

## DISPENSATIONALISM, THE CHURCH, AND THE NEW COVENANT

by  
R. Bruce Compton<sup>1</sup>

The church's relationship to the new covenant continues to spark debate between dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists,<sup>2</sup> as well as between traditional dispensationalists and progressive dispensationalists.<sup>3</sup> The implications of this debate bear directly on the core distinctives of dispensational theology.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the debate raises

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Compton is Professor of Biblical Languages and Exposition at the Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Allen Park, MI.

<sup>2</sup>See Bruce A. Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 68–97; with the responses in the same volume by Willem A. VanGemeren, "A Response," pp. 336–40; Bruce K. Waltke, "A Response," pp. 350–51; Walter C. Kaiser, "An Epangelical Response," pp. 363–69.

<sup>3</sup>See Elliott E. Johnson, "Covenants in Traditional Dispensationalism," and Darrell L. Bock, "Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism" in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), pp. 121–223. The covenants discussed in these articles are the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the new. The terms "traditional" and "progressive" as employed in the present study refer to the two streams of theology that have developed over the past several decades within the larger dispensational context. For a history of this development, see Bateman's introductory article, "Dispensationalism Yesterday and Today," pp. 21–60. Traditional dispensationalists endeavor to maintain continuity with historical dispensationalism; progressive dispensationalists endeavor to find common ground between dispensational and non-dispensational theologies, principally with covenant theology.

<sup>4</sup>The identification of the core distinctives within dispensational theology is itself the subject of an ongoing debate. See, for example, Craig A. Blaising, "Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, pp. 23–34; and, in the same volume, Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, "Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: Assessment and Dialogue," pp. 377–85.

The debate notwithstanding, Charles Ryrie's identification of the *sine qua non* is representative of traditional dispensationalism and is the starting point for the discussion that follows. Ryrie lists three core distinctives: (1) A fundamental distinction between Israel and the church; (2) A consistent literal or plain interpretation of Scripture; and (3) God's glory as the unifying principle of creation and the universe

questions regarding the consistent literal interpretation of Scripture,<sup>5</sup> particularly in regard to the literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy,<sup>6</sup> and, as a corollary to this, the distinction maintained

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(*Dispensationalism*, rev. and enl. ed. [Chicago: Moody Press, 1995], pp. 38–41). Cf. Lewis Sperry Chafer, “Dispensationalism,” *BSac* 93 (October–December 1936): 445–49; Charles L. Feinberg, *Millennialism: The Two Major Views*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), pp. 78–79; Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference! A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990), pp. 52–53.

As Ryrie summarizes, “The essence of dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the church. This grows out of the dispensationalist’s consistent employment of normal or plain or historical-grammatical interpretation, and it reflects an understanding of the basic purpose of God in all His dealings with mankind as that of glorifying Himself...” (*Dispensationalism*, p. 41).

<sup>5</sup>Literal or plain interpretation is used synonymously here with historical-grammatical interpretation. Cf. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 80–81. Some dispensationalists have identified this hermeneutical principle as the foundational distinctive. See, for example, Earl D. Radmacher, “The Current Status of Dispensationalism and Its Eschatology,” in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), pp. 164–68. He states, “It is so utterly fundamental to understand that the foundational premise of dispensationalism is not theological but hermeneutical” (p. 166).

Recent criticism of this distinctive, questioning both the definition of literal interpretation and its validity as a dispensational distinctive, has come from both non-dispensationalists and progressive dispensationalists. From the non-dispensational perspective, see Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), pp. 78–96; Tremper Longman III, “What I Mean by Historical-Grammatical Exegesis—Why I Am Not a Literalist,” *GTJ* 11 (Fall 1990): 138–52. From the progressive dispensational perspective, see Darrell L. Bock, “Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism,” in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), pp. 85–118.

Among those responding in defense of the traditional dispensational distinctive, see Elliott E. Johnson, “What I Mean by Historical-Grammatical Interpretation and How that Differs from Spiritual Interpretation,” *GTJ* 11 (Fall 1990): 157–69; Thomas D. Ice, “Dispensational Hermeneutics,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), pp. 29–49; Robert L. Thomas, “The Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism,” *TMSJ* 6 (Spring 1995): 79–95; idem, “A Critique of Progressive Dispensational Hermeneutics,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene: Harvest House, 1995), pp. 413–25; idem, “Current Hermeneutical Trends: Toward Explanation or Obfuscation?” *JETS* 39 (June 1996): 241–56; idem, “The Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism,” in *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old*, ed. Robert L. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), pp. 351–72; Mike Stallard, “Literal Interpretation, Theological Method, and the Essence of Dispensationalism,” *Journal of Ministry & Theology* 1 (Spring 1997): 5–36.

<sup>6</sup>The debate over the fulfillment of prophecy is actually a subset of the larger debate on the use of the Old Testament in the New. These issues are specifically addressed in the third section of this article.

between Israel and the church within God's overall redemptive activity.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of this study is two-fold: (1) to examine what the New Testament says about the relationship between the church and the new covenant, and (2) to interact with the debate over the core dispensational distinctives, as these distinctives are addressed in discussing the church and the new covenant. The major views on the relationship between the church and the new covenant are presented first. This is followed by a survey of the new covenant in the Old and New Testaments. The study concludes with an evaluation of the major views, defending the core principles of dispensationalism and identifying the correct view.

## MAJOR VIEWS

### The Church Replaces National Israel and Fulfills the New Covenant in the Present

This position, generally championed by covenant theologians and, in particular, by amillennialists,<sup>8</sup> postmillennialists,<sup>9</sup> and covenant premillennialists,<sup>10</sup> argues that the church has replaced national Israel

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<sup>7</sup>As with the preceding, this distinctive has also been the subject of an ongoing debate. See, for example, the exchange in *Three Central Issues* between Stanley D. Toussaint, "Israel and the Church of a Traditional Dispensationalist," pp. 227–62; and J. Lanier Burns, "Israel and the Church of a Progressive Dispensationalist," pp. 263–303.

<sup>8</sup>E.g., Robert B. Strimple, "Amillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), pp. 84–90. Strimple states, "Hebrews 8 and 10 have presented great difficulty for premillennialists interpreters...because the writer here quotes the new covenant prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31–34 and seems clearly to say that the new covenant prophesied through Jeremiah is that better covenant founded on better promises of which our Lord Jesus Christ is the mediator (8:6), and which is in force *now*, bringing blessing to both Jews and Gentiles" (p. 89). See also Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), pp. 53–55.

<sup>9</sup>E.g., Loraine Boettner, "A Postmillennial Response," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), pp. 95–103. Boettner declares, "The fact [is] that the Old Covenant, which we have in the first part of our Bibles in the Old Testament, was made *exclusively* with the nation of Israel and that it now has been replaced by the New Covenant, which we call the New Testament, which was made *exclusively* with the church" (p. 97). From a theonomic or reconstructionist perspective, see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "Postmillennialism," *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), pp. 30–31.

<sup>10</sup>E.g., George E. Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press,

as the people of God. Those promises given to national Israel which were not fulfilled in the Old Testament have now become the possession of the church. Thus, the new covenant prophecies in the Old Testament that were promised to Israel are presently being fulfilled by the church.<sup>11</sup>

### There Are Two New Covenants: One for Israel and One for the Church

At one time a prominent view among the Dallas Seminary faculty,<sup>12</sup> this view argues that there is one new covenant for Israel and

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1977), pp. 25–29. Ladd argues, “Therefore Hebrews 8:8–13 refutes dispensational theology at two points: It applies a prophecy to the Christian church which in its Old Testament setting referred to Israel, and it affirms that the new covenant in Christ has displaced the Old Testament cult which is therefore doomed to pass away” (pp. 26–27).

<sup>11</sup>E.g., Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1999), pp. 89–90. Mathison states: “The new covenant was inaugurated by Jesus Christ at His first coming and is being fulfilled in and through the church during this present age.... The institution of the new covenant does not await the start of the Millennium or the eternal state. Since the new covenant is the means by which God will finally and completely fulfill all previous covenant promises, and since the new covenant is specifically the covenant of the present age, these promises must be fulfilled *in* the present age” (p. 90).

<sup>12</sup>Principally in view here are Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 1:43; 4:314–15, 325; 7:98–99; Charles C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953), pp. 115–25; and John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), pp. 208–20.

Both Ryrie and Walvoord have adjusted their views in subsequent writings. For example, in commenting on the new covenant in a later article, Walvoord states, “A solution to the problem then is that there is one covenant with application to Israel and to the church and to anyone saved by the death of Christ. In Scripture the application of the New covenant is explicitly to the church in the present age and to Israel as a nation in the future as far as millennial blessings are concerned” (“Does the Church Fulfill Israel’s Program?” *BSac* 137 [July–September 1980]: 219–20).

However, in a more recent discussion Walvoord appears to return to his former position. Commenting on the references to the new covenant in the New Testament, Walvoord argues: “In the New Testament, in which the new covenant is related to the church, it is the grace of God as it applies to the church. While none of the major features of the covenant for Israel are repeated, nevertheless the church has a new covenant in contrast to her former estate in Adam, just as Israel has a new covenant in contrast to her former position under the Mosaic covenant.... There is no evidence that the church is ever regarded as fulfilling the many details of the new covenant in the Old Testament relating to Israel” (“The New Covenant,” in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands: Biblical and Leadership Studies in Honor of Donald K. Campbell*, ed. Charles H. Dyer and Roy B. Zuck [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994], pp. 198–99).

Ryrie has followed a similar pattern. In a later article he argues for one new

another, separate new covenant for the church. All the relevant Old Testament passages and several New Testament passages address the new covenant for Israel. Other New Testament passages speak of a second new covenant for the church which, although having some similarities, is separate and distinct from the new covenant for Israel.<sup>13</sup> The new covenant for Israel will be fulfilled by Israel in the eschaton; the second new covenant is presently being fulfilled by the church.<sup>14</sup>

### **The New Covenant is Exclusively for Israel and Will be Fulfilled by Israel in the Future**

A view popular among early dispensationalists<sup>15</sup> and still found today<sup>16</sup> is that the new covenant is exclusively for Israel. Since Israel is

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covenant in which the church presently participates in a limited fashion and which national Israel fulfills in the eschaton (*Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Covenant, New," by Charles C. Ryrie, 1:392). However, in a more recent discussion Ryrie offers two separate new covenants, one for Israel and one for the church, as a viable option (*Dispensationalism*, pp. 172–74).

<sup>13</sup>Of the NT passages that address the new covenant, both Ryrie and Walvoord identify Rom 11:26–27; Heb 8:7–13; 10:16–17 as referring to the new covenant for Israel; the other references in the NT address the new covenant for the church (Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, pp. 119–24; Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, pp. 213–18).

<sup>14</sup>Commenting on the new covenant in Jer 31:31–34, Chafer notes: "There remains to be recognized a heavenly covenant for the heavenly people, which is also styled like the preceding one for Israel a 'new covenant.' It is made in the blood of Christ (cf. Mark 14:24) and continues in effect throughout this age, whereas the new covenant made with Israel happens to be future in its application. To suppose that these two covenants—one for Israel and one for the Church—are the same is to assume that there is a latitude of common interest between God's purpose for Israel and His purpose for the Church. Israel's covenant, however, is new only because it replaces the Mosaic, but the Church's covenant is new because it introduces that which is God's mysterious and unrelated purpose" (*Systematic Theology*, 7:98–99).

<sup>15</sup>E.g., J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 5 vols. (reprint ed., New York: Loizeaux, 1942), 5:330. In his discussion on Heb 8:7–13, Darby states, "We enjoy indeed all the essential privileges of the new covenant, its foundation being laid on God's part in the blood of Christ, but we do so in spirit, not according to the letter. The new covenant will be established formally with Israel in the millennium." Commenting on Heb 9:15, Darby adds, "The way in which the apostle always avoids the direct application of the new covenant is very striking" (5:340). Similarly, on Heb 10:15–17 Darby says, "He does not speak of the covenant in a direct way, as a privilege in which Christians had a direct part" (5:360).

<sup>16</sup>E.g., John R. Master, "The New Covenant," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 108. Similarly, Russell L. Penney, "The Relationship of the Church to the New Covenant," *The Conservative Theological Journal* 2 (December 1998): 476–77. Penney specifically notes his agreement with Darby's position (p. 476).

the specific designee of the new covenant in the Old Testament, the new covenant provisions will be fulfilled by Israel in the eschaton. Whatever benefits the church presently enjoys that are associated with the new covenant stem not from a direct relationship to the new covenant, but indirectly through the church's relationship to the mediator of the new covenant, that is, through Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Church Partially Fulfills the New Covenant Now; Israel Completely Fulfills the New Covenant in the Future**

This is the predominate view among progressive dispensationalists.<sup>18</sup> There is one new covenant which finds partial fulfillment now with the church and which will find complete, final fulfillment in the eschaton with Israel.<sup>19</sup> Progressive dispensationalists use such terms as “inaugurated eschatology” or “already-not yet” by which they mean that certain Old Testament prophecies involving the eschaton are presently being fulfilled, though in a limited way, and will have a future, final fulfillment with the return of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Master states, “The church is united to the mediator of the new covenant. The new covenant has been cut. The actualization of the new covenant in the lives of believers, however, is yet future, when Christ returns and the house of Israel and the house of Judah are transformed by God’s grace to obey completely the commands of God” (“The New Covenant,” p. 108).

<sup>18</sup>Leading advocates include Craig A. Blaising, “The Fulfillment of the Biblical Covenants through Jesus Christ,” in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), pp. 199–211; Bock, “Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism,” pp. 189–95, 219–21; and Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 111–39. Cf. Ralph H. Alexander, “A New Covenant—An Eternal People (Jeremiah 31),” in *Israel, the Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God’s Promises*, ed. H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), pp. 197–98; Larry D. Pettegrew, “The New Covenant,” *TMSJ* 10 (Fall 1999): 265–66; idem, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), pp. 34–38, 101–7.

<sup>19</sup>Saucy’s comments are representative: “What seemed in the Old Testament to be one coming has by the New Testament revelation been separated into two appearances. Thus the present operation of the new covenant in saving Jews and Gentiles in the church is not the complete fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. The return of Christ will bring further fulfillment. Because the New Testament clearly envisions a future for historical Israel, it seems reasonable to expect the coming of Christ to bring about the fulfillment of the salvation provisions of the new covenant that related particularly to that people...” (*The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 139).

<sup>20</sup>See, for example, Darrell L. Bock, “Current Messianic Activity and OT Davidic Promise: Dispensationalism, Hermeneutics, and NT Fulfillment,” *TrinJ* 15 (Spring 1994): 69–70. Discussing specifically the kingdom of God, Bock states: “With initial and future fulfillment, one can have some fulfillment in the church now and more

### The Church Presently Participates in the New Covenant; Israel Fulfills the New Covenant in the Future

This view is championed by a number of traditional dispensationalists.<sup>21</sup> There is one new covenant. It will be fulfilled in the eschaton with Israel; the church is presently participating in its soteriological benefits.<sup>22</sup> Although this view sounds similar to the previous one, the difference is that this view speaks in terms of a present, limited participation by the church rather than a partial fulfillment by the church.<sup>23</sup> Both views hold to a future fulfillment of the new covenant by national Israel following the return of Christ.

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fulfillment for Israel later.... The both/and fulfillment option may also be put in terms of an 'already/not yet' scenario..." (p. 69). Bock acknowledges that his "already/not yet" approach closely parallels covenant premillennial interpretations. "The two views are in fact fairly close to one another, though distinct. The differences come in how the role of Israel is seen in the future era. For a complementary approach, Israel again comes to have a central role in the millennial reign..." (p. 70, n. 29). See also idem, "The Reign of the Lord Christ," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 37–67; idem, "Why I Am a Dispensationalist with a Small 'd,'" *JETS* 41 (September 1998): 386–91.

<sup>21</sup>E.g., Homer A. Kent, Jr., "The New Covenant and the Church," *GTJ* 6 (Fall 1985): 296–98; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come: Tracing God's Kingdom Program and Covenant Promises Throughout History* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995), pp. 174–76; Rodney J. Decker, "The Church's Relationship to the New Covenant (part 2)," *BSac* 152 (October–December 1995): 447–56.

Decker has apparently adjusted his position in a subsequent article to reflect the terminology, at least, of progressive dispensationalism when he states, "If people-of-God status is based on a covenant relationship, and if the church is part of the people of God, it seems difficult to avoid some sense of new covenant fulfillment at the present time." Sensing the tension, he adds, "Although this position has been discussed extensively in recent literature by 'progressive dispensationalists,' it does not require that approach to dispensational hermeneutics; it coheres equally well with a more traditional form of dispensationalism" (*Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, s.v. "New Covenant, Dispensational Views of the," by Rodney Decker, p. 283).

<sup>22</sup>Kent's comments are representative: "The commonest explanation among premillennialists is that there is one new covenant. It will be fulfilled eschatologically with Israel but is participated in soteriologically by the church today. By this explanation the biblical distinction between national Israel and the church is recognized, the unconditional character of Jeremiah's prophecy which made no provision for any forfeiture by Israel is maintained, and the clear relationship of certain NT references to the church and the New Covenant are upheld" ("The New Covenant and the Church," p. 297).

<sup>23</sup>This point is addressed in the third section of the article.

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY<sup>24</sup>

The survey in the Old Testament is confined to passages in the writing prophets. While there are antecedent trajectories for the new covenant embedded within the rest of the Old Testament corpus, particularly within the Pentateuch, this limitation has been adopted simply because the new covenant as an identifiable entity is something that only the writing prophets developed in the Old Testament canon. These antecedent trajectories are mentioned when appropriate in the survey of the prophetic references. Furthermore, the passages listed in the writing prophets are those that specifically mention a future covenant. Other passages in the prophets which appear to be parallel to the new covenant but which do not include the expression “covenant” are cross-referenced. Two additional passages which mention the term “covenant,” Zechariah 9:11 and Malachi 3:1, have not been included. In both, the information provided for the identification of the covenant is insufficient to determine whether the reference is to a future covenant or to an antecedent covenant.<sup>25</sup>

The specific expression “new covenant” occurs only once in the Old Testament, in Jeremiah 31:31. However, twelve other references to a future covenant are mentioned in the Old Testament in contexts similar to Jeremiah 31:31 and are identified as referring to the same new covenant: Hosea 2:18; Isaiah 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3; 59:21; 61:8; Jeremiah 32:40; 50:5 (cf. 24:4–7); and Ezekiel 16:60; 43:25; 37:26 (cf. 11:14–21; 36:22–33).<sup>26</sup> In each the nation of Israel is promised a future covenant in an eschatological context where the nation faces

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<sup>24</sup>The conclusions presented here and with the New Testament survey are based largely on the author’s dissertation, “An Examination of the New Covenant in the Old and New Testaments” (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1986), pp. 9–253. The documentation that follows supplements and updates the documentation in the dissertation.

<sup>25</sup>For a discussion on the covenant reference in Zech 9:11, see Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1993), pp. 139–40; Eugene H. Merrill, *An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), pp. 258–59; Thomas E. McComiskey, “Zechariah,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, 3 vols., ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 3:1170. The Meyerses and Merrill identify the covenant as the Mosaic; McComiskey argues for the Abrahamic.

For a discussion on the covenant reference in Mal 3:1, see Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 289; Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1998), pp. 269–71; Douglas Stuart, “Malachi,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, 3 vols., ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 3:1351. Verhoef identifies the covenant as the Mosaic; Hill and Stuart argue for the new covenant.

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, Ware, “The New Covenant,” pp. 69–70.

national judgment and dispersion, followed by a restoration to its homeland and unparalleled material and spiritual blessings.<sup>27</sup> While the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles illustrate this judgment, and Judah's return from exile the restoration, these historical events do not satisfy the context in which the new covenant promises are given.<sup>28</sup>

The survey begins with the references to a future covenant in Jeremiah, starting with Jeremiah 31:31–34 as the *locus classicus* for the new covenant. Following this, the references to a future covenant outside Jeremiah are examined in canonical order. Preparatory to this, however, a comment on the nature of Old Testament covenants is in order. The covenant concept in both the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament expressed a formal agreement between two or more parties in which obligations were placed on one or both parties. Among the kinds of covenants attested in the Ancient Near East, three are particularly recognized as having parallels in the Old Testament: (1) the parity covenant between parties of roughly equal status involving mutual obligations; (2) the suzerainty covenant between parties of unequal status where the superior (suzerain) placed obligations on the inferior party (vassal); and (3) the promissory covenant also between parties of unequal status where the superior party obligated itself for the benefit of the inferior party and without making reciprocal demands. In terms of the major covenants associated with the nation of Israel, the Abrahamic (cf. Gen 12:1–3; 15:1–21), the Davidic (cf. 2 Sam 7:8–29; 1 Chr 17:7–27; Ps 89:19–37), and the new are viewed as promissory. The Mosaic covenant (cf. Exod 19–24), on the other hand, is identified as a suzerainty covenant.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Support for this context is provided in connection with the survey of the specific prophets.

<sup>28</sup>See Ralph H. Alexander, "Ezekiel," in vol. 6 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 922. Commenting on Ezekiel 36:22–32 and viewing the passage as a reference to Israel's promised new covenant, Alexander notes, "This context and that of similar accounts of God's restoration of Israel to her land, along with the historical perspective, make it clear that the return mentioned in this passage does not refer to the return to Canaan under Zerubbabel but to a final and complete restoration under the Messiah in the end times. The details of Israel's reestablishment on her land set forth above simply did not occur in the returns under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah." Idem, "A New Covenant—An Eternal People (Jeremiah 31)," in *Israel, the Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God's Promises*, ed. H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), p. 170.

<sup>29</sup>For a treatment of these and related issues, see *ABD*, s.v. "Covenant," by George E. Mendenhall and Gary A. Herion, 1:1179–93; *NIDOTTE*, s.v. "בְּרִית," by Gordon J. McConville, 1:747–52. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, the relationship among the three national promissory covenants, the Abrahamic, the

### The New Covenant in Jeremiah

Jeremiah's references to a future covenant for Israel, 31:31, 32:40, and 50:5 (cf. 24:4–7), provide the following information about the new covenant.

(1) The new covenant is contrasted with the old or Mosaic covenant (31:32), though both involve the same nation (31:31–32) and the divine *torah* (31:33). The contrast between the Mosaic covenant and the new is expressed, in part at least, by the statement in 31:32, “not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.”<sup>30</sup> The reference to Egypt in this verse identifies the antecedent covenant in this passage as the Mosaic covenant, the covenant God gave to the nation at Sinai following the nation's exodus from Egypt (cf. Exod 19:1–24:18). The recipients of the new covenant are specifically identified in 31:31, “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” Jeremiah's identification of the recipients in 31:33 by the single designation “the house of Israel” is not in conflict with 31:31. Jeremiah simply addresses the nation collectively in 31:33 through the common expression (cf. Jer 33:14, 17). The divine *torah* is directly referenced in 31:33, “I will put my law within them.” Although a number of interpreters understand the *torah* in 31:33 as a reference specifically to the Mosaic covenant or law, Jeremiah's use elsewhere in his prophecy argues that the term refers more broadly to divine instruction involving moral obligations, of which the Mosaic law was but one expression (cf. 2:8; 6:19; 8:8; 9:12; 16:11; 18:18; 26:4; 32:23 [*Qere*]; 44:10, 23).<sup>31</sup>

(2) The new covenant includes Yahweh's transforming or regenerating the heart of the individual so that there is both the desire as well as the capacity for obedience (31:33; 32:39–40; 50:4–5; cf. 24:7). The expression Jeremiah uses in 31:33, “I will put my law within them and on their heart I will write it,” is generally understood as a metaphor, referring to the regeneration of the human nature, roughly synonymous with such Old Testament concepts as “circumcising the heart”

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Davidic, and the new, is that the Abrahamic covenant functions as the progenitor for the Davidic and the new; the Davidic and new covenants represent further developments of the themes initially expressed in the Abrahamic promises.

<sup>30</sup>All translations, unless indicated, are taken from the NASB, 1995 edition.

<sup>31</sup>F. B. Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, NAC, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), p. 286; *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “Law of God,” by Peter Enns, 4:893–97.

or “making a new heart” (cf. Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; Ezek 18:31; 36:26). While such took place under the old covenant, this was not something that the old covenant itself provided. What is promised in the new covenant is that this provision for covenant keeping, that is, for obeying the covenant, is guaranteed for all of its participants.<sup>32</sup>

(3) The new covenant establishes an inviolable relationship between Yahweh and the nation, based, at least in part, on the knowledge of God, that is, on the nation knowing God through obeying His word and enjoying His favor (31:33–34; 32:38–40; 50:5; cf. 24:7). Jeremiah twice refers to the new covenant as an “everlasting covenant” to underscore its irrevocable nature (cf. 32:40; 50:5). The promise of a universal knowledge of God is stated in 31:34, “for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.” Consistent with Jeremiah’s other uses, the expression *knowing God* means to be brought into a relationship of fellowship with God where His favor is experienced and His will is obeyed (cf. 2:8; 4:22; 9:3, 5, 23–24; 22:15–16). Again, such knowledge was available under the old covenant, but it was not something that the old covenant itself produced. Under the new covenant, this knowledge is promised for all.<sup>33</sup>

(4) The new covenant provides for the full and final forgiveness of sins (31:34; cf. 50:20). The promise of forgiveness is found in 31:34, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” The relationship between the forgiveness of sins under the Mosaic covenant and forgiveness under the new is a complex issue, involving among other things the function and efficacy of Old Testament sacrifices. The matter of forgiveness is taken up in the following survey of New Testament passages, particularly in Hebrews.<sup>34</sup>

(5) The new covenant is associated with the nation’s restoration to its promised land, following a period of judgment and dispersion (31:27–29; 32:36–38; cf. 24:6–7). A key marker in establishing the context of the new covenant in Jeremiah is the expression “Behold, days are coming” in 31:31. Used five times in chapters 30–33, it identifies the events associated with the new covenant as transpiring in the eschaton, specifically in connection with the nation’s final dispersion

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<sup>32</sup>*TDOT*, s.v. “לָב,” by H. –J. Fabry, 7:431–34; *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “לָב,” by Alex Luc, 2:749–54.

<sup>33</sup>See the discussion in *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “יָדַע,” by Terence E. Fretheim, 2:409–14.

<sup>34</sup>On OT sacrifices, see Robert T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman, eds., *Sacrifice in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), and on the efficacy of OT sacrifices, see John C. Whitcomb, “Christ’s Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel,” *GTJ* 6 (Fall 1985): 201–17. For a treatment of forgiveness in the OT, see *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “סָלַח,” by J. P. J. Olivier, 5:259–64.

and subsequent restoration to the land of Palestine. In 31:3 the expression is used with the restoring of Israel and Judah to the land which had been given their forefathers; in 31:27 with the repopulating of the nation; in 31:38, with the rebuilding of Jerusalem; and in 33:14 with the placing upon the throne of David a righteous “branch” to rule the nation. The expression itself, along with its cognates, points to the future day of the Lord.<sup>35</sup>

One question raised in light of the above contrast that may be addressed here is whether to interpret the new covenant as a renewal of the Mosaic covenant or as a replacement for it. Covenant theologians postulate three antecedent theological covenants to the biblical covenants: (1) a covenant of works made between God and Adam in the garden; (2) a covenant of redemption established between God and Christ providing for salvation; and (3) a covenant of grace between God and the elect which secures their redemption. Traditionally, interpreters within this movement see the national Old Testament covenants as expressions of the covenant of grace and conclude that the new covenant is thus a renewal of the Mosaic covenant, since both are formulations of the same covenant of grace.<sup>36</sup>

Apart from the question regarding the legitimacy of these antecedent theological covenants, the emphasis in Jeremiah falls on the side of discontinuity. Jeremiah 31:33–34 identifies, in effect, the core elements of the new covenant and in so doing explains how the new covenant is “not like the covenant” God made with the nation at Sinai (31:32). In other words, the new covenant in its fundamental features is essentially different from the old covenant. The evidence here and elsewhere in both the Old Testament and the New Testament argues for seeing the new covenant as replacing and not simply renewing the Mosaic covenant.<sup>37</sup>

### The New Covenant in Hosea

The similarities between the future covenant mentioned in Hosea 2:18 [2:20]<sup>38</sup> and the new covenant in Jeremiah include the following

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<sup>35</sup>For treatment, see *TDOT*, s.v. “בְּרִית,” by M. Sæbø, 6:16–17, 30–31; *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “בְּרִית,” by P. A. Verhoef, 2:419–20.

<sup>36</sup>E.g., Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), pp. 228–29; 337–38; 404–7; 430–33; 502–7; *EDT*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Covenant Theology,” by M. E. Osterhaven, pp. 301–3.

<sup>37</sup>Huey, *Jeremiah*, pp. 280–81; Gerald L. Keown et al., *Jeremiah 26–52*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1995), pp. 131–32. Further discussion of this is taken up with the survey of the new covenant in the NT.

<sup>38</sup>Brackets indicate Hebrew versification, when different from the English.

points.

(1) The covenant is placed in an eschatological context that juxtaposes divine condemnation and judgment with divine deliverance and restoration (cf. Hos 2:2–23 [2:4–25] with Jer 30–31). The first three chapters of Hosea encompass three judgment-salvation cycles, with the second cycle represented by 2:2–23 [2:4–25]. The pattern in each cycle goes from condemnation and judgment to deliverance and restoration. For the second cycle, the judgment portion is found in 2:2–13 [2:4–15], and the salvation section is taken up in 2:14–23 [2:16–25].<sup>39</sup> As such, the covenant reference in 2:18 can be approached as a foreshadowing of Jeremiah’s pronouncement of a new covenant in 31:31–34. Both passages have as their backdrop God’s judgment against the nation because of covenant unfaithfulness. Both passages involve God’s subsequent removal of judgment and the establishment of a covenant relationship with its attendant blessings. And, both passages use temporal markers, placing the covenant within the eschatological day of the Lord. For Hosea, the temporal marker is the expression “in that day” found in 2:16, 18, and 21.<sup>40</sup>

(2) The relationship established by the covenant is said to be forever (cf. Hos 2:19 [2:21] with Jer 32:40). The expression of longevity is found in 2:19 [2:21], “I will betroth you to Me forever.” Although the term “covenant” is not used, the reference to marriage serves as a metaphor for the covenant relationship.<sup>41</sup>

(3) The covenant results in the recipients’ knowing God (cf. Hos 2:20 [2:22] with Jer 31:34). Following the statements about God betrothing Israel to Himself in 2:19–20 [2:21–22], the passage concludes, “Then you will know the Lord.” The meaning of knowing the Lord is the same here as in Jeremiah 31:34.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Cf. C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), pp. 88–93; Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), pp. 17–19 *passim*; Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), pp. 30–35.

<sup>40</sup>See, for example, David Allan Hubbard, *Hosea*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), pp. 85–90.

<sup>41</sup>See *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “שׂ־א,” by Robin Wakely, 1:528–29. Commenting on this passage, Wakely states, “The old marriage has been annulled (i.e., the old, conditional covenant violated by Israel has been revoked by Yahweh). Instead of reconstituting the old marriage, there will be a new marriage (i.e., there will be a new, unconditional covenant, the integrity and permanence of which will be guaranteed by Yahweh, who will overcome and heal Israel’s faithlessness).”

<sup>42</sup>See Thomas McComiskey, “Hosea,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, 3 vols., ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 1:45. McComiskey states, “The words of Hosea foresee the new covenant of which Jeremiah would speak (31:31–34). As a result of this loving act of

(4) The covenant insures the future prosperity and material blessing of the nation in association with the nation's occupation of the land of Palestine (cf. Hos 2:21–22 [2:23–24] with Jer 32:41–43). Reference to the land is found in 2:23, "I will sow her for Myself in the land."<sup>43</sup> The material blessings are indicated by the expressions found in 2:21–22a, "It will come about in that day that I will respond, declares the Lord...and the earth will respond to the grain, to the new wine and to the oil." The provision of these food items represents a reversal of God's judgment in which these items were taken away (cf. 2:3, 8–9).<sup>44</sup>

(5) The covenant establishes a distinct and personal relationship between the nation and God as expressed by the covenant formula, "my people" and "my God." The covenant formula is embedded within the declarations in 2:23 [2:25], "You are my People" and "*You are* my God," and corresponds to the formula in Jeremiah 31:33, "I will be their God and they shall be My people." As in Jeremiah, the formula articulates the close, familial relationship established between God and the nation.<sup>45</sup>

(6) The new relationship provided by the covenant is established through divine initiative and not in response to the nation's fulfilling covenant obligations. In other words, the nation's knowing and obeying God (2:20b) is the result of God's establishing a covenant with the nation (2:19–20a), not vice versa.<sup>46</sup>

Two prominent themes are brought out by Hosea that are not developed in Jeremiah's new covenant prophecies. The first is that the covenant guarantees the cessation of warfare, at least insofar as a means God uses to discipline the nation. The second is that the covenant establishes a harmonious relationship between the nation and the animal kingdom, indicating again the removal of the instruments of

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betrothal, the people will know God. They will enter into an intimate relationship with him; they will understand his ways and enjoy his fellowship."

<sup>43</sup>For discussion, see *NIDOTTE*, s.v. יָרַשׁ, by Christopher J. H. Wright, 3:522–23.

<sup>44</sup>See A. A. Macintosh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), pp. 81–82.

<sup>45</sup>For treatment, see *TDOT*, s.v. "יָרַשׁ," by E. Lipinski, 11:171–73.

<sup>46</sup>See Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Interpreting the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 27. Chisholm states, "Jeremiah later spoke of this new marriage as a new covenant (Jer 31:31–34). God would write His law on the hearts of His people so that they might willingly obey Him. Like Hosea, Jeremiah foresaw a time when Israel would know the Lord ("know" in Jer 31:34 translates the word rendered "acknowledge" in Hos 2:20)."

covenantal chastisement. The references in 2:18 to the animal kingdom, “I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field,” and to warfare, “And I will abolish the bow, the sword and war from the land,” represent vehicles of covenantal chastisement God has used to discipline the nation for covenant unfaithfulness which He is now removing (cf. 1:4–5; 2:12 and Lev 26:14–33; Deut 28:15–44).

The covenant formula in 2:18 [2:20] is somewhat ambiguous in that God promises to make a covenant “for” Israel and “with” certain animals. As such, this covenant could be viewed as a covenant between Israel and the animal kingdom and as distinct from the new covenant promised in Jeremiah and elsewhere. However, the covenant formula used here can be interpreted as describing a covenant between God and the nation, which involves the animal kingdom, without seeing it specifically between the nation and the animals. The parallels noted above argue for identifying the covenant reference in Hosea with the new covenant developed more fully by Jeremiah and not as a separate and distinct covenant. The clear implication from this passage is that the new covenant insures the faithfulness of the nation so that there is no longer need for these implements of divine chastisement for breach of covenant.<sup>47</sup>

### The New Covenant in Isaiah

The six references to a future covenant in Isaiah, 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3; 59:21; 61:8, support the following conclusions.

(1) In all six references, there is a covenant promised to the nation, following a period of national condemnation and judgment and preceding a period of unparalleled material and spiritual blessing. All of the covenant references occur in chapters 40–66 and, like Jeremiah 30–33, these chapters have been designated a “book of comfort” because of the message of hope they offer the nation (cf. 40:1–2). Though recognized as an oversimplification, the two divisions of Isaiah are frequently contrasted, with chapters 1–39 characterized by condemnation and judgment and chapters 40–66 characterized by deliverance and restoration.<sup>48</sup> As such, all six references fall within an overall context similar to that of Jeremiah’s new covenant. For example, the specific goal Isaiah identifies for this covenant in 49:8 is to restore the nation to its land, a land described as “desolated.” The following verses

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<sup>47</sup>E.g., Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, pp. 56–61.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), p. li; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 2 vols., NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986, 1998), 1:39.

characterize the individuals who will be restored to the land as “bound” (v. 9) and as “afflicted” (v. 13). Similarly in 54:10, God calls this future covenant “My covenant of peace.” By context, the peace referred to includes both deliverance from divine chastisement (54:7–9) and from foreign oppression (54:14–17), the latter being the instrument God has used to execute the former. The same may be said of the covenant reference in 61:8, where the nation is restored to the land and experiences unparalleled material prosperity following a period of unmitigated judgment and destruction (cf. 61:4–11).<sup>49</sup> Hence, the similarities in context and content strongly support the conclusion that Isaiah is speaking of the same covenant mentioned by Hosea and subsequently developed by Jeremiah (cf. 49:8; 54:10; 61:8).

(2) The servant of the Lord is commissioned to function as the mediator of this covenant (cf. 42:6; 49:8). The covenant expressions in 42:6 and 49:8 are somewhat distinctive in that in these two passages God promises to appoint His servant as a covenant to the nation of Israel (“I will appoint you as a covenant to the people”). The one addressed in both passages is called “my servant” (cf. 42:1; 49:3, 6) and, although this could refer either to Cyrus (cf. 44:28–45:1) or to the nation (cf. 41:8), in these passages “my servant” must refer to the future Messiah. According to 49:5, one of the servant’s responsibilities is to bring the nation back to God. The servant cannot be both the instrument of restoration and the object of restoration at the same time. Furthermore, the deliverance described in both of these passages goes beyond what Cyrus accomplished for the nation, involving both physical and spiritual dimensions. The only option remaining is to see the servant as a reference to the coming Messiah who brings forgiveness to the nation and beyond (cf. 52:13–53:12).<sup>50</sup>

In terms of the interpretation of the two passages, the parallel statement in 42:6, “*I will appoint you as a light to the nations,*” indicates that Isaiah has employed a metonymy of effect for cause. For someone to be appointed “as a light to the nations” means that this individual is appointed to bring light to the nations; the person is described in terms of what he is able to accomplish. Thus, to be appointed as a covenant to the people means simply to be appointed to provide for or to mediate a covenant for the people.<sup>51</sup> Based on the

<sup>49</sup>See, for example, Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), pp. 111–13; 123, 130–31.

<sup>50</sup>Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 2:109–19; 286–97; Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, pp. 99–100, 111–13. For further discussion, see *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “עֶבֶד,” by Eugene Carpenter, 3:306–7.

<sup>51</sup>See Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, trans. Margaret Kohl, Hermeneia

references in 49:6–8, the “people” referred to in this promise must be the nation of Israel. In 49:6 the recipients are specifically described as the “tribes of Jacob”; in 49:13, they are identified as God’s (“His”) people.” Therefore, according to these two passages, the Servant will establish a covenant with the nation of Israel, and as a corollary He will provide light for the Gentile nations as well.<sup>52</sup>

(3) In connection with this, the servant is presented as a future Davidide, a Davidic descendant who both delivers and rules the nation (cf. 55:3). The association between the new covenant and David is indicated in 55:3, where God addresses the nation and declares, “And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David.” In light of the parallels with 2 Samuel 7:15–16 and Psalm 89:29–30, 50 [89:28–29, 49], the “mercies” in view here refer to the promises God gave to David in the Davidic covenant.<sup>53</sup> Although the term “servant” is not employed, it is evident from the larger context that Isaiah has linked the role of the future servant from 42:6 and 49:8 with the antecedent promises of a Davidic ruler (cf. 11:1–9).<sup>54</sup> The implication is that the servant is a member of the Davidic line and will fulfill the Davidic promises concomitant with his establishing this future covenant. Accordingly, the servant is described as a leader and a commander, in conjunction with the Davidic promises (vv. 4–5) and as a deliverer from sin and condemnation, in conjunction with the new covenant (vv. 3, 6–7).<sup>55</sup>

The deliverance in view goes beyond the concept of physical release from captivity, incorporating the dimensions of freedom from both spiritual blindness and divine judgment (cf. 42:6; 55:3; 59:21). The spiritual dimension of the servant’s work is indicated in several of these passages. In 42:7, the servant is said “to open blind eyes” in connection with this future covenant. Comparing verses 16–18 with verses 23–25, it is apparent that blindness is used here in a metaphorical sense of the nation’s disobedience and sin.<sup>56</sup> The expression “to open

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(Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), pp. 131–32.

<sup>52</sup>Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 2:117–19; Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, pp. 101, 112–13.

<sup>53</sup>See, for example, Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2002), p. 370.

<sup>54</sup>See, for example, Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), pp. 436–37.

<sup>55</sup>Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, pp. 124–25. The connection between the new covenant and David is taken up again with the discussion of the new covenant references in Ezekiel.

<sup>56</sup>See *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “עִוְרָה,” by R. K. Harrison and E. H. Merrill, 3:356.

blind eyes” thus means to remove the nation’s rebellion and to grant spiritual discernment. The same may be said of the covenant reference in 55:3. The promise of the covenant is preceded by an invitation to the nation to come to the Lord and live. According to 55:7, the same invitation is expressed in terms of the wicked forsaking his ways, turning to the Lord, and receiving the Lord’s abundant pardon. Finally, in 59:20–21, a future covenant is promised in connection with the Lord sending a “redeemer” to deliver those in the nation (lit., “in Jacob”) who turn from transgression and with His giving His (“My”) Spirit.<sup>57</sup>

(4) Lastly, the servant, in conjunction with the covenant, fulfills a salvific role toward the Gentiles, granting spiritual discernment and deliverance to the ends of the earth (cf. 42:6; 49:8). In addition to the servant mediating a covenant for Israel in 42:6, He is also described as giving “light to the nations.” As argued above, “light” is used here in a metaphorical sense of spiritual discernment and deliverance. The same may be said of the covenant reference in 49:8. According to 49:6, the servant is appointed as “a light of the nations,” with the stated goal “so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” Thus, the servant through the new covenant provides spiritual deliverance or salvation for the Gentiles world-wide.<sup>58</sup>

### The New Covenant in Ezekiel

In addition to the three passages in Ezekiel which mention a future covenant, 16:60, 34:25, and 37:26, two others, 11:14–21 and 36:22–33, are included in the discussion in that they are found in similar eschatological contexts and employ key phrases associated with this future covenant. One additional reference to a covenant is found in 20:37. The information provided in the surrounding context makes it difficult to determine whether in this instance Ezekiel is referring to a future or to an antecedent covenant. Based on the parallels with Jeremiah 31:31–34 and elsewhere, the consensus interprets 20:37 as a reference to the new covenant. Ezekiel speaks of this covenant as taking place in the future in connection with God’s gathering the exiles from the surrounding nations, establishing a righteous remnant by purging the nation, and restoring this remnant to the land.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup>See, for example, John A. Martin, “Isaiah,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2 vols., ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983, 1985), 1:1095–96, 1110–11, 1114. The role of God’s Spirit is discussed later with the new covenant references in Ezekiel.

<sup>58</sup>See *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “אֵר,” by Martin J. Selman, 1:325–28.

<sup>59</sup>For discussion, see Alexander, “Ezekiel,” pp. 838–39; Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel*

The following parallels between the covenant references in Ezekiel and the new covenant passages previously mentioned are noted.

(1) Similar to the passages in Jeremiah, Hosea, and Isaiah, the covenant is connected with the restoration and subsequent prosperity of the nation in its geographical homeland (cf. 34:26–29; 37:21–26). In 34:27, God promises the recipients of the covenant that they will be “delivered from the hand of those who enslaved them,” that “they will be secure on their land,” and that “the earth will yield its increase.” Similarly in 37:21, God promises that he will gather “the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone” and “bring them into their own land” in connection with this covenant. While the statements in both passages could refer to the experiences of the post-exilic community, the evidence taken at face value argues against this. According to 34:28–29, the nation once delivered will never again experience deprivation or national dispersion. In addition, according to 37:25, the nation’s restoration to the land is permanent.<sup>60</sup>

(2) Following Jeremiah 32:40 and 50:5, the covenant is called an “everlasting covenant” (16:60; 37:26), and following Hosea 2:18 and Isaiah 54:10, a “covenant of peace” (34:25; 37:26). As such, the covenant insures that the nation will dwell securely in the land, free from the threat of man and beast (cf. 34:25–28). For example, the covenant of peace in 34:25–31 includes the promises in 34:28 that the nation “will no longer be prey to the nations” and that “the beasts of the earth will not devour them.” Instead, the nation “will live securely, and no one will make them afraid.” As in Hosea 2:18 and Isaiah 54:10, removing the threat of beasts and foreign invasion means removing the implements of covenantal chastisement. Through the covenant of peace, God will establish a harmonious relationship with a transformed nation where covenant curses are replaced with covenant blessings.<sup>61</sup>

(3) Like Jeremiah 31:33–34, the covenant provides for the forgiveness of sins and the nation’s knowing and obeying God (cf. 16:62–63; 37:23–24), provisions which are closely linked to the work of God’s Spirit and the giving of a new heart (cf. 11:19–20; 36:24–27). Forgiveness is associated with the future covenant in 16:63, “when I have forgiven you for all that you have done,” and in 37:23, “I

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20–48, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1990), pp. 5–16; Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr., *Ezekiel*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), pp. 199–209; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 2 vols., NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, 1998), 1:611–57.

<sup>60</sup>Alexander, “Ezekiel,” p. 922; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, pp. 304, 316, 318, 327; Block, *Ezekiel*, 2:416–18.

<sup>61</sup>Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, pp. 163–64; Block, *Ezekiel*, 2:301–7. For discussion, see *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “שָׁלוֹם,” by Philip J. Nel, 4:130–33.

will cleanse them.” Knowing God is predicated of the future covenant in 16:62, “and you shall know that I am the Lord,” and obeying God is associated with the future covenant in 37:24, “and they will walk in My ordinances and keep my statutes and observe them.”

The connection between the future covenant and the giving of God’s Spirit and a new heart is based on the larger context. The promise of God’s Spirit is recorded in 37:14, “I will put My Spirit within you.” This reference is in a passage (37:12–14) that parallels the passage in which the future covenant is promised (37:21–28). A similar promise of God’s Spirit is made in 36:27, “I will put My Spirit within you.” This is preceded in 36:26 with the corresponding promise, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.” The parallels with 36:22–38, 37:11–14, and 37:21–28 argue that the provision of a new heart in 36:26 is linked with the future covenant in 37:26 (cf. 11:14–21). These parallels include the promise of forgiveness (36:25; 37:23), the giving of the Spirit (36:27; 37:14), the nation’s obeying God’s statutes (36:27; 37:24), God’s restoring the nation in its land (36:24, 28; 37:14, 21, 25), and the covenant formula, “you will be My people and I will be your God” (36:28; 37:23, 27).<sup>62</sup>

(4) Similar to Isaiah 55:3, the covenant is associated with the promises given to David concerning his descendant who would one day sit upon his throne and rule the nation (cf. 34:23–24; 37:24–25). In 34:23, after God delivers the nation from evil shepherds, He states, “Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David.” This promise is repeated in 37:24, “My servant David will be king over them.” It is difficult to determine whether the reference in these passages is to a resurrected David ruling over the nation or to one of his descendants. In light of the promises to David in 2 Samuel 7:12–17 and elsewhere involving a descendant sitting on his throne, the consensus sees the references here to the future Messiah as David’s heir.<sup>63</sup>

(5) Lastly, as in Jeremiah 31:33 and elsewhere, the covenant formula is used, describing the personal and distinctive relationship the covenant establishes between God and the nation (34:24, 30; 37:23, 27). For example, following His promise of a future covenant, God declares in 37:27, “I will be their God, and they will be My people.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>See William H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1–19*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), p. 251; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, pp. 144, 178–79, 303–4; 316–17; 327–28; Block, *Ezekiel*, 1:351–54, 516–20; 2:297–308; 352–57; 410–22.

<sup>63</sup>E.g., Alexander, “Ezekiel,” pp. 913–15, 927; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, pp. 302–5; Block, *Ezekiel*, 2:297–301; 414–18.

<sup>64</sup>See *TDOT*, s.v. “עבד,” by E. Lipinski, 11:171–73.

The passages in Ezekiel provide only one significant characteristic of the new covenant not previously developed in the other prophets. In connection with the new covenant, God will establish His sanctuary in the midst of His people (37:26–28). In 37:26 God states, “I will set my sanctuary in their midst forever.” This statement is parallel to 37:27, “My dwelling place also will be with them.” Although the sanctuary here could refer to the second temple, the descriptor “forever” argues against this in that the second temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. Assuming a literal sanctuary or temple is in view, and that is the predominant use of the term elsewhere in Ezekiel, the reference is to the eschatological temple described by Ezekiel in chapters 40–48.<sup>65</sup>

The references in Ezekiel also provide greater resolution on two issues. The first concerns the role that the Davidide plays in the nation’s future restoration and anticipated covenant. Quite clearly, the references to a future David portray him as a prince and ruler over a reunited and restored nation (34:23–25; 27:24–25). Ezekiel specifically contrasts the historical context where the nation had been divided into two kingdoms, each with its own king, with the future where the nation will be reunited and under a single king (e.g., 37:22, 24).<sup>66</sup> The second involves the nation’s reoccupation of its land. From the references in Ezekiel, the land can be specifically identified as that which had been given to Jacob and where the nation’s fathers had lived (37:21–22, 25; cf. 11:17; 20:42; 34:27; 36:28). This could only be a reference to Palestine. For example, in 37:25, God proclaims, “They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived.”<sup>67</sup>

#### NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

The New Testament contains thirteen references to the new covenant. These include three references in the Synoptics (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20),<sup>68</sup> three references in the Pauline corpus

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<sup>65</sup>Alexander, “Ezekiel,” pp. 905–8, 943–46. See the treatment in *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “מִקְדָּשׁ,” by Richard E. Averbeck, 2:1079–83; *TDOT*, s.v. “מִקְדָּשׁ,” by H. Ringgren, 12:538–39.

<sup>66</sup>See, for example, Block, *Ezekiel*, 2:297.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:412, 418.

<sup>68</sup>The fourth gospel is not included in this survey in that John does not discuss the Last Supper *per se* and, as a result, makes no reference to the covenant. There is debate over John’s contribution to an understanding of the Last Supper and, specifically, over the relationship between the Last Supper and Christ’s discourse on the bread of life in John 6. The issues are beyond the scope of this article. For discussion, see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991),

(Rom 11:27; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6), and seven references in Hebrews (7:22; 8:6–13; 9:15; 10:15–18, 29; 12:24; 13:20).

### The New Covenant in the Synoptics

All three synoptic gospels record the Lord speaking of a new covenant in the context of the Last Supper (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). During a meal with his disciples on the night he was betrayed, Jesus referred to a new covenant. Whether the meal was an actual Passover celebration or simply a solemn meal prior to the Passover, the thought of the Passover was clearly on the minds of all.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, the words of Jesus spoken at the Last Supper must be understood in light of the paschal backdrop. The Synoptics reveal the following two points about the new covenant.

(1) Jesus associates the shedding of his blood with the ratification of the new covenant.<sup>70</sup> This is supported by the longer reading in Luke

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pp. 277–80.

<sup>69</sup>The question stems from an apparent disagreement between the Synoptics and John over whether the Supper was a Passover meal. The Synoptics are often interpreted as though the Supper were a Passover meal (cf. Matt 26:17–19; Mark 14:12–25; Luke 22:7–20), while John is often interpreted as placing the Supper the day before the Passover (cf. John 13:1, 2, 21–30; 18:28; 19:14, 31, 36, 41). The preferred solution is to see the Last Supper as a Passover meal and to interpret John's account accordingly. See, for example, Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 455–58. In any case, there is virtual agreement among interpreters that the Passover was on the minds of all in the Upper Room and that the Lord's words must be understood in light of the paschal motif.

<sup>70</sup>The actual form of the saying varies somewhat among the Synoptics. Matthew has, "for this is the [my] blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" (τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν). Mark records, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (Τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ ἐκχυννόμενον ὑπὲρ πολλῶν). Luke writes, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐκχυννόμενον). The only significant difference is that Matthew and Mark have the adjectival participle, "pouring out," modifying "blood," whereas Luke has it modifying "cup."

Decker apparently fails to notice these variations in his critique of my discussion of the modified elements. He faults me for misidentifying the construction in Luke when, on the page he cites from my dissertation, I am actually discussing the saying in Matthew. He seems unaware that the forms of the saying in Matthew and Luke are not identical. The identifications I give in my dissertation are correct, Decker's criticisms notwithstanding. See Decker, "The Church's Relationship to the New Covenant," p. 448, n. 82. Taking "cup" in Luke as a metonymy for that which is in the cup, the meaning in Luke is essentially the same as in Matthew and Mark. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 2 vols., AB (New York: Doubleday, 1981, 1985), 2:1402–03; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, 2 vols., BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker,

and by Paul's reference to the supper in 1 Corinthians 11:25, both of which specifically use the words "new covenant."<sup>71</sup> In addition, the association between Jesus' blood and the new covenant must be interpreted in light of the covenant concept developed in the Old Testament, in particular by Moses' use of the identical phrase "the blood of the covenant" in Exodus 24:8 when referring to the ratification of the Mosaic covenant.<sup>72</sup> Using the same metonymy of cause and effect, Jesus means by this phrase that his death, symbolized by the contents of the cup and expressed in the reference to his blood being poured out, will "cut" or ratify the new covenant.<sup>73</sup>

(2) In addition, the expression "which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (cf. Matt 26:28) expressly links the new covenant with the forgiveness of sins. The connection between Christ's death and the forgiveness of sins is implicit in Mark and Luke. Both mention Christ's blood being poured out for others. The concept of blood being poured out has sacrificial overtones involving atonement for sin, especially within a paschal setting. Taken together with such passages as Leviticus 17:11 and especially Isaiah 52:12–53:12, the entire expression communicates the idea of an atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>74</sup> Matthew makes explicit what was implicit in Mark and Luke by adding the prepositional phrase "for the forgiveness of sins" as the goal of Christ's sacrificial death. The two concepts, new covenant and forgiveness of sins, are found in the Old Testament only

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1994, 1996), 2:1727–28.

<sup>71</sup>There is a textual question in all three of the Synoptic accounts whether Jesus used the adjective "new" in speaking of the "covenant." For discussion, see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), pp. 54, 95, 148–50. Metzger, reflecting what appears to be the consensus among interpreters, accepts on internal evidence the shorter reading without the adjective in Matthew and Mark, but embraces on internal and external evidence the longer reading in Luke that includes the adjective. There are no textual variants listed with Paul's description of this covenant as the new covenant in 1 Corinthians 11:25.

<sup>72</sup>In Exodus 24:8, Moses declares, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you." The expression Moses employs, literally "the...covenant which the Lord has *cut* with you," associates the killing of the sacrifices and the sprinkling of the blood with the formal initiation or ratification of the covenant. See *TDOT*, s.v. "כָּרַת," by G. F. Hasel, 7:349–52; *NIDOTTE*, s.v. "כָּרַת," by Eugene Carpenter, 2:729–31.

<sup>73</sup>See, for example, Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 660–61.

<sup>74</sup>See Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology and Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 841–42; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), p. 394.

in Jeremiah 31:34 and would have been understood as a reference to Jeremiah's promise by those who heard Jesus' words.<sup>75</sup> As such, Jesus' death functions both as a covenant ratification sacrifice, thus establishing the new covenant, and as an expiatory sacrifice, thereby providing full and final forgiveness.

### The New Covenant in the Pauline Epistles

Before surveying the passages on the new covenant in Paul's epistles, Paul's reference to "covenants" in Galatians 4:24 needs to be mentioned. In this passage, Paul contrasts two covenants, one of them being the Mosaic covenant.<sup>76</sup> Since elsewhere Paul contrasts the Mosaic covenant with the new covenant, the possibility exists that he is doing the same here.<sup>77</sup> However, in both the preceding context (3:15–18) and the immediate verses (4:21–31), Abraham is specifically mentioned as a point of comparison. This suggests that in Galatians 4:24, Paul contrasts the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants, rather than the Mosaic and the new.<sup>78</sup> Assuming that is the case, there are only three references to the new covenant in the Pauline corpus: Romans 11:27; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6.

#### Romans 11:27

A reference to the new covenant is found in Romans 11:26–27, providing the following information.

(1) In connection with this covenant, God promises to send a deliverer to the nation to deliver it from future condemnation and judgment. Paul begins the passage with a declaration that "all Israel will be saved." In support of this declaration, Paul gives a two-part composite citation in 11:26b–27 from the Septuagint of Isaiah, the first from

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<sup>75</sup>See, for example, Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew*, 2 vols., WBC (Dallas: Word, 1993, 1995), 2:773.

<sup>76</sup>In discussing the respective mothers of Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, Paul draws an analogy, "for these *women* are two covenants: one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai." Clearly, the reference to the covenant from Mount Sinai points to Exodus 19:18–20:17 and the Mosaic covenant that God established with the nation. See Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 206–8.

<sup>77</sup>E.g., Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1990), pp. 208–11; Timothy George, *Galatians*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), pp. 338–40.

<sup>78</sup>E.g., Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, pp. 206–7; similarly, James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), pp. 248–50.

Isaiah 59:20–21a (Rom 11:26–27a) and the second from Isaiah 27:9 (Rom 11:27b).<sup>79</sup> While there are some differences between the Septuagint Paul quotes and the Hebrew text discussed in the previous section, none alters the conclusions reached in that discussion.

(2) As such, this deliverance is accomplished through a savior. The reference to a savior is found in 11:26a, “The deliverer will come from Zion,” taken from Isaiah 59:20. It was argued in connection with the survey of the new covenant passages in Isaiah that Isaiah 59:20–21 is discussing the new covenant, that the deliverer in view in Isaiah 59:20 is a reference to the messianic Servant of the Lord, and that the deliverance takes place in the eschaton.<sup>80</sup>

(3) The promised deliverance encompasses the nation as a whole. Easily the most debated issue in this passage is the meaning of “all Israel” in the expression “all Israel will be saved” in 11:26a. Based on the surrounding context, the term “Israel” refers to national, ethnic Israel, and the expression “all Israel” refers to the nation as a whole. Paul employs the expression “Israel” almost a dozen times in chapters 9–11, always elsewhere in an ethnic sense, as in the verse immediately before 11:26. That meaning appears demanded here. Furthermore, Paul refers to a remnant of Jews who are presently experiencing salvation (cf. 11:5). The force of the expression “all Israel” in 11:26a is intended by way of a contrast. Paul’s point is that just as a remnant is presently experiencing salvation, so one day “all Israel” will be saved.<sup>81</sup>

(4) This deliverance involves the forgiveness of sins and the removal of ungodliness. Paul mentions removing ungodliness from the nation (lit., “Jacob”) in his citation from Isaiah 59:20 in 11:26b, “He will remove ungodliness from Jacob,” and the nation’s sins being forgiven in his citation of Isaiah 27:9 in 11:27b, “When I take away their sins.”<sup>82</sup>

(5) Lastly, this promised deliverance follows the present period of Gentile salvation. In 11:25, Paul speaks of the “partial hardening” of Israel continuing “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” The

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<sup>79</sup>See Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 720–23; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 727.

<sup>80</sup>See Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), p. 225; Schreiner, *Romans*, pp. 619–20. Schreiner identifies the redeemer in Isaiah 59:20 as Yahweh and in Romans as Jesus Christ.

<sup>81</sup>Mounce, *Romans*, p. 225; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 720–23; Schreiner, *Romans*, pp. 615–19.

<sup>82</sup>See, for example, Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 422.

temporal clause marks the terminus for the present, partial hardening of the nation. The terminus is specifically identified as the point in time when the salvation of the full complement of Gentiles is reached.<sup>83</sup> This is followed by Paul's statement in 11:26, "and so all Israel will be saved." The adverb "so" has been variously interpreted, with a consensus of interpreters opting for its common use indicating manner, "in this way all Israel will be saved." However, a number of these understand that the manner in which all Israel is saved involves a sequence of events: a present, partial hardening of the nation, an influx of Gentiles experiencing salvation until the full number is reached, and finally the salvation of national Israel following this. In other words, a temporal force cannot be avoided, especially following the temporal clause at the end of 11:25, placing the salvation of national Israel following the present period of Gentile salvation.<sup>84</sup>

### 1 Corinthians 11:25

Paul's reference to a new covenant in 1 Corinthians 11:25 offers the following points.

(1) Paul links the Corinthian believers to the same new covenant announced by the Lord on the night He was betrayed. In addressing the significance of the elements used in the Lord's Supper, Paul quotes the words Jesus uttered during the Last Supper (11:23). Thus, when Paul cites in 11:25, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood," he intentionally identifies the cup used by the Corinthians in the Lord's Supper with the new covenant announced by Jesus.<sup>85</sup>

(2) In addition, Paul relates the Corinthian believers' forgiveness to the forgiveness mentioned by the Lord in connection with this new covenant. According to 10:14–22, participating in the elements of the Lord's Supper involves participating in what the elements signify. Paul's rhetorical question in 10:16, "Is not the cup of blessing which

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<sup>83</sup>Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1993), pp. 621–22; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 717–19; Schreiner, *Romans*, pp. 617–18.

<sup>84</sup>See Judith M. Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance: Staying In and Falling Away* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), pp. 179–81; Moo, *Romans*, pp. 719–20; Schreiner, *Romans*, pp. 620–21. Moo, questioning the legitimacy of the temporal use and opting for manner as representing the predominant force of the adverb, nevertheless concludes by saying, "This means that *houtōs*, while not having a temporal *meaning*, has a temporal *reference*: for the manner in which all Israel is saved involves a process that unfolds in definite stages" (*Romans*, p. 720). See also Gentry, "Postmillennialism," pp. 133–41.

<sup>85</sup>See, for example, Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 545–56.

we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ,” anticipates a “yes” answer.<sup>86</sup>

(3) Finally, Paul notes that participating in the Lord's Supper serves to remind the Corinthian believers of the Lord's death and of His future return. Paul declares in 11:26, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes”<sup>87</sup>

## 2 Corinthians 3:6

Paul's reference to a new covenant in 2 Corinthians 3:6 gives the following information.

(1) In the surrounding context, 3:1–18, Paul makes an extended contrast between the new covenant and the Mosaic covenant in terms of their respective ministries.<sup>88</sup>

(2) As such, the ministry connected with the new covenant is that in which Paul and others are engaged. Paul states in 3:6 that God has made him and others adequate or competent as “servants of a new covenant.” The anarthrous construction could suggest that Paul's ministry involves *a* new covenant, but not *the* new covenant promised in the Old Testament and referred to in the Gospels. However, in the verses that follow, Paul does not contrast his ministry with that of the new covenant as if the two were distinct. Instead, he contrasts his ministry with that of the old or Mosaic covenant (cf. 3:14), using the anarthrous construction to focus on the character of his ministry in contrast to that of Moses and the old covenant. His is a new covenant ministry because it involves the new covenant rather than the old.<sup>89</sup>

(3) It is a ministry empowered and made effective through the Spirit of God. The contrast Paul makes in describing his ministry in 3:6 as “not of the letter but of the Spirit” has been variously understood. In light of the verses that follow and the sustained contrast

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<sup>86</sup>Commenting on the Corinthians' “sharing” in Christ's blood, Fee notes, “Since, therefore, the cup is specifically interpreted by the Lord (cf. Mark 14:24), and continued to be so understood in the early church (1 Cor 11:25), as ‘my blood of the new covenant,’ this language almost certainly refers to their sharing in the provisions and benefits of that covenant” (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 468).

<sup>87</sup>See David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), pp. 548–50.

<sup>88</sup>On the development of Paul's argument in chapter three concerning the contrast between the respective ministries of the Mosaic and new covenants, see Linda L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, IVPNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), pp. 92–113.

<sup>89</sup>See Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994, 2000), 2:234–37; Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, pp. 94–95.

between Paul's ministry under the new covenant and Moses' ministry under the old, it is best to take "letter" as representing the Law or Mosaic covenant (cf. 3:7) and "Spirit" as representing the new covenant. In addition, Paul has referred to God's "Spirit" in connection with his ministry in 3:17 and 3:18, and that is how "Spirit" should be understood in 3:6. Thus, Paul's new covenant ministry is a ministry empowered by God's Spirit.<sup>90</sup> Saying this does not suggest that the Spirit was inoperative or did not save prior to the inauguration of the new covenant with the sacrifice of Christ. Paul's point is that participation in the new covenant and participation in the activity of God's Spirit are corollaries and that the same was not true with the Mosaic covenant.

(4) In contrast to the Mosaic covenant, the ministry associated with the new covenant brings life and righteousness rather than condemnation and death. Paul describes the ministry of the Mosaic covenant in 3:6 as that which "kills," in 3:7 as a "ministry of death," and in 3:9 as a "ministry of condemnation." Conversely, he describes the ministry of the new covenant in 3:6 as that which "gives life" and in 3:9 as a "ministry of righteousness." Paul's harsh words regarding the ministry of the Mosaic covenant are not in conflict with positive statements he makes elsewhere nor do they suggest that Paul has in view some aberrant use or interpretation of the Mosaic covenant. The two chief functions of the Mosaic covenant were revelatory and regulatory. As a vehicle of divine revelation, the Mosaic covenant is described by Paul as "holy and righteous and good" (Rom 7:12). However, as a regulatory vehicle involving moral obligations, the Mosaic covenant did not provide the ability to perform that which it demanded. Because of this and because of human depravity, Paul also describes it as being unable to make alive (Gal 3:21), as involving a curse (Gal 3:13), and as bringing condemnation and death (Rom 7:10).<sup>91</sup>

(5) Concerning the longevity of the two, the new covenant supplants the old covenant and remains in force. Paul depicts the old covenant in 3:11 as "that which fades away" and the new as "that which remains." The contrast is between that which is temporary and transitory and that which is not.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>E.g., Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:234–36; Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, pp. 94–98.

<sup>91</sup>See the discussion by Douglas J. Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian: Five Views*, ed. Wayne G. Strickland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 319–76.

<sup>92</sup>See, for example, Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 187–88. It is assumed Paul is speaking of the regulatory function of the Mosaic covenant, not its revelatory function. See Moo,

(6) Finally, the new covenant and its ministry are imbued with greater glory than the old covenant and its ministry. In comparing the respective ministries of the old and new covenants and the glory associated with each, Paul describes the new in 3:8 as imbued “even more” with glory, in 3:9 as that which does “abound” in glory, and in 3:10 as having a “glory that surpasses.” Paul’s argument is *a fortiori*. If the ministry of the Mosaic covenant was attended with glory, and it was, how much more is the ministry of the new.<sup>93</sup>

### The New Covenant in Hebrews

Clearly the most extensive discussion of the new covenant in the New Testament, the author of Hebrews (hereafter AH) makes the following points in his development of the new covenant theme in 7:22; 8:6–13; 9:15; 10:15–18, 29; 12:24; 13:20.

(1) There is a direct and necessary relationship between the new covenant and Christ’s role as high priest, just as there was between the old or Mosaic covenant and the Levitical priests. In other words, just as the Mosaic covenant was the basis upon which the Levitical priesthood operated, so also the new covenant is the basis upon which the priesthood of Christ operates (cf. 7:11–22; 8:6). The AH establishes the connection between the Mosaic covenant and the Levitical priesthood in 7:11 when, in describing the Levitical priesthood, he adds the parenthetical remark, “for on the basis of it the people received the Law.” The thought is that the Mosaic covenant or Law was necessary in order to regulate the Levitical system. In fact, according to 7:12, a change in priesthood requires a change in the law regulating that priesthood.

Following this, the AH makes the connection in 7:21–22 between the new covenant and Christ’s priesthood. He cites Psalm 110:4 in 7:21, describing the priesthood of Christ as confirmed by divine oath, and then correlates this in 7:22, stating, “so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant.” He makes the same connection between Christ’s priesthood and the new covenant in 8:6. Having described the superiority of Christ’s priestly ministry at the beginning of the verse, the AH adds, “by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant.” What follows this statement is a citation of Jeremiah 31:31–34, identifying this better covenant with the

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“The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses,” pp. 343–76.

<sup>93</sup>Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:239–41; David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), pp. 169–70.

new covenant promised in Jeremiah.<sup>94</sup>

(2) As a high priest under the new covenant, Christ is viewed both as the mediator of the new covenant, providing for its ratification (8:6; 9:15; 12:24), as well as the guarantor of the new covenant, guaranteeing the fulfillment of its promises (cf. 7:22–25). Christ is described as the guarantor of the new covenant in 7:22, “Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.” He is described as the mediator of the new covenant in 8:6, “He is also the mediator of a better covenant,” in 9:15, “He is the mediator of a new covenant,” and in 12:24, “and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.” A mediator is one who intercedes between two parties to secure an agreement and, in this context, to secure or establish a covenant. Parallel to this is the concept of a guarantor who guarantees the stipulations of an agreement or, as here, a covenant.<sup>95</sup>

(3) As in 2 Corinthians 3, the AH contrasts the old or Mosaic covenant with the new. The new is seen as superior both in terms of its ability to provide full and final forgiveness and also in terms of its longevity, functioning as the replacement for the old (cf. 7:18–25; 8:6–13; 9:12–15; 12:22–24; 13:20). For example, in 9:13–14, the AH contrasts the forgiveness provided by the Mosaic sacrifices with the forgiveness provided by the sacrifice of Christ. The former, he declares, was effective “for the cleansing the flesh,” while the latter is able to “cleanse our/your conscience.”<sup>96</sup> As mentioned earlier, the issues surrounding the efficacy of the Old Testament sacrifices are complex. The AH appears to be contrasting cultic or ceremonial cleansing accomplished through the Mosaic sacrifices with moral or spiritual cleansing accomplished by the sacrifice of Christ. In the next verse, the AH links the forgiveness of sins with Christ’s role as mediator of the new covenant, “For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant...since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions.”<sup>97</sup>

The longevity of the new covenant is explicit in 13:20, where it is called an “eternal covenant,” and implicit in its relationship to Christ’s priesthood. Citing Psalm 110:4 in 7:21, the AH records the promise of

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<sup>94</sup>See, for example, F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 166–67, 170–71, 185–86.

<sup>95</sup>See, for example, Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), pp. 208–9, 254–55.

<sup>96</sup>There is a textual question whether to read the first person plural, “our,” or the second person plural, “your.” See Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p. 599.

<sup>97</sup>See, for example, Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 214–18. On the nature and efficacy of OT sacrifices, see footnote 34.

the Father to the Son, “You are a priest forever.” In 7:22, the AH connects this promise to Christ’s role as the guarantor of the new covenant. The implication is that Christ’s priesthood as well as the covenant on which it is based are both eternal. This is in contrast to the Mosaic covenant which the AH describes in 8:13 as “old,” “obsolete,” and “ready to disappear.”<sup>98</sup>

(4) The new covenant is described as having been established or ratified through the death of Christ. In addition, the readers of Hebrews are depicted as participating in the forgiveness which it promises (cf. 8:6; 10:15–18; 10:29; 13:20). The AH presents the new covenant in 8:6 as having already been ratified or “enacted.” The perfect indicative used here points to an action completed in the past whose results continue.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, according to 9:15–18, the new covenant was enacted in conjunction with Christ’s death. Drawing a parallel between covenant ratification and sacrifice, the AH declares in 9:18 that “even the first *covenant* was not inaugurated without blood.” The point is that just as the Mosaic covenant had been ratified (perfect indicative) with the death of animals (cf. 9:19–20) in the same way the new covenant has been ratified with the death of Christ.<sup>100</sup>

The fact that the readers are participating in the forgiveness promised in the new covenant is made evident in 10:15–18. In 10:14, the AH establishes that Christ has provided full and complete forgiveness of sins for all those whom He has sanctified (cf. 10:11–13). In the verses that follow, the AH supports the full and complete forgiveness provided by Christ by citing Jeremiah 31:33–34 and the promise of forgiveness in Jeremiah’s new covenant (10:17). In 10:15, he introduces the citation from Jeremiah about the forgiveness of sins by saying that the Holy Spirit has “testified to us,” that is, to the writer and to the readers, through Jeremiah’s promise.<sup>101</sup>

(5) When identifying the antecedent to this covenant, the AH

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<sup>98</sup>See, for example, Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2001), pp. 112–15, 369–70, 388.

<sup>99</sup>Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 572–74.

<sup>100</sup>See, for example, William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, 2 vols., WBC (Dallas: Word, 1991), 2:241–45. The expression “ratified” is employed here and elsewhere when speaking of the establishing of a covenant to avoid the connotations associated with the term “inaugurated.” The latter is used by both progressive dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists to speak of the present, partial fulfillment of OT eschatological prophecies.

<sup>101</sup>See, for example, Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 512–14.

twice draws upon the new covenant pericope recorded in Jeremiah 31:31–34, though he does not equate his readers with the designees of the new covenant identified in Jeremiah (cf. 8:6–13; 10:15–18). In citing Jeremiah 31:33 in 10:16, the AH changes the identification of the new covenant recipients from “the house of Israel” to “them.” That this represents a conscious change is evident in that the AH follows the Hebrew and the LXX in identifying the recipients of the covenant as “the house of Israel” in his initial citation of Jeremiah 31:33 in 8:10. The change in 10:16 appears prompted by the fact that the AH has identified his readers in 10:15 as those to whom the Holy Spirit was testifying concerning the forgiveness of sins in the Jeremiah passage. To highlight the point that his readers, although benefiting from the forgiveness promised in Jeremiah’s new covenant, are not the designees of Jeremiah’s covenant, the AH uses the pronoun “them” to describe the actual recipients, “This is the covenant that I will make with them.” The new covenant was something that God was going to accomplish for “them,” that is, for the nation of Israel, not for “you,” that is, for the readers of Hebrews. Had he understood that the covenant was something that God was going to accomplish for his readers, the AH would have used the pronoun “you,” designating the readers as the recipients, rather than “them,” which distinguishes the readers from the recipients.<sup>102</sup>

#### AN EVALUATION OF THE VIEWS

##### **The Church Replaces National Israel and Fulfills the New Covenant in the Present**

This view must be rejected for two reasons. *First*, the most telling critique of this view is the fact that in Romans 11:26–27, Paul identifies a future fulfillment of the new covenant for national Israel. In verse 26a, Paul speaks of the future salvation of the nation and supports that statement in verses 26b–27 with a composite citation from Isaiah 59:20–21a and 27:9. It was established earlier that Isaiah 59:20–21, with its reference to a future covenant, is one of the new covenant passages in Isaiah. By combining this reference with Isaiah 27:9, Paul intentionally associates the concepts of (1) the coming of a deliverer for the nation, (2) the forgiveness of sins, and (3) God’s establishing a covenant with His people. All of these, Paul declares, will take place for Israel in the future.

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<sup>102</sup>Contra Attridge (*Hebrews*, p. 281), Ellingsworth (*Commentary on Hebrews*, p. 513), and Koester (*Hebrews*, p. 435). Attridge suggests that the change was prompted in order to broaden the scope of the covenant to include Gentiles.

The point is, if the church has supplanted national Israel in God's plan of redemption and now fulfills God's promises originally given to Israel, then why does Paul speak of a future deliverance of the nation, a deliverance, it should be noted, that fulfills God's promise of a new covenant with national, ethnic Israel? Those arguing that the church replaces national Israel have recognized the tension between their position and Paul's words in Romans 11:26–27. Their principal recourse has been to define "Israel" in verse 26 as referring collectively to elect Jews and Gentiles. Thus, "all Israel" means all the elect, both Jews and Gentiles, as the people of God.<sup>103</sup> The problem with this solution is that the term "Israel" is employed almost a dozen times throughout this section of Romans, including in the immediately preceding verse. In every other instance, as even non-dispensationalists acknowledge, the term is invariably used of national, ethnic Israel.<sup>104</sup>

Recognizing the problem with defining "Israel" in 11:26 as referring to individuals other than Jews, champions of this view offer two alternate solutions. Some argue that "Israel" in this verse refers to elect Jews and that the salvation mentioned takes place throughout history.<sup>105</sup> The problem with this approach is that it still gives a definition for "Israel" that is not found in the surrounding context. Nowhere else does the expression refer to the elect Jews throughout history.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, this approach fails to understand the sequence of events Paul gives in the immediate passage. The expression "thus all Israel will be saved" is not describing the manner in which God saves Jews in history, but an activity which will take place following the salvation of the

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<sup>103</sup>See, for example, N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), pp. 249–51; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2000), pp. 176–89.

<sup>104</sup>Written from a covenant, postmillennial perspective, John Murray's oft quoted response bears repeating, "It should be apparent from both the proximate and less proximate contexts in this portion of the epistle that it is exegetically impossible to give to 'Israel' in this verse any other denotation than that which belongs to the term throughout this chapter.... It is of ethnic Israel Paul is speaking and Israel could not possibly include Gentiles. In that event the preceding verse would be reduced to absurdity and since verse 26 is a parallel or correlative statement the denotation of 'Israel' must be the same as in verse 25" (*The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 2:96).

<sup>105</sup>See, for example, Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, pp. 1024–30; Ben L. Merkle, "Romans 11 and the Future of Ethnic Israel," *JETS* 43 (December 2000): 709–21.

<sup>106</sup>See Mounce, *Romans*, p. 225; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 720–23; Schreiner, *Romans*, pp. 615–19.

“full number” of Gentiles in the present era.<sup>107</sup> Finally, this approach misunderstands the contrast between the “remnant” of the nation that has experienced salvation (11:1–6) and “all Israel” that Paul says “will be saved.” According to this approach, the “remnant” and “all Israel” are synonymous and the expression “will be saved” means, in effect, “are now being saved.”<sup>108</sup>

Others identify “Israel” in 11:26 as a reference to elect Jews, but place the salvation in this verse some time in the future as part of God’s present program in saving Jews and Gentiles as members of the body of Christ, the church.<sup>109</sup> Those who embrace this approach fail to do justice to the Old Testament citations Paul uses in 11:26–27 to support his argument. As explained earlier, these Old Testament citations are in an eschatological context and address God’s activity with national Israel in fulfillment of the new covenant and all that God had promised the nation with that covenant.<sup>110</sup>

*Second*, there is no incontrovertible evidence in the New Testament to support the church’s supplanting national Israel and taking over its promises. Advocates of this view cannot point to a single verse in the New Testament where the two terms “Israel” and “church” are used as theological equivalents. Furthermore, the church is never designated in the New Testament as the “new,” “true,” or “spiritual” Israel. The three New Testament passages often cited in support of including elect or saved Gentiles in the designation “Israel” are Romans 2:29, Galatians 6:16, and Philippians 3:3 (note the term “Israel” does not actually appear in either Romans 2:29 or Philippians 3:3).

In Romans 2:29, Paul declares that a Jew is not one who has undergone the physical rite but one who has experienced a “circumcision of the heart.” Paul’s statement has been taken by many as a redefining of the expression “Jew” to mean anyone, Jew or Gentile, who shares

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<sup>107</sup>See the discussion on pp. 27–28.

<sup>108</sup>In support of this critique, see Mounce, *Romans*, p. 225; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 720–23; Schreiner, *Romans*, pp. 615–19.

<sup>109</sup>See, for example, David E. Holwerda, *Jesus & Israel: One Covenant or Two?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 168–75; Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, pp. 126–30; Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, pp. 190–94. Both Holwerda and Riddlebarger specifically mention that the coming of the deliverer in Paul’s citation of Isa 59:20–21 is referring to Christ’s *first* advent.

<sup>110</sup>For a recent discussion supporting the conclusions offered here and including a critique of the so-called two covenant or *sonderweg* interpretation that argues for a future salvation of national Israel apart from the gospel, see Harold W. Hoehner, “Israel in Romans 9–11,” in *Israel, the Land, and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God’s Promises*, ed. H Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), pp. 153–67.

this inner circumcision.<sup>111</sup> Paul's statement, however, can be understood, as in 9:6, as simply contrasting a saved Jew as a subset of the larger category of ethnic Jews, without any intent of including Gentiles within the designation.<sup>112</sup>

The same may be said of Philippians 3:3. There Paul declares that he and his readers, the majority of whom are Gentiles, are "the circumcision," in contrast to his Jewish opponents whose circumcision he describes in 3:2 as an outward "mutilation." Again, a number of interpreters understand Paul's statement as redefining "Jew" to refer to Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, who partake of this circumcision.<sup>113</sup> It needs only to be noted, however, that Paul does not use the expression "Jew" in this passage. To extrapolate from Paul's statement a redefinition of "Jew" goes beyond what the verse actually says.

The Galatians 6:16 passage is the key text in this discussion in that here the expression "Israel of God" is used. Having defended the true gospel in the epistle, Paul concludes his letter with a benediction on all those who conduct themselves according to his gospel as the standard of truth, saying "peace and mercy upon them, and upon the Israel of God." Covenant theologians have understood, and correctly so, that the pronoun "them" upon whom Paul's benediction is pronounced includes all Christians, both Jews and Gentiles. However, they further argue that the expression, "the Israel of God," is to be taken epexegetically, giving an additional description of the same group represented by the pronoun "them." Thus, they conclude, Paul identifies Christians as the new Israel, replacing the ethnic nation as the people of God.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>For example, Moo states, "But Paul goes beyond any first-century Jewish viewpoint...in implicitly applying the term 'Jew' to those who were not ethnically Jews" (*The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 175).

<sup>112</sup>See, for example, C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975, 1979), 1:176. Cranfield states: "Is he [Paul] implying...that the Christian Church alone is the heir to all the promises? Taken by themselves these verses would seem to be patient of such a construction. They have certainly often been understood in this sense and Paul has appeared as the father of those 'who have denied to the Jewish people their election privileges and promises,' simply 'transferring them to Christianity as the new Israel of God.' But these verses do not stand by themselves, and, if they are to be interpreted in the light of 3.1-4 and also of 9.1-11.36, they can hardly bear this meaning."

<sup>113</sup>For example, Moisés Silva states, "The polemic of Philippians 3 begins with an unequivocal assertion of the great spiritual reversal: Judaizers are the new Gentiles, while Christian believers have become the true Jews" (*Philippians*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary [Chicago: Moody Press, 1988], p. 170). See also Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), p. 126.

<sup>114</sup>For two recent defenses, see Robertson, *The Israel of God*, pp. 38-46; Andreas

The verse has been variously interpreted, and no interpretation is without its challenges. Nevertheless, interpreting the phrase, “the Israel of God,” as a reference to Jewish and Gentile Christians is improbable at best. It requires the “and” connecting the phrase to the previous pronoun to be taken as explicative, meaning “namely” or “even,” an unusual use of the connective and one contested in Paul’s writings.<sup>115</sup> As well, this interpretation gives a meaning to the expression “Israel” that is not demonstrated elsewhere in Paul or the New Testament.<sup>116</sup> A better interpretation is to take the expression as a reference either to Jewish Christians, which would be somewhat parallel to Rom 2:29 and Paul’s use of the term “Jew,” or to eschatological Israel, similar to Paul’s reference in Romans 11:26.<sup>117</sup>

### There Are Two New Covenants: One for Israel and One for the Church

Based on the evidence, this view cannot be sustained either. There is no passage in the New Testament which specifically mentions two new covenants or distinguishes between a new covenant for the church and one promised to Israel.<sup>118</sup> One passage, Hebrews 12:23–24, does mention both Old Testament believers (“the spirits of righteous men made perfect”) and the church (“the church of the firstborn”), yet only one new covenant is mentioned.<sup>119</sup> In addition, at least twice when referring to new covenant benefits enjoyed by the church, the New Testament identifies the new covenant in view as the one promised in Jeremiah (Heb 8:8–12; 10:15–18).<sup>120</sup>

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J. Köstenberger, “The Identity of the ἸΣΡΑΗΛ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ (Israel of God) in Galatians 6:16,” *Faith & Mission* (Fall 2001): 3–24.

<sup>115</sup>See S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., “Paul and ‘The Israel of God’: An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study,” in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, ed. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), p. 188.

<sup>116</sup>Mounce, *Romans*, p. 225; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 720–23; Schreiner, *Romans*, pp. 615–19.

<sup>117</sup>See Johnson, “Paul and ‘The Israel of God,’” pp. 191–94.

<sup>118</sup>Kent, “The New Covenant and the Church,” pp. 297–98; Decker, “The Church’s Relationship to the New Covenant,” pp. 431–35.

<sup>119</sup>See Bruce, *Hebrews*, pp. 358–60.

<sup>120</sup>As discussed earlier, the relationship between believers in the present age and Jeremiah’s new covenant is expressly linked in Hebrews 10:15–18. The AH introduces the new covenant citation from Jeremiah 31 in 10:15 by saying that the Holy Spirit has testified to “us,” meaning to himself and to his readers, and then he cites the Jeremiah passage, focusing specifically on the promise of forgiveness in 31:34. Thus, the provision of forgiveness promised in Jeremiah’s new covenant has been made

**The New Covenant Is Exclusively for Israel and  
Will be Fulfilled by Israel in the Future**

This view, likewise, must be rejected. The evidence from the New Testament indicates that several of the provisions of Jeremiah's new covenant are directly related to the church. *First*, Jesus' words during the Last Supper associate his death and the forgiveness which it provides with the new covenant. According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, the Corinthian believers were to observe the institution commemorating the Lord's Supper because they participated in the forgiveness which the institution signifies. In other words, the blood of the new covenant, represented by the cup, provided for their forgiveness.<sup>121</sup>

The AH makes the connection between the new covenant and the forgiveness which those in the church enjoy even clearer. He establishes in 9:15–18 (cf. 7:11; 8:6) that the new covenant promised in Jeremiah was ratified by the death of Christ. He confirms in 10:14–18 that Christ's death secured the full and final forgiveness promised in Jeremiah's new covenant. And, he specifically identifies in 10:29 the "blood of the covenant" as the basis for his readers' forgiveness (cf. 10:10, 22). The only covenant mentioned by the AH in the immediate context is Jeremiah's new covenant (cf. 10:16–17). Moreover, in 10:25, the AH describes certain individuals as having abandoned the community of believers to whom he is writing, "not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some." In warning his readers of the consequences of such an act, the AH says in 10:29 that anyone who does this has "regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified." As noted above, the AH specifically identifies this covenant in the previous verses as the same covenant which Jeremiah had promised.<sup>122</sup>

*Second*, the AH inseparably links Christ's role as a priest with the new covenant. In other words, just as the Levitical priests performed their duties on the basis of the Mosaic covenant (7:11), so also Christ functions as a high priest on the basis of the new covenant (7:11–12,

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available to the readers of Hebrews. See p. 33.

<sup>121</sup>As mentioned previously, the connection between the cup used in the Lord's Supper and the forgiveness of sins is made explicit in 1 Cor 10:16. Paul's rhetorical question in 10:16, whether or not the Corinthians' partaking ("sharing") of the cup symbolized their participation in the benefits of Christ's blood represented by the cup, requires a "yes" answer. Thus, to "share" in the blood of Christ, by metonymy, means to share in the forgiveness provided by the blood, that is, by the sacrificial death of Christ. See pp. 28–29.

<sup>122</sup>See, for example, Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:290–94.

20–22; 8:6). At the same time, according to the AH, Christ exercises his role as a high priest on behalf of his readers (4:14–15; 7:26; 8:1). For example, in 8:1 the AH states, “Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest....” The “we” refers to the author and readers; the “high priest” is a reference to Christ. In 8:6, the AH transitions from discussing Christ’s role as a high priest to discussing his role as the mediator of a “better covenant,” reinforcing the link between priesthood and covenant. Following this, the AH cites Jeremiah 31:31–34 in 8:8–12, identifying the “better covenant” with which Christ serves as a high priest as Jeremiah’s new covenant. Thus, for his readers to partake of Christ’s priestly ministry means that they participate in this benefit and provision of the new covenant.<sup>123</sup>

*Third*, in 2 Corinthians 3, Paul identifies himself as a minister of the new covenant, that is, as one who is presently serving under the auspices of the new covenant. Although the construction is anarthrous, this does not mean that Paul is contrasting the new covenant under which he serves with the one promised in the Old Testament. No such contrast is found in this passage. Rather, he specifically associates his ministry in this covenant with God’s Spirit, similar to the new covenant references in Ezekiel. In addition, he contrasts his ministry with this covenant with that of the ministry of the old or Mosaic covenant, similar to the key new covenant passage in Jeremiah. Furthermore, Paul identifies his readers as recipients both of this new covenant ministry and of the Spirit associated with it (3:3).<sup>124</sup>

#### **The Church Partially Fulfills the New Covenant Now; Israel Completely Fulfills the New Covenant in the Future**

The evidence argues against using fulfillment terminology when discussing the relationship of the church to the new covenant, ruling out this view as well. The interpretive basis for this approach is called “complementary hermeneutics.” What this means is that the New Testament complements, that is, adds to and changes the meaning of Old Testament texts, particularly Old Testament prophecy, so as to

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<sup>123</sup>In addition the discussion on pp. 31–32, see Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews*, pp. 408–11.

<sup>124</sup>See pp. 29–31. In 3:3, Paul speaks metaphorically of the readers as epistles of Christ, “written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God...” For a recent discussion on 2 Cor 3 supporting the conclusions drawn above, though from a progressive dispensational perspective using fulfillment terminology, see Paul Thorsell, “The Spirit in the Present Age: Preliminary Fulfillment of the Predicted New Covenant According to Paul,” *JETS* 41 (September 1998): 397–413.

include the church in the scope and meaning of those texts.<sup>125</sup> In terms of the new covenant, the Old Testament speaks of the forgiveness of sins, the salvation of Gentiles, and the ministry of God's Spirit. While these are found in eschatological contexts in the Old Testament describing God's activity with Israel, the New Testament, it is argued, expands the meanings of these texts to include God's present activity in the church. Thus, while these Old Testament prophecies will be fulfilled in the future with Israel, they have a partial fulfillment today in the church.<sup>126</sup>

Although proponents may deny this, complementary hermeneutics appears to be similar to, if not identical with, what has been called *sensus plenior*.<sup>127</sup> In other words, God meant more than what the Old Testament author understood as indicated in the words of the Old Testament text, particularly in the writing of Old Testament prophecy.<sup>128</sup> This additional meaning, it is argued, has now been revealed in

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<sup>125</sup>See, for example, Bock, "Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism," pp. 89–91, 96–98. Discussing the "complementary" concept, Bock explains: "According to this approach, the New Testament does introduce change and advance; it does not merely repeat Old Testament revelation. In making complementary *additions*, however, it *does not jettison* old promises. *The enhancement is not at the expense of the original promise.* Here is an attempt to respect original authorial meaning and yet allow the New Testament to speak in a progressive way about how to put the pieces of Old Testament hope together. A complementary emphasis does not remove meaning; it makes new, sometimes fresh, additional connections. It works canonically. It does so without removing what was originally affirmed, since those factors of meaning will come to play in the era to come" (p. 90).

<sup>126</sup>See the entries in footnote 18.

<sup>127</sup>Bock attempts to counter the charge: "New Testament texts that point to the current activity of God and even point to Old Testament promises to explain that activity are...best honored contextually when they are seen as relevant to the current activity of hope being described. Thus the appeal to...Jeremiah 31 in Hebrews 8–10 points to direct realizations of promises of old brought into the fresh sphere of present activity.... Some...have argued that there is something inherently 'unstable' in reading the text this way. But we would argue that it is decidedly biblical. Salvation itself has an 'already-not yet' quality to it in that we are justified now but await glorification. There is nothing inherently problematic, then, that eschatology will reflect a parallel kind of structure.... So progressive dispensational hermeneutics is not against the pursuit of original meaning or stable meaning. It is not engaged in allegorizing, spiritualizing, or pursuing *sensus plenior*" ("Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism," pp. 92–94).

<sup>128</sup>For similar critiques, see Elliott E. Johnson, "Prophetic Fulfillment: The Already and Not Yet," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), pp. 183–201; Thomas, "The Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism," pp. 88–93; idem, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, pp. 361–63. Thomas makes the same observation: "Blaising and Bock explicitly refuse to limit textual meaning to a reproduction of what the author meant. Regarding this issue

the New Testament.<sup>129</sup>

Two problems make this view unacceptable. The *first* problem involves the hermeneutical principles underlying this view. Complementary hermeneutics appears to be in conflict with the univocal nature of language, the single meaning of Scripture, and authorial intent. By the univocal nature of language, it is meant that communication depends on words having one meaning in a given context.<sup>130</sup> While not all engaged in the debate agree with this principle, it is

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they state, “These texts have a message that extends beyond the original settings in which they were given. Something about what they say lives on.” They deny the well-known maxim of ‘one interpretation, many applications,’ referring to later applications as added meanings that accrue to various biblical texts. This opinion is in essence none other than an advocacy of *sensus plenior*, when they refer to a meaning beyond that determined by the historical circumstances of the text’s origin” (*Evangelical Hermeneutics*, pp. 361–62). Strangely, Thomas appears to embrace what he criticizes, when he argues for “inspired *sensus plenior* application.” By this he means that on occasion “the NT writer goes beyond the grammatical-historical sense of the OT passage to assign the passage an additional meaning in connection with its NT context.... It is ‘inspired,’ because along with all Scripture, the NT passage is inspired by God. It is ‘*sensus plenior*’ in that it gives an additional or fuller sense than the passage had in its OT setting. It is an ‘application’ because it does not eradicate the literal meaning of the OT passage, but simply applies the OT wording to a new setting.” See Robert L. Thomas, “The New Testament Use of the Old Testament,” *TMSJ* 13 (Spring 2003): 80. How this differs from what progressive dispensationalists argue is not clear.

<sup>129</sup>For example, Bock argues: “One other point needs attention with the focus on original setting and utterance. It is the observation that in Scripture we are dealing with the unique circumstance of dual authorship. This means that although we are concerned with the meaning of the human author in his setting, we are also to be sensitive to the meaning of the divine Author, who knows the whole of the story and the entirety of canonical promise. The reality of dual authorship in Scripture is what permits and requires consideration of the development of meaning in three settings...the reading of the text in its original setting, in light of the biblical book, *and* in light of the canon. It is dual authorship that opens up the canon for consideration as a factor in determining the ultimate scope of meaning” (“Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism,” pp. 90–91).

<sup>130</sup>See Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), p. 205. His definition remains the standard, “A fundamental principle in grammatico-historical exposition is that words and sentences can have but one signification in one and the same connection. The moment we neglect this principle we drift out upon a sea of uncertainty and conjecture.” Addressing Old Testament prophecy specifically, he adds, “The hermeneutical principles which we have now set forth necessarily exclude the doctrine that the prophecies of Scripture contain an occult or double sense.... We may readily admit that the Scriptures are capable of manifold practical *applications*; otherwise they would not be so useful for doctrine, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. iii, 16). But the moment we admit the principle that portions of Scripture contain an occult or double sense we introduce an element of uncertainty in the sacred volume and unsettle all scientific interpretation” (p. 493).

telling that those who reject it must employ this rule in an effort to overthrow it.<sup>131</sup> By the application of this rule, a biblical text can have only one meaning. It is the meaning intended by the author, and it is the meaning expressed in the selection of the words used in a given context to communicate that meaning.<sup>132</sup> The understanding of this meaning comes from the application of the standard or normal rules of interpretation. This would include the normal interpretation of figures of speech when employed by the author.<sup>133</sup>

With biblical texts, what the human author means must be the same as what the divine author means, since the only access to the meaning intended by the divine author is through the words of the human author. Divine inspiration did not circumvent the human author's intellect, but superintended the human author so that the words the human author understood and used communicated precisely what the divine author intended. This does not imply that the human

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<sup>131</sup>See Robert H. Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," *JETS* 44 (September 2001): 455. He makes a similar point concerning authorial intent, "The greatest argument in favor of understanding the author as the determiner of a text's meaning is that it is the common sense approach to all communication. One cannot have a meaningful conversation or even a serious debate about this issue without assuming this."

<sup>132</sup>See E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 5. Discussing the issue from the larger hermeneutical debate and responding to those who locate meaning outside the words of the author as recorded in the text, Hirsch cautions, "To banish the original author as the determiner of meaning [is] to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to an interpretation.... For if the meaning of a text is not the author's, then no interpretation can possibly correspond to *the* meaning of the text, since the text can have no determinate or determinable meaning" (pp. 5–6). For a recent defense of authorial intent in response to those who deny the possibility of reclaiming the author's intention, see Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," pp. 451–57. For a survey of the contemporary debate, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in the Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), pp. 9–468.

<sup>133</sup>See, for example, Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 80–81. His definition of literal hermeneutics bears repeating: "It is sometimes called the principle of *grammatical-historical* interpretation since the meaning of each word is determined by grammatical and historical considerations. The principle might also be called *normal* interpretation since the literal meaning of words is the normal approach to their understanding in all languages. It might also be designated *plain* interpretation so that no one receives the mistaken notion that the literal principle rules out figures of speech. Symbols, figures of speech, and types are all interpreted plainly in this method, and they are in no way contrary to literal interpretation. After all, the very existence of any meaning for a figure of speech depends on the reality of the literal meaning of the terms involved. Figures often make the meaning plainer, but it is the literal, normal, or plain meaning that they convey to the reader."

author shares in God's omniscience or that the human author understood all the implications or significance of the text. It does imply that a text can only mean what the human author understood in the choice of words that were used to communicate that meaning.<sup>134</sup>

The complementary hermeneutics employed by this view concludes that there is meaning in the Old Testament text that extends beyond what the Old Testament author understood and beyond what can be gained from the words used in their Old Testament context. As such, it violates the above principles and opens the Old Testament text, in effect, to whatever meaning the interpreter may discover from the New Testament.<sup>135</sup>

The *second* problem with this view involves the New Testament's use of the Old. Progressive dispensationalists identify certain key Old Testament texts used in the New Testament as proof texts to validate and defend their use of complementary hermeneutics. For example, Peter's use of Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:16–21 is identified as a key text in support of complementary hermeneutics. Joel speaks in an eschatological context about God's pouring out His Spirit on Israelites and others. Peter uses this verse, it is argued, to show that what the Spirit was doing in forming the church on the day of Pentecost was included in the

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<sup>134</sup>See similarly Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Meaning of Meaning," in *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 40–41; Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," pp. 463–64. Stein writes, "We have no way of understanding what God means except through what his apostles and prophets wrote in Scripture, and in seeking to understand God's apostles and prophets, we want to know what these human, inspired authors meant by their words. We simply have no access to a separate divine meaning" (p. 464).

<sup>135</sup>Although Bock attempts to deny that this is the case, his discussion of the throne of David in Acts 2:30 in defense of his hermeneutical system effectively counters his denial. Bock grants that in Psalm 132:11 the expression carries the meaning of David's earthly throne in Jerusalem. However, he argues in Acts 2:30 where Peter is citing Psalm 132:11 that the same expression refers to Christ's present rule from heaven. The two meanings are not synonymous, as Bock himself acknowledges. Furthermore, the meaning Bock gives the expression in Acts 2:30 cannot be derived directly from the words found in the Old Testament text, but must be derived from the New Testament author's alleged expansion and altering of the Old Testament expression. Lastly, Bock's contention that his system still produces stability of meaning in that the meaning of the expression in the Old Testament is the same as the meaning it has in the eschaton misses the point. The meaning he identifies for the text in Acts 2:30 is not the same as the meaning of that text in the Old Testament. For Bock's discussion of Acts 2:30 in the context of his defending progressive hermeneutics and the single meaning of Scripture, see "Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism," pp. 87–91. For a rebuttal, see Johnson's "Response" in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), pp. 101–5.

meaning of Joel's prophecy.<sup>136</sup> By applying Joel's prophecy in this way, proponents of this view argue that Peter has expanded and changed the meaning of the Old Testament text such that the church is, in some way, fulfilling what Joel had prophesied.<sup>137</sup>

There are a number of objections to this reading of Acts 2. Peter does not use the fulfillment formula when introducing his quote from Joel 2, as he does, for example, in Acts 1:16, when introducing a quote from the Psalms. In other words, Peter does not say that what Joel prophesied was being fulfilled at Pentecost, partially or otherwise. Although it is commonly argued by progressive dispensationalists and others that the expression Peter uses to introduce his citation ("this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel") approximates a fulfillment formula,<sup>138</sup> the expression itself is open to other interpretations. Specifically, the construction can be interpreted as introducing an illustration or analogy from the Old Testament that in some way parallels the events at Pentecost. Understanding the citation in this way, Peter would be saying that "this is *similar to* what was spoken through the prophet Joel." As such, Peter does not imply that Joel's prophecy is being fulfilled.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, there is nothing mentioned in Joel's passage that Peter (or Luke) identifies as actually taking place at Pentecost. There is no reference in Acts 2 to prophecy, to dreams, to signs of

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<sup>136</sup>See, for example, Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ," pp. 47–49. Similarly, Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 97–107.

<sup>137</sup>E.g., Darrell L. Bock, "Response," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of the Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), pp. 160–62. Commenting on the relationship between Peter's use of Joel 2, the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost, and the new covenant, Bock argues, "*Israel* can know that Jesus is the Christ because the *promised* Spirit has been poured out, which is an initial fulfillment of the new covenant" (p. 162).

<sup>138</sup>E.g., Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ," p. 47. Bock states, "The quotation is introduced in Acts 2:16 with as explicit a citation formula as could be used to denote fulfillment.... Such phrases were used at Qumran to indicate the presence of fulfillment." For a discussion on the use of this formula in Jewish literature in the second temple period, see Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 181; Klyne Snodgrass, "The Use of the Old Testament in the New," in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. David A. Black and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), p. 218.

<sup>139</sup>See, for example, Roy E. Beacham, "Acts 2 and Pentecost," in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), p. 34. After surveying the options, Beacham concludes, "It seems best to understand Peter's reference to Joel simply as an illustration [of] the work of the Spirit. Peter was saying, this is that kind of thing spoken of by the prophet Joel" (p. 34).

blood, fire, and smoke, or to the sun's turning to darkness or the moon to blood. The only common denominators between Joel's prophecy and the events in Acts 2 are the working of God's Spirit and the offer of salvation.<sup>140</sup>

In 2:33, Peter specifically identifies the Holy Spirit as the point of comparison between Joel's citation and the events of Pentecost: "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this [Spirit] which you both see and hear." The purpose of the citation is to show that the activity of God's Spirit on Pentecost is similar to Joel's prophecy. Peter's citation does not equate Joel's prophecy with the events of Pentecost. Rather, the citation simply draws attention to the activity of God's Spirit and the offer of salvation which are found in both. In other words, Peter uses Joel to show that the events of Pentecost were analogous to Joel's prophecy, as well as to show that the offer of salvation mentioned by Joel was available to those present at Pentecost.<sup>141</sup>

There is nothing in Acts 2 about the fulfillment of Joel nor any justification for changing or expanding the Old Testament text to support a concept of complementary hermeneutics. The same may be said of those passages in the New Testament that draw upon the new covenant prophecies in the Old Testament. When the New Testament writers speak of the church's relationship to the new covenant, they do so not in terms of fulfillment nor in terms of changing or adding to the meaning of the Old Testament text. Rather, they speak in terms of the new covenant's having already been established in the death of Christ and of their readers' enjoying certain provisions or benefits derived

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<sup>140</sup>See, for example, Charles C. Ryrie, "The Significance of Pentecost," in *Vital Theological Issues: Examining Enduring Issues of Theology*, Vital Issues Series, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1994), p. 169. Ryrie states, "Clearly Joel's prophecy was not fulfilled at Pentecost, for (a) Peter did not use the usual scriptural formula for fulfilled prophecy as he did in Acts 1:16 (cf. Matt. 1:22; 2:17; 4:14); (b) the original prophecy of Joel will clearly not be fulfilled until Israel is restored to her land, and is converted and enjoying the presence of the Lord in her midst (Joel 2:26–28); (c) the events prophesied by Joel simply did not come to pass. If language means anything, Pentecost did not fulfill this prophecy nor did Peter think that it did."

<sup>141</sup>See Beacham, "Acts 2 and Pentecost," p. 34; Ryrie, "The Significance of Pentecost," p. 169. Ryrie anticipates that someone may ask why Peter includes the miraculous activity in his citation of the Joel passage (Acts 2:19–20), if fulfillment were not in view. He answers, "Peter not only wanted to show his audience that they should have known from the Scriptures that the Spirit could do what they had seen, but he also wanted to invite them to accept Jesus as their Messiah by using Joel's invitation 'every one who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved' (v. 21). Thus what is recorded in Acts 2:19–20 is simply a connecting link between the two key points in his argument."

from the ratification of this new covenant.

**The Church Presently Participates in the New Covenant;  
Israel Fulfills the New Covenant in the Future**

This view appears to overcome the liabilities of the previous views. However, two objections have been raised against this view. The *first* is whether there is sufficient evidence to speak of the church as actually participating in the new covenant. This objection has already been addressed in the critique of the third view. As noted there, believers in the present age participate in the forgiveness of sins, they are recipients of the Spirit's ministry, and they enjoy the benefits of Christ's high priestly ministry. All of these are directly related to the new covenant which Christ has ratified in His death.

The *second* objection is whether it is possible to separate the ratification of a covenant from the fulfillment of its promises. In other words, can the new covenant be ratified and the church participating in its provisions without the covenant in some sense being fulfilled? Using the Abrahamic covenant as an example, the answer is that the fulfillment of covenant promises is not necessarily collocated with the ratification of the covenant nor with participation in covenant benefits. Virtually all recognize that Genesis 15 describes the formal ratification of the Abrahamic covenant between God and Abraham.<sup>142</sup> Among the promises God gave to Abraham in the Abrahamic covenant was that Abraham and his descendants would possess the land of Palestine as an eternal inheritance (cf. 13:14–15; 15:7; 17:8).<sup>143</sup> The AH refers to this promise, saying that Abraham came and dwelled in the land that he was to receive as an inheritance, yet residing in the land of promise as an alien, not as an owner (11:8–9). In other words, the AH depicts Abraham as dwelling in the land and therefore as participating in the benefits of the promise, without describing the promise as being fulfilled. This is made clear when the AH states in 11:13 that Abraham died in faith, “without receiving the promises.”<sup>144</sup> To say that Abraham

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<sup>142</sup>Representing progressive dispensationalists, see Bock, “Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism,” p. 173; representing traditional dispensationalists, see Johnson, “Covenants in Traditional Dispensationalism,” pp. 126–27. For a discussion of the passage as a covenant ratification ceremony, see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 430–34.

<sup>143</sup>Addressing the issue of the land promise, God declares to Abraham in Genesis 17:8, “I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession.”

<sup>144</sup>This statement is not contradicted in 11:17 where the AH describes Abraham as the one “who had received the promises.” In 11:17, the AH is talking about promises themselves, not their fulfillment. See, for example, Bruce, *The Epistle to the*

died “without receiving the promises” is simply another way of saying that this promise was not fulfilled in the lifetime of the patriarch.<sup>145</sup>

Having established in principle that a covenant can be ratified and its benefits enjoyed without the corresponding promises being fulfilled, the question remains whether it is legitimate to argue this for the new covenant. Since certain of the Abrahamic promises have been fulfilled (for example the birth of Isaac), could it not be argued that the same is true of the new covenant?<sup>146</sup> The problem with seeing the fulfillment of any of the new covenant promises in the present era with the church is that those promises without exception occur in the Old Testament in eschatological contexts. As was argued above in the survey of the new covenant in the Old Testament, the new covenant promises are all given in connection with the Lord’s coming to gather the Jews from the lands in which they have been dispersed, reconstituting them as a nation, and restoring them to their geographical homeland. To argue that any of these promises are being fulfilled by the church ignores the Old Testament context in which these promises are found and violates the univocal nature of language and the single meaning of Scripture.

### CONCLUSION

In light of the previous discussion, the view that the church presently *participates* in the new covenant while national Israel *fulfills* the new covenant in the future is the most satisfactory interpretation of the biblical evidence. It is the only view that consistently maintains a literal hermeneutic, particularly with Old Testament prophecy. In addition, it is the only view that allows for a distinction between national Israel and the church in God’s redemptive activity that is consistent with a literal interpretation of the Old and New Testaments.

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*Hebrews*, p. 298, n. 115.

<sup>145</sup>See, for example, Johnson, “Covenants in Traditional Dispensationalism,” pp. 126–27, 145–47. Johnson states, “While the covenant was instituted with Abraham (Gen 15:18–19), fulfillment was not inaugurated with either Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, as none came into possession of any land by means of the promise” (pp. 126–27). See also Johnson, “Response,” pp. 204–11. Specifically regarding the new covenant, Johnson declares, “The new covenant, which had been promised in the Old Testament (Jer 31 and Ezek 36, etc.), was instituted at the death of Christ (Luke 22:20). But such an institution ought not be regarded as fulfillment with Israel who rejected Him (Acts 4:8–20) nor even with the church. The church is merely the beneficiary of some of the provisions of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:4–6) without becoming a covenant partner” (p. 206).

<sup>146</sup>The AH refers to the fulfillment of this promise in 6:15. See the discussion in Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 152–53, 298.