covenant-giver and by focusing on His absolute authority. Yahweh, the covenant-maker, is God who identifies Himself with both the Mosaic and the Abrahamic covenants. In the chapter promise includes both the promise to bless under the Abrahamic covenant and the promise to curse under the Mosaic covenant. Though the word for repentance does not occur in the chapter, the concept of repentance is entailed in the promise of Israel’s return from captivity. The word “law” implies a necessity of communicating the law-giver’s standards in written form for the benefit of future generations. Though the NT cites Leviticus 26 only once, the concepts involved in the chapter permeate many parts of the NT. By synthesizing the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, it offers a taste of promise tempered by precept in telling God’s people how to live.

* * * * *

Leviticus 26 consists of parenetic revelation given at Sinai on the threshold of Israel’s wilderness wanderings. The apparent tension that the Mosaic Covenant’s promulgation creates between it and the Abrahamic Covenant makes Leviticus 26 relevant to the discussion of the progression and distinction of biblical covenants. After three disturbing apostasies at Sinai, Leviticus 26 explains the relationship between the two covenants and reemphasizes the exclusive lordship of Yahweh. Although Leviticus 26 antedates Paul’s teaching in Gal 3:17 by fifteen centuries, both

proclaim the same truth: “the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.”¹

The blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 advance the respective emphases of both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. The blessings relate to the Abrahamic Covenant’s promises regarding land and blessing, but the cursings represent a five-stage process of Mosaic Covenant vengeance.² The cursings seek to produce confession of guilt, humility, and restitution—elements that might anticipate either the Deuteronomic (or Palestinian) Covenant or the New Covenant.³ Restitution involves the sabbatical principle, a significant element of the Mosaic Covenant. The sabbatical principle is central to Leviticus 26. Yahweh is Lord of both space (the land) and time (the sabbaths). The Land-Giver and Exodus-Causer will prove loyal at all times to His covenants and to His covenanted people. In addition to its direct links to the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, Leviticus 26 also has bearing upon the existence of a covenant that Israel entered in Moab. Later prophetic revelation anchors itself in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–28.

This article will discuss the inter-covenantal aspects of Leviticus 26 as that text relates to the following subject areas: (1) covenant, (2) law, (3) Yahweh, (4) promise, (5) repentance, and (6) revelation. The parenthesis in Leviticus 26 contributes to each of these areas of OT theology and, at the same time, provides some potential clues regarding the existence of a Deuteronomic covenant.

Covenant

Moses employs “covenant” (בְּרִית) eight times in Leviticus 26 (vv. 9, 15, 25, 42 *ter*, 44, 45). It always denotes Yahweh’s binding relationship to His people Israel. This relationship provides Israel with a life that exhibits a goal and with a history that possesses meaning. In all its occurrences in this pericope, “covenant” promotes the concept of the sovereignty of Yahweh, the Covenant-Giver. Six of the eight uses of the term include the first person singular suffix (“My covenant”; vv. 9, 15, 42 *ter*, 44). Yahweh Himself is always the antecedent. This form of reference implies the unilateral nature of the covenants. Yahweh alone establishes the covenants. Yahweh’s personal intervention in the history of Israel points to a central theme of the covenants. His lordship is personal and absolute. The covenant lays hold of the

¹NASB. All translations in this study are the author’s own unless otherwise indicated, as here.

²The five stages are (1) debilitation and defeat (Lev 26:16-17), (2) drought (vv. 18-20), (3) devastation by wild beasts (vv. 21-22), (4) deprivation by siege (vv. 23-26), and (5) deportation (vv. 27-38).

³There are a number of similarities between the Deuteronomic Covenant and the New Covenant. See Dennis T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses: A Theological Reading*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 126-58 (esp. 153-56).

people of Israel and demands unconditional surrender to the will of God. Loyalty to the covenant must consist of more than outward acquiescence; it must demonstrate an inward reality. The “uncircumcised heart” (v. 41) stands in antithesis to covenant loyalty. Concerning this loyalty, Meredith Kline writes,

The covenant Lord demands heart-consecration which reflects the fulfillment of the consecration sworn in the circumcision oath. Circumcision is an oath-rite. To be uncircumcised would be to place oneself outside the juridical authority of Yahweh and a refusal to consign oneself to the ordeal of the Lord’s judgment for the final verdict on one’s life—eternal weal or woe.⁴

The Abrahamic Covenant

Yahweh’s covenant with Abraham appears to underlie the references to “covenant” in Lev 26:9, 42, and 44. The theme of a fruitful population echoes Abrahamic Covenant promises in Gen 17:6, 7, 19, and 21 (cf. also Exod 6:4 and Deut 8:18). Leviticus 26:9 provides an example of the distinctions made within the passage concerning the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. Characteristics of the Abrahamic Covenant include (1) The theme of promise, (2) emphasis on divine fulfillment, and (3) references to land, prosperity, and blessing and/or cursing. On the other hand, characteristic elements of the Mosaic Covenant involve (1) the theme of law, (2) emphasis on human responsibility, and (3) references to sabbath, sanctuary, and divine sovereignty. Although verse 9 sits in the midst of Mosaic Covenant material, it displays Abrahamic vocabulary, phraseology, and theme. Its message pertains to that brief span of time immediately following the revelation of the Mosaic Covenant at Mt. Sinai. In effect, the message declares that the revelation concerning law equals in authority the older revelation concerning promise. In order to receive the promised blessings contained in the Abrahamic Covenant, Israel must obey the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, the Mosaic Covenant provides the program by which Israelites should manifest their faith by their works (cp. Jas 2:14-26).

Moses associates each of the three references to “My covenant” in Lev 26:42 with one of the patriarchs:

וּזְכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב -42a
and I shall remember my covenant with *Jacob*
וְאֵף אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק -42b
even my covenant with *Isaac*
אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אֲבְרָהָם אֲזַכֵּר -42c
yea, I shall remember my covenant with *Abraham*

⁴Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 47-48.

-42d
 והארץ אזכר
 and I shall remember the land

The triple employment of זכר sets the tone for this section.⁵ The first person references indicate that Yahweh Himself will respond to Israel's repentance when it occurs. When Israel repents and turns back to Yahweh, God will reconfirm or renew the Abrahamic Covenant with them. Thus, Moses sets the blessings and cursings of Leviticus 26 against the backdrop of the Abrahamic Covenant. Verse 44 might have the same covenant in view through Yahweh's promise not to initiate any breach of the covenant.

The blessings recited in Lev 26:4-12 fulfill, at least in part, the covenant made with Abraham. Those blessings fall into six categories:

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

The biblical text associates all of these blessings with the land that Yahweh will give to Israel. They are consistent with various statements and restatements of the Abrahamic Covenant.

The covenant curses of Lev 26:14-38 indicate, at least in part, a removal of the Abrahamic blessings. Disobedience on the part of Israel results in the following changes:

1. Rather than possessing the land (Gen 12:1; 15:7, 18-21; 17:8), Israel will be

⁵ In addition to the repetitions in v. 42, readers should note the following elements: (1) The elevated style of v. 42abc is nearly a tristich containing synonymous parallelism. This does not mean that the three men are synonymous. The proper names are but modifiers of ברית. The last phrase of v. 42 and the subsequent context confirm that the text describes only one covenant. (2) זכר forms an inclusion opening and closing the section in order to maintain the emphasis on remembrance. The absence of זכר in v. 42b helps the inclusio develop. (3) ואף in v. 42bc continues the concept initiated in v. 42a. Its absence in v. 42d confirms the individual nature of that stich. (4) In this text the patriarchal names reverse the triad's usual order (a *hapax phenomenon* in the OT). The backward look to the original Abrahamic promise serves to confront Israel with their covenant relationship to Yahweh. (5) Verse 42d concludes the apodosis (the protasis is in vv. 40-41). The substitution of הארץ for ברית focuses attention on the central promise of the covenant: the land. Moses does not focus attention on the patriarchs, but rather on the land grant. (6) Verse 42d repeats the *yqtl* form of זכר (cf. v. 42c) in order to maintain the continuity between vv. 42abc and 42d. Therefore, it is best to understand v. 42d as a concise summary of v. 42abc. Note also that הארץ תעזב ("the land will be abandoned") in v. 43a immediately follows הארץ אזכר ("I will remember the land") in v. 42d. This case of contrastive anadiplosis is significant in that the Israelites must first abandon the land before Yahweh remembers the land.

- dispossessed from the land (Lev 26:33-38).
2. National greatness (Gen 12:2) will turn into humiliation, inferiority, and insignificance (Lev 26:29, 32, 36-37; Deut 28:43-44).
 3. Blessing (Gen 12:2; 22:17) will turn into cursing (Lev 26:14-38; Deut 28:15-68).
 4. Instead of being a blessing (Gen 12:2-3; 22:18), Israel will become a curse (Lev 26:32, 36-37a; Deut 28:25, 37).
 5. Multiplication (Gen 12:2; 15:5; 17:4-6; 22:17) will be replaced by diminution (Lev 26:22, 29, 38; Deut 28:18, 20-22, 53-57, 62).
 6. Success over Israel's enemies (Gen 22:17) will turn into defeat at the hand of their enemies (Lev 26:16-17, 32, 36-38; Deut 28:25, 31, 48, 52, 68).

The Abrahamic Covenant forms the basis for Yahweh's historical extraction of Israel from Egypt (cf. Gen 15:13, 14). While the nation resides at Mt. Sinai, they will remember that covenant as part of their theological heritage. They are experiencing the beginning of the historical fulfillment of its promises—they are en route to the land Yahweh promised to Abraham's descendants.

The Abrahamic Covenant demonstrates that Israel does not create their own national identity. That covenant provides them with the hope of landedness at a time when they are landless. Leviticus 26:1-13 reveals to Israel that the recent covenant given at Mt. Sinai (the Mosaic Covenant) does not nullify the Abrahamic Covenant. The land of promise comprises the central concept of the Abrahamic Covenant (v. 42). The Mosaic Covenant will not conflict with the landedness Yahweh promised long before Sinai.

Even the phraseology of covenant disloyalty ("uncircumcised heart," v. 41) reflects the impact of the Abrahamic Covenant on the theology and life of Israel. Circumcision outwardly manifests inward commitment to the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 17:9-14). Personal commitment and accountability are implicit even in the unilateral pact that Yahweh made with Abraham while the latter slept (15:12-21). Divine sovereignty and human responsibility do not present opposing concepts in the biblical covenants. Indeed, the human vassal must obey Yahweh because He is the sovereign Lord. Without a sovereign Lord, no human accountability can exist—obedience would be non-binding. Subsequent covenants do not alter Yahweh's lordship revealed in His covenant with Abraham. Since the sovereignty of God is not altered, neither are His covenant promises (cp. Gal 3:17).

Sinaitic Covenant

In Leviticus 26 Moses directs attention to the Mosaic Covenant by the prominence of the immediate historical context at Sinai and the legal nature of some of the terms used in the chapter ("statutes, commandments," v. 3; "commandments, statutes, ordinances," vv. 14-15; "statutes, ordinances, laws," v. 46). The precepts of verses 1-2 also have the Mosaic Covenant in view:

- prohibition of idols
- observance of sabbaths, and
- reverence for the sanctuary

The clear statements of verses 15, 45, and 46 remove any remaining doubt. This legal emphasis sets the stage for covenant vengeance in verse 25. It also promotes the sense of Yahweh's lordship which was already present in the Abrahamic Covenant. The covenant at Sinai is based upon Israel's historical deliverance from Egypt. Yahweh performed that deliverance in accord with the prior covenant (vv. 13, 45). The Mosaic Covenant intentionally identifies the people of Yahweh more narrowly. The Mosaic Covenant supplements the Abrahamic Covenant's identification of the land of promise by a refined definition of the people of promise. Just as circumcision provides the outward seal/sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, so the observance of the sabbaths becomes the seal/sign of the Sinaitic Covenant (cf. Lev 25; 26:2, 34-35, 43). The seal/sign of each covenant affects the realm of the other covenant: the covenant of the land (Abrahamic) relates directly to the people by circumcision, and the covenant of the people (Mosaic) relates directly to the land by means of the sabbaths.⁶ Thus divine revelation binds together the two major elements of these covenants (the land and the people). Yahweh appoints the land for the people and the people for the land.

The legislation connected with the Mosaic Covenant encourages a serious mindset regarding submission to the divine overlord. It also produces humility with reference to the unworthiness of Israel to be the special people of God, the chosen people (cf. Deut 7:6-11). Right behavior by the people of Yahweh presents the means by which they might witness to the nations concerning their heavenly Sovereign. By such behavior Israel participates in the testimony that Yahweh Himself initiated by means of their miraculous deliverance from Egypt (cf. Lev 26:45). The legislation marks Israel as the people belonging to Yahweh, the Exodus-Causer.

Disobedience to the absolute Sovereign of Israel's history will result in the removal of covenant blessings associated with the Mosaic Covenant. The exile will render the following aspects of the Mosaic Covenant inoperable:

- Yahweh will abhor and treat Israel as the tail of all the nations (Lev 26:30; Deut 28:43-44), although she previously enjoyed a position above all the nations (Exod 19:5; Deut 26:18-19).
- The kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6) will become ceremonially unclean and their sacrifices unacceptable (Lev 26:31).

⁶A distinction between a covenant of the land and a covenant of the people should not be pressed to an extreme. The Abrahamic Covenant also identifies the people of promise, referring to them as the descendants of Abraham. It became clear, however, that some of the descendants of Abraham (through Ishmael) would not be the people of promise. The Mosaic Covenant clarifies the situation regarding the identification of the covenant people.

- The holy nation of Israel (Exod 19:6) will become burdened with guilt (Lev 26:39) and characterized by a heathenlike uncircumcised heart (v. 41).
- Israel's history of national deliverance (Exod 19:4) will turn into a history of national exile (Lev 26:33, 38).

Sinai represents but the commencement of the relationship between God and Israel. God and the nation must identify with each other if the wilderness years are to lead to the promised land. The apostasies at Sinai⁷ serve only to remind the nation why Yahweh gave them legislation. They need standards. Without the order those standards produce, chaos and anarchy will prevail. The nation must prepare for their inheritance, the land. The means of preparation consists of instruction, parenthesis. Instruction expresses the primary concept of Torah (תורה, v. 46). Leviticus 26's instruction focuses on identification with the covenant deity or suzerain, Yahweh (cf. v. 45).

Deuteronomic Covenant⁸

The many parallels between Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–30 present the reader with a problem regarding relationships between covenants. How does the Deuteronomic Covenant relate to Leviticus 26? The similarities of structure (blessing and cursing), the revelation of the ultimate chastisement for breach of covenant (exile preceded by siege which deteriorates into cannibalism), and a time sphere subsequent to the impartation of the Mosaic Covenant all demonstrate a relationship in content. However, similarity does not equal identity. Leviticus 26 does not reveal ratification of a third covenant. Neither does the chapter describe a third covenant in terms of any relationship to the past covenant (Abrahamic) and the present covenant (Mosaic). The text might contain an allusion to a future covenant; however, those who received Leviticus 26 would not have identified that covenant with Deuteronomy 27–30.

⁷The golden calf incident provoked the public shattering of the covenant tablets (Exod 32:19). About 3,000 died that day (v. 28). Two priests, sons of Aaron, also died at Sinai when they did not follow divine instructions concerning service at the altar (Lev 10:1-2). Later, a man was executed because of his blasphemous appropriation of the name of God (Lev 24:10-23).

⁸For the sake of discussion, the author defines the Deuteronomic Covenant as the pact God established with Israel on the plains of Moab (Deut 27-30). That covenant was entered by Israel's oath (Deut 29), confirmed by sacrifices and public deposit at Shechem (Josh 8:30-35), and renewed at Shechem near the end of Joshua's ministry (Josh 24:1-28). Synonyms for this covenant include Deuteronomic Covenant and covenant on the plains of Moab. Cf. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953) 58-59; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 214-17, 226, 230; S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Meridian Library, 1956) 71; M. Weinfeld, "בְּרִית," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis, 2:256, 268-69; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 59-116; Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969) 58-64, 134-42.

Yahweh revealed the latter text to the new generation of Israelites while they camped on the plains of Moab. Yahweh revealed the former text to their parents and grandparents while they were still at Mt. Sinai (Lev 26:46). Leviticus 26 might be considered a prophetic preview of the Deuteronomic Covenant only in the sense that the basic theological concepts of the Moab covenant are present in the pericope. However, Leviticus 26 does not specify that covenant *per se*. Leviticus 26 does not provide a formal prophetic announcement regarding any future covenant.

Divine revelation is progressive in nature. The seeds of one age become the flowers of yet another age. Leviticus 26 might contain the seed of the Deuteronomic Covenant. The blessings and cursings of that chapter are transitional. They prepare Israel for the land while they are at Sinai prior to commencing their wilderness wanderings. Yahweh will provide transitional revelation expanding and formalizing a covenant upon Israel's arrival at the threshold of the land (on the plains of Moab). The title deed to the land (the Abrahamic Covenant), the constitution for the people of the land (the Mosaic Covenant), and the rights to the riches of the land (the Deuteronomic Covenant) would then provide the nation with all the revelation necessary to live within the land itself.

Land

Every gift to the nation of Israel calls her people to an obligation before the covenant suzerain, Yahweh. The land grant to Israel involves the people's identification with Yahweh. The Land-Giver summons the people to service. The summons is both beneficial and binding. The covenant conditions its benefits upon obedience to Yahweh's command. He delivered the enslaved nation from Egypt and they became bond slaves belonging to Yahweh (Lev 26:13). The prior bondage differs from the latter in that the latter brings blessing (vv. 2-12). No such rewards accrued as a result of Egyptian bondage.

The land grant predates the existence of Israel *per se*. Abraham received the land grant at the time of his own exodus from Mesopotamia. Israel's national identity was established under Moses at the time of their exodus from Egypt. God in His sovereignty controls the history of the land and the people. Wijngaards points out that, "From the roughly 160 cases in which biblical passages speak of Jahweh's giving the land to Israel, more than half contain references to 'the fathers.'" It is significant, therefore, that the text of Leviticus 26 refers to "the ancestors" (v. 45) in a context related to the Mosaic Covenant. This establishes a continuity of covenants. Just as Abraham's descendants claim the Abrahamic Covenant while they are at Mt. Sinai, so in the future days an exiled people will repent and claim the covenant made with their ancestors at Mt. Sinai. Willingness to identify themselves as Yahweh's people will qualify them for restoration to the land.

⁹J. N. M. Wijngaards, *The Dramatization of Salvific History in the Deuteronomic Schools*, Oudtestamentische Studiën 16 (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1969):73.

The land of promise provides the setting for fulfillment of both blessings (vv. 4-12) and curses (vv. 14-38). Reward and retribution cannot be fulfilled anywhere else. The landedness of Israel is essential for fulfillment. Israel cannot receive landed prosperity without the land. On the other hand, Israel cannot experience exile from the land until they have first possessed it.

Interestingly, Yahweh treats the land itself as a separate participant in the covenant. It can receive restitution for sabbaths that Israel denied it (vv. 34-35, 43). The land belongs first to Yahweh. Therefore, as its sovereign Lord, He possesses authority to grant it to Israel. He presents the title deed to Abraham's descendants. Any intermediate generation who are disloyal to the covenant will be subject to expulsion from the land (vv. 33-44). Yet, the land will remain, kept in store for that future generation who will obey the precepts of Yahweh. The generations may come and go, but the land will abide as the Abrahamic Covenant's material entity. Yahweh intended to preserve the fruitfulness of the land for the ultimate possessors by means of sabbaths (cf. Leviticus 25). Thus, disobedience to Yahweh's sabbatical legislation involves sin against the land. Even more, it is a sin against future generations, since such a breach of the covenant results from greed. Such greed robs the land of its fruitfulness and robs future generations of its provision.

Landedness makes it possible for the people to be tempted in the areas of self-sufficiency, idolatry, and sabbath breaking. Israelites can resist such temptations by remembering the history of the people and the land. Remembering the covenant deeds of Yahweh reminds the people that the land they enjoy is an unearned gift. The exiled people, remembering the Lord of the land, must confess their guilt and make restitution (vv. 40-41). Their remembering and acting upon that memory results, in turn, in Yahweh remembering the land (v. 42). In this way He preserves covenant blessings for His people.

At Mt. Sinai, the land represents hope. In the wilderness, the land represents hope. In the land, when the hope is fulfilled, the land presents the people with a challenge. They must exercise faith in the God of the covenant. Such faith had not been exhibited by those who apostatized at Sinai and who died in the wilderness. During the exile, the land again represents the people's covenant hope.

Divine History

The foundation of the Mosaic Covenant (Lev 26:13, 45) consists of the history of Yahweh's deeds on behalf of His people. Yahweh is the God of history, the sovereign Lord of time and of place. Divine election and deliverance comprise the main factors in Israel's history. Nothing that Israel possesses results from her own work. Yahweh as Creator and Giver graciously and mercifully associates Himself with this nation. As the Lord of history, He controls all history. He can move entire nations in order to chastise disobedient Israel and to return her to the land in the time of her repentance. Indeed, the God of history can prepare the nations for receiving the exiled people (cf. Joseph, Gen 50:20). The nations might swallow up the scattered

Israelites (Lev 26:33) and make them vanish (v. 38), but Yahweh will preserve a remnant so that a new history might begin. Israel must trust the God of history who controls all time, places, and nations.

Breach and Preservation of Covenant

Israel might breach (פרר, Lev 26:15, 44) the covenant, but Yahweh cannot (v. 44). The “uncircumcised heart” (v. 41) of disobedient Israel reflects her disloyalty to the divine covenants. Yahweh can never be disloyal; He is always faithful because He is “Yahweh their God” (v. 44).

Breach of covenant occurs when Israel disobeys the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant (v. 15). Idolatry and sabbath breaking, especially, constitute breach of covenant (vv. 1-2). Such an action of disobedience is willful. Therefore, it results in the nullification of blessings associated with the Abrahamic Covenant and identification associated with the Mosaic Covenant. Yahweh, as the suzerain-legislator, deems any infraction of Mosaic legislation as rebellion against His sovereign will.

Yahweh, however, “remembers” (זכר) His covenants; He preserves the covenants. The covenants contain both blessing and cursing. Blessing and cursing are initiated by promise and implemented by legislation. Promise emphasizes divine sovereignty; legislation highlights human responsibility. When Israel proves unfaithful, Yahweh remains faithful. The suzerain’s faithful preservation of the covenant sharply contrasts with the vassal’s failure to submit. Covenant history confirms both divine dependability and human culpability.

The Hebrew Bible identifies the Abrahamic Covenant as a covenant with roots in the history of Israel. It involved Jacob, and before him, Isaac. Before Isaac, Yahweh granted the land to Abraham. Leviticus 26:42 presents this confirmation of prior history. As Yahweh preserves the Abrahamic Covenant (and will continue to preserve it), so also He will preserve the Mosaic Covenant for future generations (v. 45). Yahweh’s deeds in history illustrate His faithfulness to maintain the covenant in spite of the failure of one generation to be faithful to it.

Law

Religious enthusiasm does not suffice for proper participation in the covenant relationship with Yahweh. Enthusiasm without identification leads to confusion. Identification produces unity within and recognition from without. At Mt. Sinai, the apostasies of the golden calf, strange fire, and blasphemy demonstrate what unguided and unstructured religious fervor can generate. Seeing that the emphasis of divine law rests upon Yahweh Himself, any breach of the law consists of defiance directed against the Law-Giver. The stipulations of law exhibit the nature and personality of the Law-Giver. The morality of the law reflects Yahweh’s morality. Israel’s faith is grounded in the precepts of divine law. Divine law identifies Yahweh

as the Creator of the heavens and earth, the Promise-Giver, the Land-Giver, and the Exodus-Causer. Every statute presents a testimony to the election of the people and a witness to their identification with their sovereign Lord.

Moses employs a variety of terms for law in Leviticus 26: חק/חקה (“statute”), מצוה (“commandment”), משפט (“ordinance”), and תורה (“law/instruction”). These terms represent the entire law promulgated at Mt. Sinai. The law must be “kept/preserved” (שמר), “obeyed” (שמע), “walked in (ordering the life)” (הלך), and “practiced” (עשה) (cf. vv. 3, 14-15). Therefore, the law did not serve as mere ornamentation. The law is Israel’s constitution. The nation of Israel derives her identity from corporate and individual observance of Yahweh’s commandments.

The legislation Yahweh promulgates at Sinai does not contradict the promise given to Abraham. The legal covenant (Mosaic) supplements the promissory covenant (Abrahamic). The latter does not nullify the former. Mosaic legislation is a means of implementing Yahweh’s suzerainty. It reaffirms His lordship over His people prior to their entry into the land promised to Abraham’s descendants.

Relation to Covenant

As already observed, law supplements covenant. The treaty form employed by several cultures in the ancient Near East includes stipulations. Thereby the suzerain could identify himself as the overlord, the one with authority to establish the calendar, ordain boundaries, grant life, or deal out death. Legislation clarifies authority. Every covenant must identify an authority in which it resides, an authority capable of meting out the punishments required for breach of covenant. A covenant endures as long as its ratifier and reflects the wisdom and moral character of its ratifier. The ratifier of the covenants with Abraham and Moses is Yahweh Himself. The covenants are His covenants (cf. “My covenant,” Lev 26:9, 15, 42, 44), and the laws are His laws (cf. first-person singular suffixes on terms for law in vv. 3 and 15).

Prohibition of Idolatry

Leviticus 26:1 clearly prohibits all forms of idolatry. The prohibition emphatically identifies the true nature of faith in Yahweh. Such faith recognizes the exclusivity of Yahweh’s deity and lordship. No idolater can truly worship Yahweh. Yahweh’s preeminence as the Creator of heavens and earth makes Him the only true God. Yahweh created and controls all the natural forces of the world. He is the Rain-Giver and the Rain-Withholder (vv. 4, 19); He is the Controller of wild beasts (vv. 6, 22); and He is the Controller of the nations (vv. 7-8, 16-17, 33, 38). He knows the heart and its motives (vv. 36, 41). He is the Destroyer of idols and idol worship (v. 30). Idolatry and its attendant rituals in the ancient Near East implied that the deities were incapable of self-sufficiency. In fact, idolaters were cast in the role of manipulators. They sought to manipulate the deities behind the idols. Not so with Yahweh—no man controls or manipulates Yahweh. Yahweh controls history, nature, life, death, and man.

Leviticus 26 reveals that idolatry is powerless and empty; idolatry is man's product (v. 1). Idolatry is blatant, filthy, and deadly (v. 30¹⁰). It is doomed to destruction and the idolater is destined to die. Idolatry consists of willful rebellion against the person of Yahweh. It usurps Yahweh's rightful sovereignty. Anyone engaging in such activities against Yahweh is a covenant breaker, a rebel, an anarchist, and a conspirator. According to the treaties of the ancient Near East, to aid in the usurpation of a throne or to engage in intrigue aimed at supplanting the true heir to the throne comprised a capital offense.¹¹

Defiance of the Creator of the universe and the God of all history presents a far more serious crime than the breach of any human treaty. The "self-introduction formula"¹² ("for I am Yahweh your God") succinctly expresses the ultimate reason for the prohibition of idolatry. This formula represents the key phrase in Leviticus 18–26.¹³ The contrast is self-explanatory. Yahweh's inherent and exclusive authority makes idols worthless, powerless, anthropocentric, and void of any spiritually redeeming value. No room for divided loyalties exists. Yahweh insists upon exclusive lordship in the lives of His people. Awareness of Yahweh's existence, identity, and presence forms the core of the covenant relationship that Israel enjoys.

The idolater chooses the way of the uncircumcised nations (cf. v. 41), therefore those nations among whom he will be exiled (v. 33) will swallow him up (v. 38). His guilt, his treason, will cause him great anguish (v. 39). The only way for restoration to Yahweh's favor comes through confession, humility, and restitution (vv. 40-41). Idolaters must confess their filthy idolatry. Humility results from the realization that one cannot manipulate Yahweh. Restitution must consist in making Yahweh and His land priorities in one's life.

Observance of Sabbaths

¹⁰The following translation of Lev 26:30 brings out the "deadly" aspect of idolatry: "I will destroy your shrines and cut down your incense altars, then I will put your corpses upon the lifeless forms of your filthy idols because I despise [lit., my soul despises] you." The term for idols (אֱלֹהִים) may be "a term of reproach, 'things of dung,' which is vocalized similarly to אֲדָמָה ['detested things']"—Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 104-5. Cf. Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, trans. Douglas W. Stott, OTL (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster-John Knox, 1996) 403: "dungy things."

¹¹Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire*, *Biblica et Orientalia* 19 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967) 15, 21, 83.

¹²John van Seters, "Confessional Reformulation in the Exilic Period," *Vetus Testamentum* 22 (1972):455.

¹³Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 250.

“Sabbaths” occurs in the plural throughout the pericope (Lev 26:2, 34-35, 43). Yahweh undoubtedly intends the reference to include both weekly sabbaths and annual sabbaths (including the year of jubilee) that are mentioned in the preceding context (chaps. 23-25).

Sabbath observance exhibits theological richness. It specially signifies Yahweh’s dominion over Israel.¹⁴ In His sovereignty Yahweh establishes the nation, grants them their land, and claims His demand upon their time.¹⁵ The sabbaths are also a means of reminding Israelites of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage.¹⁶ Walther Zimmerli stresses the significance of Israel’s liturgy: “Any OT theology must pay attention to the way in which the faith of the OT hears the commandment of its God in its liturgical ordinances.”¹⁷ Israel’s liturgical calendar is Yahweh-oriented. Yahweh is the God of time as well as the God of space. The sabbath honors the Lord of time. The sabbaths teach the Israelites to trust the Lord of all things for their provisions. Lordship resides at the heart of the sabbatical principle. By trusting the Lord to provide for the seventh day, the seventh year, and the forty-ninth and fiftieth years, Israel gives tangible witness to His power and wisdom. He who provided in the wilderness had already proclaimed the sabbatical principle while Israel camped at Mt. Sinai. The instruction for God’s people is simple: “Trust me to provide. I am Yahweh. I will not lead you where I cannot care for you.” God never demands what man is unable to do. He provides the way of service and blesses the path of obedience. Sabbath in the Hebrew Bible expresses more than the vertical relationship to the Lord of all creation. It also conveys concern and care for those who are fellow participants in the covenant (cf. Leviticus 25).

The sabbatical principle constitutes the test, the seal or sign, of the obedience Yahweh demands under the Mosaic covenant (Exod 33:17-21). The legal covenant represents the legislative authority of Yahweh. The sabbath represents Yahweh’s authority over time. Thus sabbatical law embodies the legislation of time.

Even the land needs restitution when Israel fails to grant the time that Yahweh demands for it (Lev 26:34-35, 43). Yahweh is Lord of the land as well as the people. The land is a promised possession in a time-space continuum. Breach of the sabbatical principle regarding the land confirms rebellion against the Lord of time and space. Violation of the land by denying its just recompense indicates a violation of Yahweh’s gift of fruitfulness. Failure to observe the sabbaths consists of robbery because it denies continued fruitfulness for future generations of Abraham’s

¹⁴Matitiahu Tsevat, “The Basic Meaning of the Biblical Sabbath,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1972):455.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 64.

¹⁷Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978) 125.

descendants. The liberty proclaimed in the sabbatical principle echoes the divine history. The God of history delivered Israel from servitude in Egypt so that the people might experience liberation from oppression. Denying that liberation equals denying the Lord who brought them out of Egypt (v. 13; cf. 25:38, 42, 55).

Yahweh

Leviticus 26 clearly depicts Yahweh as God of the covenants. Moses employs “Yahweh” (יהוה) six times in the pericope (vv. 1, 2, 13, 44, 45, 46). Twice he uses the title absolutely (vv. 2, 46). Four times he connects the divine title directly with or associates it by context with “your/their God” (vv. 1, 13, 44, 45). In four of these occurrences, Moses mentions Yahweh in relation to the Mosaic Covenant (vv. 1, 2, 45, 46). In two cases, he associates Yahweh with the Abrahamic Covenant (vv. 13 and 44).

Self-introduction Formula

The self-introduction formula (“for I am Yahweh your God”) is one of the devices by which Moses sets this particular pericope off from the surrounding context. He often mixes this formula with the divine history formula (statement concerning Yahweh delivering Israel out of Egypt). In all cases (Lev 26:1, 2, 13, 44, 45), Moses employs the self-introduction formula as a conclusion to a section of the pericope. This formula marks the precepts of verses 1-2, the blessing of verses 3-12, and also the penalties of verses 14-45. The only mention of Yahweh outside either one of these two formulas appears in the postscript (v. 46), which identifies Yahweh as the Giver of the laws committed to Moses. The dual emphasis on Yahweh’s identification in the section concerning precepts (vv. 1-2) presents an obvious contrast to the idolatry forbidden there. Yahweh is the covenant name of the Covenant-Giver (cf. Exod 3:13-18; also, Gen 12:1, 4; 15:1-8; Exod 20:2, 7). “I am Yahweh” constitutes the divine seal on the covenants involved in Leviticus 26. Covenant preservation depends upon Yahweh’s identity (vv. 44-45).

Yahweh is the author of the precepts (v. 46; cf. vv. 1-2), the author of the history (vv. 13, 45), and the author of the covenant (v. 44). His authority is absolute; His covenants are dependable. He authors both the blessings and the curses, the reward and the retribution.

Relation to Covenant

The following elements establish Yahweh’s relationship to the covenants in Leviticus 26: (1) the self-introduction formula, (2) the divine history formula, (3) the attribution of the source of the laws at Sinai (v. 46), and (4) the first-person singular suffixes on “covenant.” The covenants did not originate with Israel. Yahweh promulgates the covenants unilaterally.

Presence and Sanctuary

The word “presence” (פָּנִים, Lev 26:17) refers to the presence of Yahweh. In addition, other phrases or terms allude to the divine presence: “walk among you” (הִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּתוֹךְ, v. 12), “sanctuary” (מִקְדָּשׁ, v. 2), and “tabernacle” (מִשְׁכָּן, v. 11). His presence works both weal (vv. 11-12) and woe (v. 17). His presence is both edifice-oriented¹⁸ (vv. 2, 11) and people-oriented (vv. 12, 17). Notably, His presence involves holiness (note the employment of the root שָׁקַד “holy” in שָׁקַדְתָּ, “sanctuary”). Reference to holiness stands out in a particularly striking fashion because it occurs in the context of precepts prohibiting idolatry and commanding observance of sabbaths. Yahweh is holy because He is set apart from idols and His presence is distinct from idols—He is wholly other, incomparable. Also, setting sabbatical time apart for Him implies Yahweh’s holiness.

Verses 14-45 imply that when disobedient Israel is confronted by the punishment-dealing presence of Yahweh, He has ceased to “walk among” them or to tabernacle among them. Indeed, the text pictures Him as “walking in opposition” to them (vv. 24, 28). Even though His presence or sanctuary does not reside with the exiles among the nations (at least not in the same fashion as when they are obedient and in the land), yet Yahweh will preserve His covenant with them (v. 44).

Promise

Promise here is being used in a very broad sense of the term. It covers both the promise to bless and the promise to curse. It includes the sense of fulfillment or commitment as much as the sense of hope or expectancy.

Leviticus 26 identifies promise with the solemn, divine, self-introduction of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (vv. 1, 2, 13, 44, 45; cf. v. 42). This promise precedes the history of deliverance from Egypt (the Abrahamic Covenant) and the entrance into Canaan (the Mosaic and Deuteronomic covenants). Promise does not refer to something inward and spiritual, but to the tangible aspects of covenant life: productivity, peace, population, presence, and land (property). The promise includes a pledge to bless Israelites for their loyalty to the covenant and to curse them for their disloyalty. Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, promises to be loyal to His covenant with His people.

Blessing and Curse

The blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 bear a good deal of similarity to those of Deuteronomy 27–28 as well as to those of extrabiblical documents such as

¹⁸By “edifice-oriented” this writer does not mean that Yahweh is edifice-limited. An edifice merely represents an accommodation to focus attention on Yahweh’s presence among His people. Cf. Ezek 10:3-19; 11:22-23; 43:1-5.

the Esarhaddon vassal treaties and the Sefire stela treaties.¹⁹ Similarities involve both formal structure and traditional phraseology and vocabulary. By their very contexts in the biblical materials, the blessings and curses are distinctly covenantal.²⁰ The blessings relate directly to the promised blessings and/or privileges of both the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants. Likewise, the curses relate directly to the nullification or removal of those same blessings and/or privileges.

The blessings and curses do not in themselves indicate the presence of the Deuteronomic Covenant in Leviticus 26. Any preview of that covenant in the pericope must maintain continuity with the two previous covenants. In other words, a third covenant (whether here or in Deuteronomy 27–30) does not nullify the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants.

Obedience and Disobedience

According to Zimmerli, “Obedience to Yahweh, the one God, who delivered Israel out of slavery and is jealous of his own uniqueness, defines the fundamental nature of the OT faith.”²¹ Obedience reflects respect for who and what Yahweh is personally and historically (Lev 26:1-3, 13-15, 39-45). Obedience involves acceptance of the lordship of Yahweh in one’s life in both time and space (cf. vv. 2, 34-35, 43). Obedience produces participation in the covenant blessings (v. 9). The precepts of the law reveal the will of Yahweh for Israel. The will of man must yield to the will of Yahweh in order for him to demonstrate loyalty to the covenants (cf. v. 41).

Disobedience expresses denial of the identity of Yahweh in history, covenant, and law. It comprises breach of covenant faith (v. 15). It consists of acting unfaithfully, disloyally, and treasonously (v. 40). It represents blatant opposition to God (vv. 21, 23, 27). Disobedience constitutes nonperformance of His commands (v. 14). It involves rejecting His statutes and despising His ordinances (v. 15). Disobedience involves the inner man (vv. 15, 41, 43; note “soul” and “heart”) and has frightful consequences. Even cannibalism falls within the capability of the disobedient (v. 29). It causes the unacceptability of the sacrifices, which were the outward manifestation of faith (v. 31). Disobedience is worthy only of death (vv. 25, 33, 37, 38) and exile (vv. 33, 44). Death consists of separation from the body; exile means separation from the land.

¹⁹Fitzmyer, *Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire* 44-48; D. J. Wiseman, *The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon*, Iraq 20/1 (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1958) 62, 64,70.

²⁰Contra Ronald E. Clements, *Prophecy and Tradition*, Growing Points in Theology (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 16-17.

²¹Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology* 116.

Guilt

The concept of guilt (עון) occurs in Lev 26:39, 40, 41, and 43. Moses mentions it only in the context of repentance, confession, humility, and restitution. Israelites must acknowledge guilt resulting from disloyalty to the covenant before the breached covenant might be reinstated. Guilt in this context possesses two aspects: (1) the guilt of the ancestors of Israel (“the fathers,” vv. 39, 40) and (2) the guilt of the current generation of Israelites (vv. 39, 40, 41, 43). Yahweh requires confession of both before He grants restoration. The guilt of the current generation holds primary significance. Unless the current generation can recognize, acknowledge, and deal with their own guilt, it is pointless to recognize, acknowledge, and deal with the guilt of their forefathers.

This guilt proves so burdensome that it will lead to severe anguish among exiled Israelites (v. 39). The guilt is real; the burden is real. This does not embody some sort of temporary “guilt trip.” Guilt, properly acknowledged, becomes Yahweh’s instrument to draw Israelites back to the covenant relationship that they enjoyed prior to their willful rebellion against Him. This guilt must be confessed (v. 40).

Retribution and Chastisement

Yahweh highlights the application of the curses or penalties of Leviticus 26:14-45 by two means: (1) the gradation of punishments in five stages of severity (vv. 16-17, 18-20, 21-22, 23-26, and 27-38)²² and (2) the recurring refrain, “seven times for your sins” (vv. 18, 21, 24, 28). Three occurrences of the term “discipline” (יסר, vv. 18, 23, 28) emphasize the stages of chastisement. Yahweh intends the entire process, from start to finish, as a means of restoration. However, the primary purpose does not consist of restoration, but of glorifying the covenant God, Yahweh (cf. vv. 44, 45).

Retribution might be terminal (cf. vv. 25, 30, 38), but chastisement might result in restoration through repentance (cf. vv. 39-45). Leviticus 26 speaks to both retribution and chastisement. Divine retribution will come upon those who fail to confess their sins. Yahweh, however, will chastise only those who confess their sins.

In the refrain (“seven times for your sins”), “seven times”²³ implies the sabbatical principle and “for your sins” indicates breach of covenant. The vassal

²²For an excellent discussion of the form, structure and setting of vv. 14-45, see John Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC 4 (Dallas: Word, 1992) 457-62.

²³Seven is more than just a symbolic number: “It is an appropriate and evocative number in view of the importance of the seventh in Israelite religion” (Wenham, *Leviticus* 331). Cf. also Karl Elliger, *Leviticus*, HAT 1/4 (Tübingen, Germany: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1966) 375: “Natürlich ist ‘sieben’ eine schematische Steigerungszahl” (“‘Seven’ is naturally a stylized number of intensity”).

treaties of Esarhaddon also apply the term “sin” to breach of covenant.²⁴ Leviticus 26 emphasizes the seal or sign of the Mosaic Covenant, the sabbaths. The sabbaths’ association with the land (vv. 34-35, 43) at least implies at least some relationship to the Abrahamic Covenant. Yahweh judges His people for their nonobservance of the sabbaths, for their worship of idols, and for the resulting defilement of His people among whom He dwells (cf. vv. 1-2, 29-31). Divine judgment does not betray the covenants (v. 44). On the contrary, judgment declares that disobedience constitutes sin and that sin consists of rebellion against the Lord. Eventually, Yahweh’s judgments will increase to such an intensity and nature that no doubt will remain that He has exercised His covenant rights to exact retribution from those who defy His authority.

Exile

Exile (“scattering among the nations,” Lev 26:33) constitutes the ultimate penalty for breach of covenant. It means removal from the land of promise. The landedness for which the nation hopes will dissolve into the landlessness which had characterized their sojourn in Egypt. Servitude will once again engulf the disobedient. Due to their “uncircumcised heart” (v. 41), Yahweh will place them among the uncircumcised—those who are outside the covenants. Exile comprises a living death, a living separation from the land of abundant life. Exile means removal from the setting in which Israel can experience the blessings of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. Exile, however, need not be terminal. Exile, landlessness, provides a condition that might give rebirth to hope (vv. 39-45). Landlessness is not synonymous with divine rejection or abhorrence (v. 44). As at Sinai and in the wilderness, landlessness presents the people with a goal for life and a meaning for history. The landless ones must cast their cares upon the One who would guide them out of bondage to freedom. Even in the land of their enemies, Yahweh continues to be their God (v. 44). The covenant relationship *per se* knows no geographical or political boundaries. The landedness or the landlessness of Yahweh’s people does not affect His loyalty. Yahweh stands above the circumstances of history, working for the repentance of His covenanted people so that His covenants, together with their promises, might one day be fulfilled completely.

Repentance

The Hebrew word for “repentance” (נָשׁוּב) does not occur in Leviticus 26. However, the concept of repentance occurs in a threefold turning of exiled Israelites to Yahweh: (1) They must confess their guilt and the guilt of their forefathers (v. 40), recognizing their personal and corporate culpability. (2) They must humble their

²⁴See D. J. Wiseman, *The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon*, Iraq 20/1 (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1958):42 (col. iii 160), 50 (col. iv 272), 52 (col. iv 292), 58 (col v 397).

“uncircumcised heart” (v. 41), bringing it into subjection to the precepts of Yahweh. Submission to the divine Suzerain is required of a covenanted people. They must submit to Yahweh’s lordship. Their submission must not consist of mere external compliance in religious exercises; it must be internal and real. (3) They must make restitution for their guilt (v. 41), accepting the federal (or, natural) consequences of sin. Such restitution does not equate with soteriological redemption. Restitution provides evidence, not the cause, of repentance and expiation. The Israelites will experience the impact of sin until the land enjoys its restitution. Exile will continue after repentance until the penalty has been fulfilled. Getting right with God does not insure immediate blessing and removal from uncomfortable circumstances. It does guarantee restoration to the covenant relationship whereby Yahweh might renew promised blessings once the repentant Israelites regain the land.

Restitution

“Restitution” (הצדקה) not only involves the full application of the federal (or, natural) consequences of sin, but also the full application of that which is right in Yahweh’s covenanted relationship to the land (Lev 26:34-35, 43). Therefore, restitution has a twofold character: positive (that which is right for the land—to enjoy its sabbaths) and negative (that which is the just consequence of sin—the period of Israel’s removal from the land). Through restitution Israel learns that the inexorable will and way of Yahweh will be fulfilled within both time and space.

Revelation

The very concept of law implies communication between its promulgator and its recipients. Yahweh must reveal commandments, statutes, ordinances, laws and instructions since fallen human beings cannot intuitively deduce them. In the ancient Near East the concept of covenant itself demanded a written record or deposit of a pact for future generations.

The diversity of covenant concepts and forms in Leviticus 26, as compared with the ancient Near Eastern treaties, provides evidence for the independent theology of Israel.²⁵ Among many scholars, Clements notes, there is “a remarkable unwillingness to appreciate the creative possibilities of Israel’s own religious life and experience.”²⁶ The richness of Leviticus 26 lies, in part, in its uniqueness at that

²⁵Leviticus 26 contains some elements distinct from the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon and Sefire: blessings (vv. 3-13), provision for reinstatement in case of transgression (vv. 14-45; esp. vv. 39-45), monotheism, and covenantal precedents (vv. 42, 45). In the vassal treaties there are imprecations requested by a third party in the presence of a mediating deity and the employment of ritual magic—neither of which occur in the biblical covenants. For a more detailed study of this topic, see William D. Barrick, “Leviticus 26: Its Relationship to Covenant Contexts and Concepts” (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1981) 171-84.

²⁶Clements, *Prophecy and Tradition* 21.

particular stage of progressive revelation. The confluent nature of the revelation (i.e., drawing upon contemporary vocabulary, style, forms, and cultural milieu) represents a desire on the part of Yahweh for revelation to be immediately understandable and applicable.

Leviticus 26 claims to be Mosaic in time, content, and composition. The self-witness of Scripture must suffice as *prima facie* evidence. Unless equally ancient and authentic documentation can be produced to deny explicitly the claims and contents of this pericope, it must be allowed to stand. This must apply to both the historical claims and the theological concepts. The treaties of Esarhaddon and Sefire cannot be offered as contradictory testimony since they were composed 700 years too late and the differences in subject matter, purpose, and structure disqualify them as legal testimony against the biblical materials in Leviticus 26.

Leviticus 26 and the New Testament

The employment of Lev 26:11-12 in 2 Cor 6:16 represents the only concrete example of the influence of Leviticus 26 on NT revelation.²⁷ Paul employs the passage from this pericope in order that he might better emphasize the concept of identification with God. Unfortunately, Wenham did not deal with this NT usage in his Leviticus commentary.²⁸ Wenham, however, does observe that, at least in principle, Christ's teachings in His pre-cross ministry express the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26. Israel was experiencing chastisement for covenant disloyalty at the time of Christ, so Jesus speaks of the eschatological reality of that chastisement. Wenham claims that "many of the horrifying judgments described in Rev. 6ff. find their original setting in the covenant curses of Lev. 26 and Deut. 28."²⁹ This is true insofar as the Book of Revelation directly relates them to the nation of Israel. No warrant exists for applying the covenant blessings and curses to the Gentiles (with the exception of the blessing for all peoples mediated by Abraham's descendants, Gen 12:3). Technically, Yahweh established the covenants with Israel alone (cf. Rom 9:4).³⁰

²⁷ Paul's quotation of Lev 26:11-12 is paraphrastic. He emphasizes the concept of identification with God (Lev 26:12b). The apostle's omission of Lev 26:11b provides a clue to his intention. That phrase does not serve any purpose in Paul's discussion in the context of 2 Corinthians 6. Since he would omit Lev 26:11b ("and my soul will not despise you"), he paraphrased 11a ("I will set my dwelling place in your midst"—cf. 2 Cor 6:16, "I will dwell among them"). Having established the concept and the context, Paul proceeds to quote Lev 26:12. The simple reading of the NT text alongside the Hebrew text makes elaborate discussions of conflation of OT texts, "pearl stringing," pre-Pauline usage, and 4Q LXX Lev³ unnecessary.

²⁸ Wenham, *Leviticus* 329-30, 333-34.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 334.

³⁰ Cf. the postscript of Leviticus 26: "These are the statutes and the ordinances and the laws which Yahweh established between Himself and the Israelites on Mt. Sinai through Moses" (v. 46). Exodus 19:5-6 and Rom 9:4 express this same exclusivity.

The principles of God's dealings with NT believers by means of reward and/or chastisement appear to be basically the same as the principles by which He dealt with Israelites under the covenants. However, this must not be construed as meaning that NT saints come under the same covenant relationship with God as Israel. Similarities are due to the same God, not to the same covenant. The very nature of God demands that the federal (or, natural) consequences of sin be exacted from His people in all ages (cf. 1 Cor 11:30; Gal 6:7-10). The same God provides lessons for believers in every era based upon His historical deeds (cf. Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11-13). The same God blesses in tangible ways those who are faithful (cf. 2 Cor 9:6-15). The same God demonstrates loyalty even in the face of His people's disloyalty (cf. Phil 1:6; 2 Tim 2:11-13;). The same God is Lord (cf. 1 Cor 12:3). The same Lord requires confession, humility, and restitution (cf. Phile 1-25; 1 Pet 5:5-7; 1 John 1:9). The same God promises to reward obedient service (cf. 1 Cor 15:58). The same God demonstrates that He has delivered the believer from bondage into a servitude that is totally unlike the bondage of fear and the curse (cf. Acts 26:18; Rom 6:12-23; Col 1:12-13; Heb 2:14-15).

The Lord who by means of Leviticus 26 reveals to Israel the continued authority and perpetuity of the Abrahamic Covenant after the ratification of the Mosaic Covenant, also confirms that testimony in Gal 3:17. New Testament believers must recognize that the authority of one covenant does not annul the authority of a previous covenant. God clearly reveals any exceptions (e.g., Heb 7:11-14). The epistle to the Galatian churches teaches that the law under Moses does not replace Abrahamic faith in Yahweh. Therefore, faith is still binding upon any man's relationship to the God of Abraham.

Conclusion

What then might one conclude concerning the relationship of the Deuteronomic Covenant to Leviticus 26?

- Leviticus 26 does not make any specific reference to the Deuteronomic Covenant.
- Leviticus 26 has some similarities to Deuteronomy 27-30, the pericope involved in the Deuteronomic Covenant. However, similarity does not mean identity.
- Leviticus 26 explains Israel's relationship to the land prior to occupation and subsequent to the revelation of the Mosaic Covenant.
- Although Leviticus 26 contains revelation relating to Israel's exile and subsequent repentance under the Mosaic covenant (v. 45), it is not a formal prophetic announcement.
- Leviticus 26 emphasizes the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants by direct reference. The chapter's terminology and theological concepts contain less direct references to those covenants. The relationship to these two covenants is so

embedded in the text that any connotation regarding the Deuteronomic Covenant must also involve a similar relationship between it and the previous two.

- Affinities between Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–30 are far more intimate than any similarities to extrabiblical treaties. The common entities (subject matter, language, historical context, author, and intent) of the two pericopes tie them together. These affinities represent the essence of a potential preview of the Deuteronomic Covenant in Leviticus 26. Leviticus 26 constitutes transitional revelation for the nation of Israel between the Mosaic Covenant granted at Mt. Sinai and the Deuteronomic (or, Palestinian) Covenant granted on the plains of Moab. Being transitional, it does not embody the Deuteronomic Covenant itself. It reveals only the concepts necessary to prepare the nation for entrance into that covenant at a later date.

The pericope, viewed in the context of the Sinai revelation and the Sinai apostasies, offers a perspective not found elsewhere in the Scriptures. That perspective regards the theological instruction of the nation of Israel on the threshold of its wilderness wanderings. Unlike Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 4, Leviticus 26 is not a mini-statement of the Mosaic Covenant. It is, instead, a compilation and synthesis of the combined truths of both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. The synthesis takes the form of a parenthesis for Israel regarding what Yahweh requires of His people. It provides Israel with another taste of promise tempered by precept. It wraps up the Sinai experience by appealing to a continuity of authority and promise. Leviticus 26 is a theological treatise with implications for living. Many Israelites fell in the wilderness because they failed to heed this timely instruction. Because the Israelites failed so miserably, Paul was moved to confirm the teachings for NT believers struggling with apparent conflict between the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants (Gal 3:17).

Two areas of covenant did not receive attention in this essay since Leviticus 26 does not explicitly mention them: (1) the relationship of covenant to kingdom and (2) the relationship of kingdom and covenant to the calendar of Israel. These studies might complement the present study. This writer believes that both areas are necessary adjuncts to the theological core of Leviticus 26, if one is to understand properly the relationship of the prophets to Leviticus 26 (and to Deut 27–30). Leviticus 26's primary contribution rests in its explicit proclamation of the lordship of Yahweh in both time and space as it relates to repentance and restoration.