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Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994–2004)

Scott Hahn

Department of Theology, Franciscan University of Steubenville
Steubenville, OH, USA
scottwhahn@hotmail.com

Abstract

The amount of biblical scholarship on covenant over the past decade is not great; however, significant work on the definition and taxonomy of covenant has helped to overcome certain reductionistic tendencies of older scholarship, which has contributed, in turn, to a better grasp of the canonical function of the term in the Old and New Testaments. In Old Testament scholarship, the idea that covenant simply means 'obligation' and is essentially one-sided (Kutsch, Perlitt) has been largely abandoned in favor of the view that covenants establish kinship bonds (relations and obligations) between covenanting parties (Cross, Hugenberger). There is also broad recognition that the richness of the concept cannot be exhausted merely by analyses of occurrences of *berith* or certain related phrases. In New Testament scholarship, some small strides have been made in assessing the significance of covenant in the Gospels; whereas discussion of covenant in Paul has been dominated by the 'New Perspective' debate over 'covenantal nomism'. Finally, some light has been shed on the meaning and significance of *diatheke* in two highly controverted texts (Gal. 3.15-16; Heb. 9.16-17).

The flowering of research on covenant in the modern era was inaugurated by George E. Mendenhall's form-critical studies comparing the Old Testament covenants, particularly the Sinai covenant (Exod. 19–24), with Hittite suzerainty treaties (1955). Mendenhall's work was followed closely by the dissemination of Walther Eichrodt's covenant-based *Theology of the Old Testament* (1967) in English-speaking scholarship, and initiated a flurry of research challenging Wellhausen's opinion (1885) that Israel's covenant

with God was a late biblical concept arising from the legalizing tendencies of the Deuteronomist. The wave of covenantal scholarship in the wake of Mendenhall and Eichrodt provoked a reaction from the German academy. Lothar Perlitt (1969) and Ernst Kutsch (1973) strenuously defended the late, deuteronomic nature of the Hebrew concept of ברית ('covenant') as a characterization of Israel's relationship with God, while asserting that the term did not denote a relationship, but a unilateral obligation either imposed or accepted by one party. D.J. McCarthy (1963, 1978) and his student Paul Kalluveettil (1982) critically assessed the contributions of both Mendenhall's followers and the German reaction (Perlitt, Kutsch), avoiding the excesses of both and achieving greater clarity in the definition of 'covenant' and its significance for Israel's history and Old Testament theology. E.W. Nicholson (1986), however, resisted this shift away from the positions of Perlitt and Wellhausen, gathering some support within British scholarship. Moreover, by the early 1980s, interest in covenant studies had begun to wane, although some excellent work continued to be done.

In this article I will review the state of covenant research in the past decade (1994–2004). Although the mass of scholarship on the subject is not great, some significant advances have been made, especially in overcoming certain reductionistic tendencies of older scholarship, acquiring greater precision in the definition and taxonomy of covenant, and grasping the canonical function of the term and concept in Scripture. I will divide this overview into three parts: (1) foundational studies, (2) surveys, and (3) studies on particular divine covenants (e.g. Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, etc.), or covenant themes in a particular book (e.g. covenant in Ben Sirah), in the Old Testament, Second Temple literature, and New Testament.

Foundational Studies

The significance of Frank Moore Cross's essay 'Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel' (1998) to contemporary covenant scholarship is out of proportion to the study's relatively modest length. Cross grounds the concept and institution of ברית in the *kinship-based* social organization of West Semitic tribal groups. 'Oath and covenant', Cross explains, 'is…a widespread legal means by which the duties and privileges of kinship may be extended to another individual or group, including aliens' (p. 8). In the cultural and political development of West Semitic peoples, the institution of covenant became the means to integrate foreign (non-kin) individuals or

groups within the familial structure of society. Thus, Cross remarks, although 'often it has been asserted that the language of "brotherhood" and "fatherhood" [e.g. Fensham 1971], "love" [e.g. Moran 1963; Ackerman 2002], and "loyalty" [e.g. Glueck 1967; Sakenfeld 1978] is "covenant terminology" ', this is 'to turn things upside down. The language of covenant, kinship-in-law, is taken from the language of kinship, kinship-in-flesh' (p. 11). Although the relationship of covenant to kinship seems almost self-evident once stated, never has it been articulated so succinctly and elegantly by a scholar of Cross's stature (although cf. McCarthy 1963: 175; Smith 1927: 318), and the implications are profound. It provides a paradigm for the integration of legitimate insights on the nature of covenant in earlier scholarship which, unfortunately and unintentionally, tended to be reductionistic, focusing on single aspects of the covenant institution: the legal/ethical (Wellhausen 1885), cultic (Mowinckel 1981), or political (Mendenhall 1955). The covenant bears all these aspects because it is an extension of familial relationship, and the extended family, the *bet 'ab*, was the central framework for the legal, religious and political activities of ancient Semitic society (cf. van der Toorn 1996; Schloen 2001). Furthermore, Cross's insight undercuts the view of Wellhausen and his modern defenders that 'covenant' is a late, arid, legal imposition on the original naturalness and spontaneity of Israelite religion. On the contrary, the covenant institution finds its original *Sitz-im-Leben* in the natural, kinship-based organization of the Semitic tribes, and at times sat uncomfortably with, if not in outright opposition to, the development of the monarchical nation-state. On the basis of Cross's insight, certain understandings of the development of Israelite religion should be modified. In particular, Cross is not shy about directly challenging the German school of covenant research (Perlitt, Kutsch) to defend their hypotheses by appeal to historical and cultural-anthropological data. In Cross's view, these scholars presume the lateness of the covenant concept, use that presumption to construct a literary-historical stratification of the biblical texts, and then claim the resultant stratification as proof of the presumption. In this respect, Cross argues similarly to the Egyptologist Kenneth A. Kitchen (2003). But Kitchen goes farther: unlike Cross, he presents an impressive case for an early date even for the *literary form* of Israel's covenant traditions, based on the close formal similarities of Old Testament covenant texts to late second-millennium BCE Hittite treaty documents.

While it is not one of his main emphases, Cross notes that marriage in the biblical materials and the ancient Near East was a form of covenant (p. 8). This topic is pursued definitively by Gordon Paul Hugenberger in

Marriage as Covenant (1994). The subtitle of the work, *A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage, Developed from the Perspective of Malachi*, invites the misperception that Hugenberger's monograph is only of relevance to those concerned with the exegesis of Mal. 2.14. In fact, however, Hugenberger has made a major contribution to the analysis, definition and taxonomy of 'covenant' as a term (ברית) and institution in all of biblical literature. Starting with Mal. 2.14 and its controverted history of exegesis, Hugenberger systematically demonstrates that marriage is understood as a covenant not only in Mal. 2.14 but consistently throughout the biblical texts. Responding to the legitimate objections of Greenberg and Milgrom that the marriage ceremony lacks the requisite oath for the establishment of a covenant (p. 167), Hugenberger shows that an explicit self-maledictory verbal oath was not always necessary for covenant ratification. Non-imprecatory speech-acts and non-verbal rituals—'oath-signs'—could at times suffice. In the case of marriage, solemn declarations (*verba solemnia*) and sexual union (an 'oath-sign') were the acts of covenant ratification.

All students and scholars of the covenant will be obliged to consult Hugenberger's sixth chapter, '"Covenant" [ברית] and "Oath" Defined' (pp. 168-215). Hugenberger attempts perhaps the most painstaking and methodologically self-conscious effort at defining ברית to date (also see Lane 2000), resulting in the definition, 'an elected, as opposed to natural, relationship of obligation established under divine sanction' (p. 171). In this definition Hugenberger avoids the extremes of those who would either reduce 'covenant' merely to 'relationship', or, on the other hand, merely to 'obligation'. In particular, Hugenberger, building on the work of P.J. Naylor (1980), makes an impressive demonstration of the close conceptual and semantic relationship between 'oath' (אלה or שבע) and 'covenant' (ברית). In general, an oath ratified a covenant relationship, although, as mentioned, ritually enacted oath-signs or *verba solemnia* could also perform this function.

If Hugenberger has demonstrated that marriage was a covenant, a short study by Seock-Tae Sohn advances the converse position. In Sohn's view, 'covenant' was a form of marriage! In ' "I Will Be Your God and You Will Be My People": The Origin of the Covenant Formula' (1999), Sohn points out the formal similarities between the so-called 'covenant formula' and the verbal declarations accompanying marriage and adoption in the ancient Near East, concluding that the origin of covenant terminology is the *milieu* of marriage and adoption. While many of Sohn's observations are illuminating, Cross's approach explains Sohn's data more plausibly and

economically: marriage and adoption are specific manifestations of the concept of covenant, which at root is the establishment of kinship relations and obligations between non-kin.

Rolf Rendtorff's monograph *Die Bundesformel* (1995; ET *The Covenant Formula* 1998) takes a much more extensive look at the so-called 'covenant formula', that is, the recurring biblical declaration 'I will be your God and you will be my people'. Rendtorff's title is a reference to Rudolf Smend's seminal article 'Die Bundesformel' (1963)—not to Klaus Baltzer's better-known monograph *Das Bundesformular* (1964)—although in method and results Rendtorff parts company with Smend. Rendtorff executes a canonical reading of the texts which use one of the three forms of the covenant formula: (A) 'I will be your God' alone, (B) 'You will be my people' alone, or (C) the combined statement. By examining this statement and exploring its relationship to the idea of 'covenant' (ברית) and the concept of 'election' (בחר), Rendtorff demonstrates the richness of biblical covenant thought, whose presence extends far beyond the confines of those passages which explicitly use the term ברית. While, as John Barton (2003) points out, Rendtorff's 'canonical' approach to covenant is theoretically possible even if one excepts Perlitt and Kutsch's historical views on the lateness of covenant terminology in Israel's development, it does seem as though Rendtorff subtly but intentionally takes issue with those who analyze covenant themes exclusively on the basis of the instances of the lexeme ברית and try to exclude from it all connotations of mutuality and relationship (cf. 1998: 11 n. 4; 57 n. 1).

Although Rendtorff's stated intention is to read the texts canonically, a diachronic perspective remains subtly present. This is evident in the way he subdivides the biblical literature, starting with 'The Priestly Pentateuch', which is not a canonical division but his own historical-critical construct. Furthermore, although he recognizes that 'in many cases it is not particularly useful to look at the individual terms in isolation from each other', his own study focuses somewhat exclusively on the use of the *bundesformel* apart from other major covenant texts, motifs and terminology. Indeed, it seems remarkable, in light of Rendtorff's holistic approach, that nowhere does he discuss the first Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 15), not to mention the covenant with Noah (Gen. 9) or David (2 Sam. 7; Ps. 89). Yet his conclusions about covenant in Scripture are sweeping: there is but 'one, continually "new" covenant' in the whole Hebrew Bible (1998: 78). One wonders if such a conclusion is really indicated by a synchronic reading of the Scriptures, which would seem to point rather to a cumulative

succession of divine covenants exhibiting both continuity and discontinuity over time.

In contrast to Rendtorff, Menahem Haran self-consciously employs a traditional diachronic reading strategy. Nonetheless, his essay 'The *Berît* "Covenant": Its Nature and Ceremonial Background' (1997) breaks new ground in a different direction. Haran stresses, like Cross and Hugenberger, the relational aspect of covenant, inasmuch as it 'always includes two parties' and 'in general each of the two sides makes a commitment to the other' (p. 205). But his substantive contribution is in explicating the ritual or ceremonial aspect of covenant-making. Whereas most previous scholarship has, understandably, been focused on the written form of covenant *texts*, Haran emphasizes that the *text* by itself did not and could not establish the covenant relationship. A ceremony had to take place, consisting of at least three elements: (1) a spoken declaration, by the sovereign or his representative, of the terms of the covenant, (2) an expression of consent, tantamount to an oath, by the vassal party or parties, and (3) the presentation of 'a witness that will serve to remind the two parties…of their commitment, and the witness has to relate to God' (p. 215). With respect to this last aspect of the covenant ceremony, Haran makes the salutary observation that there are, in one sense, no truly 'secular' covenants, because 'sanctity … must have been ascribed to any covenant, even when both of the partners were human beings. If there was no divine presence in so-called "secular" covenants, it is incomprehensible what would compel the parties to obey the terms of the agreement' (p. 208).

Haran has provided a service in redirecting attention to the performative aspects of covenant, even when the covenant at hand appears to be of a purely political nature. While Haran himself prefers to speak of *ritual* and *ceremony* rather than *liturgy*, he does demonstrate that covenants were generally made in the presence of divinity at a cultic site, following a ritualized pattern, with explicit appeals to the divinity as witness. Therefore, it seems justifiable to call covenant-making a *cultic, liturgical act*. In the field of New Testament research, the cultic aspect of covenant-making has been explored in depth and applied masterfully to the book of Hebrews by John Dunnill (1992). The work of both Haran and Dunnill demonstrates the inappropriateness of designating ברית as a 'contract'. While a covenant certainly has an important legal aspect (so Buchanan 2003), the English term 'contract' conveys *only* the legal aspect to the exclusion of its social, familial, liturgical, and other dimensions.

Having begun this review of foundational studies with an essay by Frank Moore Cross, it seems appropriate to conclude with mention of one by

Cross's dissertation partner and long-time collaborator, David Noel Freedman (Freedman and Miano 2003). Freedman, together with David Miano, undertakes to update Freedman's classic essay 'Divine Commitment and Human Obligation' (1964). In the 1964 essay, Freedman had pointed to the fact that ancient Near Eastern covenants between unequal parties, i.e. a suzerain and vassal, could take one of two forms: the suzerain could impose obligations on the vassal, or take them upon himself for the vassal's benefit. Applied to the biblical covenants between God and human beings, Freedman termed the two types as covenants of 'human obligation' and 'divine commitment' respectively. In this 2003 update, Freedman seeks to renew and reinvigorate this distinction, especially in view of attacks upon it in the past forty years, in particular by Gary Knoppers. Knoppers (1996) took issue with Moshe Weinfeld's treatment (1970) of the Davidic covenant as a 'covenant of grant' in light of the similarities between the covenant's terms (2 Sam. 7) and those of ancient Near Eastern royal grants, in which a suzerain would grant a faithful vassal various benefices in perpetuity as a reward for loyal service. Knoppers rightly points out difficulties with Weinfeld's argument: for example, the various biblical texts seem to differ as to whether the Davidic covenant is conditional or unconditional; furthermore, there is no real common pattern or structure for 'grants' in the ancient Near Eastern sources. (Knoppers might have noted, however, that such grants do have at least one significant element in common: the suzerain's *oath* which serves as a guarantee of the reward for loyalty.) Nonetheless, Freedman points out that the peculiar difficulties Knoppers raises vis-à-vis the Davidic covenant do not invalidate Freedman's basic twofold covenant typology of 'human obligation' and 'divine commitment' ('vassal treaty' and 'royal grant' in Weinfeld's terminology).

Having defended the original twofold covenant typology, Freedman and Miano engage in an analysis of three particular biblical covenants: the Davidic, the Sinaitic, and the 'new covenant' of Jeremiah. The treatment of the first and last of these breaks new ground. Reversing the standard position established by Weinfeld (1970), Freedman and Miano argue that the Davidic covenant was in fact a conditional covenant of *human obligation* (a 'vassal treaty'), at least as it was conceived in later biblical literature.

Unfortunately, Freedman and Miano's argument on this point, while intriguing and well-argued, is not without some difficulties. While many of their insights into Davidic covenant texts are quite valuable—for example, their interpretation of the Davidic covenant as the referent of Zechariah's 'covenant with the nations' in Zech. 11.4–17—the analogy between the Davidic covenant and the vassal treaties seems stretched.

The obligations and attendant curses placed on the inferior party of an ancient Near Eastern vassal treaty were numerous and specific, whereas the blessings were often brief and vague, or even omitted altogether, as in the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon. By contrast, the Davidic covenant texts (2 Sam. 7; Ps. 2, 72, 89, 132) are predominantly occupied with describing the blessings YHWH had undertaken to bestow on David and his house in view of David's fealty. A more economical solution to the difficulties posed by certain *conditional* Davidic covenant texts would simply be to concede that it is a covenant of 'divine commitment' with, nonetheless, certain conditions on the human party (see Waltke 1988).

Also novel is Freedman and Miano's treatment of the 'new covenant' of Jer. 31. The authors point out that in Jeremiah's covenant there is such internal unity of will between the human and divine parties that conventional notions of obligation, with attendant curses and blessings, simply do not apply. In Freedman and Miano's view, both the Qumran and early Christian communities saw themselves as participating in the 'new covenant', and yet without the realization of the perfected human–divine coincidence of will. This remains an eschatological ideal in Judaism and Christianity.

The common element of all these studies we have termed 'foundational' is their move beyond reductionistic categories to explore the richness of the covenant concept reflected in the biblical text. Cross, Hugenberger and Sohn, each in his own way, have shown the significance of covenant as sacred (fictive) kinship, with legal, social, and liturgical dimensions. Haran focuses attention on the little-noticed ritual/ceremonial aspects of covenant. Rendtorff's canonical analysis shows that the concept of covenant is frequently operative where the term is absent, and covenant phraseology occurs at key points in the canonical text. His interests finally tend to the explicitly theological, as do those of Cross and Miano, who, after defending their twofold covenant typology, admit that the final hope of the Hebrew prophets was for a form of covenant relation with God which transcended human typologies and could not be realized in this present historical-temporal framework.

Popular Surveys of the Covenant Theme

At least four one-volume surveys of biblical covenant themes have appeared in the past decade. The authors differ widely in confessional commitments and methodological preferences, but all four attempt to produce readable,

accessible condensations of contemporary covenant scholarship and its theological ramifications.

Walter Brueggemann's *The Covenanted Self: Explorations in Law and Covenant* (1999) is the fifth volume in a series of the author's collected essays. Brueggemann's methodology throughout these essays is intriguing: he interprets the scriptural text in conversation with the 'object relations theory' of modern psychology, which views human growth through the lens of our capacity for interpersonal relations. Brueggemann's term for this capacity is 'othering'. He also relates the communal dimensions of covenant in scripture to modern personality theories. By employing psychology as a cognate discipline for interpretation, Brueggemann is able to develop the biblical notion of covenant obedience in non-legalistic terms. He speaks of covenant relationships involving 'revolutionary *discipline*, *devotion*, and *desire*'.

In contrast to Brueggemann's provocative methodology, Roland J. Faley's *Bonding with God: A Reflective Study of Biblical Covenant* (1997) is, in some ways, a very conventional study, reviewing the last century of covenant scholarship with special attention to the covenant at Sinai. Faley argues that all the covenants have both *affective* and *bilateral* elements, even the Abrahamic and Davidic. For Faley, the covenant is the means by which saving events are ritualized. For example, ancient Israel's agrarian feasts were, in his opinion, first *historicized*, that is, linked to a historical saving event; and then *liturgized*, that is, provided with a ritual-cultic form.

Like other volumes in the Understanding Biblical Themes series, Steven L. McKenzie's *Covenant* (2000) aims to make contemporary scholarship on a biblical topic accessible to an educated lay audience. McKenzie's dependence on Frank Moore Cross for his view of the role of covenant in Israel's history is explicit and substantial but not slavish. For example, much of his first, foundational chapter, 'Family Ties: The Origins of Covenant in Israel' draws freely from Cross's 'Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel' (1998). McKenzie, like Cross, stresses the antiquity of the covenant concept on ancient Israel as an expression of early tribal society. Nonetheless, in the next chapter McKenzie will state that covenant 'comes to full expression relatively late' in Israel's history, namely in D and P (p. 25). Although McKenzie views the concept of covenant *itself* as ancient, he does not believe that there is any sure evidence that Israel's relationship with God was construed as a covenant any earlier than the eighth century BCE (i.e. by the Deuteronomist[s]). From this point on, McKenzie traces

covenant as a theological idea through D, P, the prophets, and into the New Testament, including discussion of the Gospels, Paul, and Hebrews. Ultimately, McKenzie views Deuteronomy as 'the center from which the Bible's theology emanates', particularly with respect to covenant thought (p. 123). Thus he concludes his monograph with a treatment on the nature of covenant in Deuteronomy and its relevance to theology in contemporary society.

Unlike other surveys reviewed here, John H. Walton's *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan* (1994) is written from and for a conservative Protestant setting. Walton, who teaches at the Moody Bible Institute, sets out to propose a new model for understanding biblical covenants that will overcome the limitations of traditional covenant theology, classical dispensationalism and progressive dispensationalism. Walton calls his proposed model the 'Revelatory' view. Its essential insight is that, according to the biblical account of salvation history, God wishes to reveal himself to humankind in order to enter into relationship with them, and the covenant(s) with Israel are the means to that end. Covenant is oriented to relationship and particularly to *God's self-revelation*. Walton employs this model in analyzing all the major covenants of both the Old and New Testaments, especially those passages employing phrases such as 'For my name's sake' and 'So that they will know that I am the Lord'. Walton concludes that covenant is the mechanism for maintaining the relationship and imparting the revelation of God, and Israel is the instrument of God by which he lets himself be known by all the nations.

One of his most intriguing contributions to the analysis of biblical covenants is his notion of 'covenant jeopardy' (pp. 94-107). 'Covenant jeopardy' describes the development of a situation in which one of the covenant parties fails to fulfill the obligations. There may be either a real or apparent failure on the part of Israel or God. Walton's own theological explanation of how situations of 'covenant jeopardy' are resolved is not entirely satisfactory, but he is certainly correct that 'covenant jeopardy' is a major biblical motif and one worthy of further research.

Although it is not a monograph, it seems appropriate to include in this discussion of surveys the recent article on ברית by Gordon J. McConville for the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (1997). McConville provides a readable summary of current research on the meaning of 'ברית' as well as the various biblical covenants: Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Sinaitic, Deuteronomic, Davidic, and 'New.' McConville does not fail to contribute his own insights. Against Kutsch he defends the notion of covenant as bilateral and relational, and against

Perlitt he finds the concept of covenant already present in the earliest literary prophets (Hosea, Amos). He considers the notion of an Adamic or creation covenant plausible, and explains the difference between the variant phrases כרת ברית and חקים ברית in the Pentateuch as 'to make a covenant' and 'to (re-)establish a covenant' respectively, rather than by appeal to distinct sources (pp. 748-49; cf. Milgrom 2004: 99).

Strikingly, McConville and the authors of all four monographs share a common opposition to Christian supersessionism, which they regard as an unwarranted misreading of the relationship of the old and new covenants. These authors stress that the fulfillment of the old in the new is neither abrogation nor termination; hence there is no point in speaking of 'replacement'. Instead, the relationship between the new covenant and the old is precisely one of *renewal* that is both restorative and transformative.

Studies of Particular Divine Covenants

We turn now from general studies of covenants to work done on particular divine covenants recorded in Scripture.

The Noahic Covenant

The first recorded scriptural covenant is that with Noah (Gen. 9). Nonetheless the Noahic covenant has seldom received much scholarly attention (so Barr 2003). Katherine J. Dell (2003) seeks to address this *lacuna*. Observing that the Noahic covenant was not merely with Noah but with all creation, she systematically examines other prophetic and pentateuchal texts which either mention or presume a covenant with creation (e.g. Isa. 11.6-9; 24.3-5; 33.8-9; Jer. 5.22-25; 14.20-22; 33.20-22; Ezek. 34.25-30; 37.26; Hos. 2.18), and may thus be references either to the Noahic covenant, or indications of a belief in a primordial 'creation covenant'. In essence, Dell begins with the Noahic covenant, observes that the relevant passages (Gen. 6–9) are redolent with creation imagery, notes that other biblical texts combine creation and covenant themes, and finally asks whether this may not indicate that at some point in Israel's religious development, creation itself came to be understood as a covenant act. From the Noahic covenant, then, Dell 'backs in' to the question of the existence of an Adamic or Creation covenant—a question that has occupied Christian theologians over the centuries and was usually answered in the affirmative. It is to be hoped that Dell will continue her research on this line of thought and perhaps benefit the academy with a monograph on the subject.

The Abrahamic Covenant

The Abrahamic covenant, of course, has always been a focus of scholarly attention. Perhaps the most important recent contribution is Paul R. Williamson's monograph *Abraham, Israel and the Nations* (2000). Williamson, a synchronic and narrative analyst, recognizes and places interpretive weight on the fact that there are not one but (at least) two covenants between God and Abraham recorded in Scripture, Gen. 15 and 17. Williamson demonstrates that the treatment of 'the' Abrahamic covenant is one of the rare instances in which diachronic analysts are more guilty of conflation and harmonization than their sychronic counterparts. Specifically, since most source-critical exegetes believe Israel to have remembered only one Abrahamic covenant, preserved in two versions, JE (Gen. 15) and P (Gen. 17), there is an impulse to conflate and harmonize the two accounts, usually to the detriment of an accurate reading of Gen. 17. For example, Freedman (1964: 421, 425), Van Seters (1975: 288-89) and Lohfink (2000a: 27) flatly deny the existence of conditions on the covenant given Abraham in Gen. 17, even though the conditional nature of the covenant in ch. 17—as opposed to ch. 15—is quite clear in vv. 1 and 9-14 (so Rendtorff 1998: 1984; Milgrom 2004: 96).

Opposing the usual conflation of Gen. 15 and 17, Williamson argues that the narrative presents these two incidents as referring to two distinct covenants with Abraham. Each takes up an aspect of the promises given in Gen. 12.1-3: the Gen. 15 covenant relates to the promise of nationhood, Gen. 17 to the promise of a 'great name' and international blessing to all peoples. In his treatment of Gen. 17, Williamson follows T.D. Alexander (1997) in seeing a conditional covenant *promised* but not *ratified*. The ratification of the Gen. 17 covenant does not take place until Gen. 22.16-18, where, after the testing of Abraham's commitment to 'walk blamelessly before me' (Gen. 17.1), God gives Abraham a self-sworn oath to fulfill his promises toward him, particularly the promise of blessing to all the nations. Alexander and Williamson's view that the covenant of Gen. 17 is not ratified until the oath of Gen. 22.16-18 is based on the commonplace in covenant scholarship that an oath is necessary to establish a covenant, as discussed above.

While not all will be convinced by his treatment of Gen. 17 vis-à-vis Gen. 22, Williamson has performed a service by calling attention to and questioning the commonly held assumption that the differences between Gen. 15 and 17 are without significance from the perspective of the final redaction of the text. It is to be hoped that his work will provoke further synchronic analyses of the Abrahamic narrative.

Williamson's work stands in contrast to an essay-length analysis of the covenant theme in the Pentateuch by Graham Davies. Davies devotes most of the first half of his essay to the question why, in the course of the Pentateuch, there is a transition to language about 'covenant' to language about the 'oath' to the fathers. Davies reviews several alternative explanations and produces mixed results. One wonders if Williamson's analysis of the Abraham cycle, which points to the climactic nature of the *oath* to Abraham in Gen. 22.15-18 (the only divine oath to any patriarch) as the confirmation of all previous Abrahamic *covenant* promises (i.e. Gen. 12.1-3, Gen. 15, etc.) would shed light on Davies's investigation.

The rest of Davies's essay analyzes covenant in the Holiness Code, specifically Lev. 26. Davies's work in this area is similar in method and conclusions to a longer and more detailed study by Jacob Milgrom (2004), who undertakes to analyze both the Abrahamic (better: 'patriarchal') and Sinaitic covenants from the perspective of the Holiness Code. Milgrom believes the Holiness School was aware of the covenant traditions of J, E, and P, and Lev. 26 presupposes knowledge of each of them. All the occurrences of ברית in Lev. 26—the conclusion of the Holiness Code—refer to the Sinaitic covenant, with the exception of v. 42. In Milgrom's view, the Holiness School understood *both* the patriarchal *and* the Sinaitic covenants as *conditional*. Genesis 17, after all, has conditional elements. Therefore, the bulk of Lev. 26, contrary to consensus, did *not* arise in the post-exilic period when the supposed 'unconditional' covenant with the patriarchs was understood to be the basis for the return from the exile. For the Holiness School, the covenant with the patriarchs and the Sinai covenant were essentially the same, both requiring Israel's obedience.

Milgrom's analysis is full of brilliant exegetical insights on particular passages: for example, his explication of the conditional nature of Gen. 17, and his understanding of the term חקים ברית in Lev. 26 and elsewhere as 'to uphold/maintain' a covenant rather than 'to establish' it. Yet the broader usefulness of his contribution is hampered by the dominance of his meticulous but idiosyncratic source-criticism and his narrow focus on 'H'—a school and tradition whose very existence is denied by some (notably Rendtorff). Thus, his discussion of the 'Abrahamic' covenant takes almost no notice of Gen. 12.1-3, Gen. 15 or Gen. 22, all of which are unconditional in their formulation, despite the fact that he believes the Holiness redactor was well aware of these traditions. Those interested in source-critical analysis of the Priestly and Holiness materials, however, will find Milgrom's work a plausible and well-argued challenge to traditional assumptions.

The Sinai Covenant

In the same Weinfeld festschrift as Milgrom's essay, Frank H. Polak (2004) uses newly-found covenant texts from Mari to shed light on the account of the Sinai covenant (Exod. 19–24). The logic of the Sinai covenant-making narrative has long puzzled scholars, leading to complex theories of multiple sources and redactions. Polak argues that the text follows a coherent pattern typical of ancient Near Eastern covenant ratifications: (1) terms given by the superior covenant partner are announced, often by a mediator; (2) the consent of the other party is expressed; and (3) a *bilocal* ratification process ensues: covenant-making rituals are performed first in one party's territory, then in the other's. This would correspond to the twofold covenant ratification at Sinai, first in the human sphere (Exod. 24.4–8) and then in the divine (24.9-11).

Polak has made an important advance in the interpretation of Exod. 19–24. Like Haran, his work stresses the fact that, although biblical scholarship tends to focus excessively on covenant *texts*, covenants were not established by texts but by *cultic rituals*. Furthermore, we must take care to distinguish the actual *covenant texts*—which usually relate the stipulations, blessings and curses—from *accounts of covenant-making*. Both genres are found in biblical literature, but they follow different stereotyped patterns.

The Davidic Covenant

The Davidic covenant has received an unusual amount of attention in recent covenant scholarship because of the debate between Knoppers and Weinfeld over whether the covenant is conditional or unconditional (see McKenzie 2001 for a review of the debate). Griphus Gakuru (2000) has devoted an entire monograph to the subject, a revision of his dissertation under Graham Davies. Gakuru's results are complex: to summarize briefly, the 'Davidic covenant' is not a historical event *per se* but a cluster of interpretations of a 'dynastic oracle of salvation' that lies behind 2 Sam. 7 and can be traced to the time of David. David himself may have interpreted the oracle as a 'covenant'; in any event, its interpretation as a covenant is pre-Deuteronomic (*contra* McKenzie 2001: 178). In response to the changing fortunes of Israel and the House of David through history, the Davidic covenant was variously interpreted as conditional or unconditional, and this historical vacillation is reflected in the biblical texts, sometimes in the *same* biblical text (e.g. Ps. 89). Although the Chronicler did not seem to anticipate a restoration of the Davidic monarchy, the prophets (for the most part) did, although they differed as to the form it would take. For

example, Deutero-Isaiah imagined the democratization of the Davidic covenant and promises (e.g. Isa. 55.3).

While Gakuru examines Davidic covenant texts themselves, Clements (2003) demonstrates the pervasiveness of the Davidic covenant in the book of Isaiah, in all its historical stages of development. Clements shows that Isaiah of Jerusalem based his oracles to Ahaz and Hezekiah on the assumption of a divine commitment to the endurance of the House of David. Later, Isaiah's successors expressed the hope generated by the accession of Hezekiah or Josiah in exuberant royal hymns (Isa. 9). After the fall of Josiah and the exile, hope in the Davidic covenant did not wane. Scholars often point to Isa. 45.1-4 and 55.3 as partial abandonments of Davidic covenant ideology, but Clement believes such interpretations are mistaken. Cyrus's role in Isa. 45, in Clement's opinion, is not to assume upon himself the promises given to David, but rather to *fulfill* the Davidic covenant promises that the kings of earth would serve David and Israel. Cyrus's support for the re-establishment of Jerusalem is an aspect of his role *in service to* the restoration of the Davidic monarchy and its realm. Furthermore, in Isa. 55.3, the promises of the Davidic covenant are not being 'democratized': the people always were a party to the Davidic covenant, inasmuch as the king embodied the people and his fortunes were necessarily tied to their own. Themes from royal Davidic ideology pervade Deutero-Isaiah and in Trito-Isaiah, the 'homage of many nations to the king who reigns in Jerusalem…returns to occupy a central place' (p. 65). Thus 'all through the Book of Isaiah the belief in a unique relationship between the house of David provides a continuing basis of reference' (p. 65).

Clement's conclusions are remarkably similar to those of Daniel I. Block (2003), who approaches the prophetic literature from the perspective of Israelite messianism. Block argues that the 'servant' of Isaiah's 'servant songs', even the 'suffering servant' of Isa. 53, is a royal figure and specifically a Davidide. While Block is investigating Davidic messianism rather than the Davidic covenant *per se*, the significance of his study for research on the Davidic covenant in Isaiah is obvious.

Covenant in the Prophets

Norbert Lohfink (2000b) also undertakes a study of the covenant in Isaiah, but without any specific focus on the Davidic covenant. Lohfink does see a transferal of the Davidic covenant to Israel in Isa. 55.3, whereby Israel assumes a royal role over the nations, even as David ruled over Gentile peoples. Lohfink also notices the continuing presence of the theme of the

pilgrimage of the nations to Zion throughout the Isaianic materials. This pilgrimage is associated with a Zion-*torah* for the nations which is not simply identical with or reducible to the Sinai-*torah* of Moses. Both pilgrimage and *torah* are also associated in some way with the renewal of Israel's covenant. It remains unclear for Lohfink, however, what exactly the *torah* of the nations is, and how the nations participate in Israel's covenant. It seems that Lohfink's work could be combined profitably with Clement's observations on the pervasive influence of Davidic covenant thought in Isaiah and Freedman/Miano's insights on the nature of the Davidic covenant. The Davidic covenant primarily had implications for Israel but always had a role for the nations as well, whose kings were to be vassals of the Davidic king (Ps. 2, 72, 89; Freedman and Miano 2003: 18). It is remarkable that in 2 Sam. 7.19 David refers to his covenant as 'this *torah* for humanity' (זאת תורת האדם; cf. LXX; Dumbrell 1984: 151; Kaiser 1974: 315). The Davidic covenant, centered at Zion, the City of David, may provide the background Lohfink seeks for the international aspect of the *torah* and covenant in Isaiah.

Covenant in the Deuterocanonicals

In the deuterocanonical books, one study of covenant in Sirach is noteworthy. Otto Kaiser shows that Ben Sirah (Sir. 44–45) engages in an early form of covenant theology when reviewing salvation history in Israel's Scriptures. Moreover, in other parts of his book Ben Sirah ties his covenant themes to those of creation and wisdom. Thus we see that a theological reading of scriptural narrative according to covenant categories (e.g. Eichrodt 1967) has Second Temple Jewish precedent; indeed, for Catholic and Orthodox scholars, *canonical* precedent. The covenant structure of biblical history was already clearly seen in Judaism prior to the dawn of the Christian era.

Non-canonical Second Temple Literature

Moving into covenant in the non-canonical Second Temple literature, we face an 'embarrassment of riches', since, in addition to the entire Brill collection *The Concept of Covenant in the Second Temple Period* (Porter and de Roo 2003) dedicated to the subject, there is Betsy Halpern-Amaru's monograph on land and covenant in postbiblical Jewish literature (Halpern-Amaru 1994) and several significant articles in various journals. Space permits only a brief treatment of some of the more significant studies.

In *Rewriting the Bible* (1994) Halpern-Amaru examines the related themes of covenant and land in four Second Temple works: *Jubilees*, the

Testament of Moses, Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, and Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities.* Her general conclusion is that all four documents, in different ways, 'reconstruct the [biblical] narrative such that the Land no longer functions as the key signature of covenantal history'. Her most significant individual study is on the *Testament of Moses*. Halpern-Amaru identifies the phrase 'covenant and oath'—recurring five times in the book—as its key theological motif. The 'covenant and oath' is to be identified with the oath to Abraham subsequent to the Aqedah (Gen. 22.15-18). The use of 'covenant and oath' to describe this event in *T. Moses* is an important witness to the recognition in Second Temple Judaism that (1) covenants and oaths were intimately related; and (2) the dramatic divine oath in Gen. 22.15-18 served to ratify a covenant with Abraham. Halpern-Amaru also argues that in *T. Moses*, Abraham and Isaac's heroic obedience at the Aqedah was understood to serve as a source of merit or grace for subsequent generations of Israelites. Jacqueline de Roo (Porter and de Roo 2003) finds this same perspective on the Aqedah present in other Second Temple writings. In general, the patriarchs 'played an important role in [Second Temple] Jewish soteriology' because 'God graciously allowed the good deeds of some [e.g. the patriarchs] to be salvific for others due to their membership in the same covenant' (p. 202). The concept of the merit of the patriarchs, and particularly the role of the Aqedah in *T. Moses*, sheds light on the treatment of similar themes in the New Testament, for example, the Aqedah background of John 3.16, Rom. 8.32 and Gal. 3.8-14 (see Hahn 2005).

The *Testament* (or *Assumption*) *of Moses* also anticipates certain New Testament themes in the way that it portrays Moses as a covenant mediator. William Horbury (2003) demonstrates Moses' role as covenant mediator in *T. Moses* and some other Second Temple texts (Philo, *Biblical Antiquities*), pointing to its significance not only for understanding the Moses-Christ typology of covenant mediation in Paul and Hebrews, but also as a guide for reading the narrative of Exodus itself not only as the story of Israel but also as 'the story of the person and work of Moses' (p. 206).

Among other treatments of non-Qumran Second Temple literature (e.g. Christensen 1995: 67-103), two studies of covenant in *Jubilees* are worthy of mention. James VanderKam's essay on *Jubilees* 6 demonstrates the similarities between covenant thinking in *Jubilees* and the Qumran literature. In both, covenants (1) require an oath, (2) are connected to the Festival of Weeks, and (3) must be renewed annually.

The covenant with Noah, however, plays a larger role in *Jubilees* than at Qumran. Jacques Van Ruiten (2003) shows that in *Jubilees,* 'the cove-

nant of Noah is considered the beginning and prototype for all other covenants'. However, the author of *Jubilees* has made significant attempts to amalgamate the Noahic and Sinaitic covenants: both are portrayed and characterized in light of each other. Although in the narrative of *Jubilees* the Noahic covenant appears foundational, the author of *Jubilees* clearly saw Sinai as the essential covenant on which all earlier ones were modeled.

Covenant in the Qumran Texts

The concept of covenant was central to the theology and self-identity of the Qumran community. In surveys of the uses of covenant in the various literary genres present in the Qumran library, Bilhah Nitzan (2001) and Craig Evans (2003) reach similar conclusions: The 'new covenant' of the Qumran community was in essence the same covenant established with Israel at Sinai. The Qumran covenanters saw themselves as an 'elect within the elect', who alone followed the one covenant properly. Salvation was only to be found within their ranks—the rest of Israel was lost. The similarities with the self-understanding of the early Church, particularly the writings of Paul, are evident. Nitzan in particular points out that the tension between 'free will' and 'predestination' is evident in the covenant-theology of the sectarian scrolls, as it is in Paul.

Among other treatments of covenant themes at Qumran (Abegg 2003; Reed 2003; Christensen 1995), Michael O. Wise (2003) has put forward the most provocative thesis. Wise argues that the shadowy founder of the community, the 'Teacher of Righteousness', was the author of the so-called 'Teacher Hymns' of the *Hodayot* (Thanksgiving Hymns). When these Hymns are read as the compositions of the Teacher of Righteousness, striking parallels appear to the self-understanding of Jesus as presented in the gospels. If Wise is correct, both the Teacher of Righteousness and Jesus understood themselves to be (1) commissioned by God to establish the 'new covenant', (2) the subject, in a messianic sense, of texts such as Zech. 11.4-17 and Ps. 41.9, and (3) a source of dissension and apostasy among their own followers. Wise's hypotheses are not conclusive, but his work is worth consideration by New Testament scholars and Qumran specialists alike.

Covenant in the New Testament

New Testament scholarship has been crowded with studies of aspects of 'covenant' in the past decade, but the vast majority of this work debates

the merits of E.P. Sanders's concept of Second Temple Jewish 'covenantal nomism' and its implications for Pauline theology. When these studies are excluded as belonging to a genre of their own, we are left with very few direct treatments of covenant concepts in the New Testament.

Jesus and the Gospels

One monograph has appeared on the influence of the covenant in Jesus' own life and ministry. Tom Holmén, in *Jesus and Jewish Covenant Thinking* (2001), investigates whether the 'historical' Jesus engaged in what Holmén calls 'path searching', defined as 'the way or means of contemplating, discussing and expounding individual issues and topics, the various practices and beliefs of the Jewish faith, in order to determine how to keep faithful to them and, together with that, faithful to the covenant itself' (pp. 48-49). After a systematic review of various 'path markers' (sabbath observance, purity laws) used by first-century Jews to indicate covenant fidelity, Holmén concludes that Jesus did not engage in 'path searching' and therefore did not give evidence of a concern for fidelity to the (Mosaic) covenant in a form recognizable to his contemporaries.

Scott McKnight (2004) recently argued that 'covenant' was not spoken by Jesus in the Last Supper (Mk 14.24), but was instead later added by a redactor, and he argued this on the basis that nowhere else did Jesus use 'covenant' and that the early Jerusalem community, following Pentecost, was most likely the first to think of what God had done in Jesus Christ to be a 'new covenant'.

Covenant in Paul

In the field of Pauline scholarship, we will not take on the vast discussion of 'covenantal nomism'—worthy of an article in itself—but will concentrate on a few works that take up the issue of what the term διαθήκη, 'covenant', means for Paul.

Both Stanley Porter (2003) and James Dunn (2003) have contributed studies specifically on the concept of *covenant*—as opposed to the broader topic of covenantal nomism—in Paul. Both take up the question of the significance of covenant to Paul, that is, did Paul have a 'covenant' theology? Curiously, however, the two adopt opposing methodologies and come to quite different conclusions. Dunn limits himself to examination of uses of the word διαθήκη in the Pauline corpus and concludes that 'Paul's use of the term "covenant" is surprisingly casual' (p. 306), and Paul's limited covenant thought is at best 'an in-house contribution to Israel's under-

standing of itself as God's covenant people' (p. 307). Porter, on the other hand, argues that one cannot link a concept such as 'covenant' to just one lexical item (διαθήκη). Instead, one needs to examine an entire semantic domain associated with the concept. For example, it may be that Paul uses δικ- words (δικαιόω, δικαίωσις, δικαιοσύνη) 'in the context of the covenant relation rather than in the context of legal procedures' (p. 282). Thus, Porter concludes that the concept of covenant may be a great deal more significant for Pauline thought than has typically been recognized, and urges further research employing semantic-domain methodology.

Any discussion of what Paul means by διαθήκη must gravitate to Galatians, where the term is used more than any other epistle, especially ch. 3, the only locus in any epistle where Paul discusses the mechanics of how a 'covenant' operates. Kari Kuula (1991), in a monograph whose larger goal is to argue that Paul's view of law and covenant is incoherent and a mere epiphenomenon of his foundational rejection of the soteriology of Judaism in favor of a christological soteriology, takes up the issue of Paul's use of διαθήκη in Gal. 3, concluding that (1) διαθήκη means 'covenant' in v. 15 and 'testament' in v. 17; and (2) the διαθήκη as 'covenant' consists of the *promises* given Abraham (i.e. Gen. 12.1-3 *et passim*) rather than a particular covenant-making incident (Gen. 15 or 17). Porter (2003: 275-79) and Dunn (2003: 290-93) come to similar conclusions.

Ellen Juhl Christensen's study of covenant in Judaism and Paul (1995) is a much larger project that Kuula's, including an excellent survey of the meaning of covenant in Old Testament and Second Temple literature. Unlike Kuula, Christensen is in tune with the developments in Old Testament covenant scholarship reflected in the foundational studies discussed above. Ultimately, she argues not for the incoherence of Paul's covenant thought, but that for Paul, 'covenant' is no longer a primary category, certainly not in an ecclesiological sense. Covenant may at best speak about the believer's individual relationship with God, but it does not define the church, and to enter the 'new covenant' is not to enter the church.

While Christensen's broader project and conclusions are quite distinct from Kuula's, her analysis of the key passage Gal. 3–4 is remarkably similar. Christensen, too, thinks Paul vacillates with respect to the meaning of διαθήκη in vv. 15-17, and that Paul has redefined 'covenant' to refer to the promises of Abraham.

Whereas Kuula represents Heikki Räisänen's 'incoherence' view of Paul and the law, and Christensen follows E.P. Sanders's and James D.G. Dunn's 'new perspective', the work of Andrew Das (2001), despite claims

to be a 'newer perspective', revives the arguments of more traditional Pauline interpreters who have never been convinced by 'new perspective' advocates. Das argues that Second Temple Judaism was more legalistic than E.P. Sanders's 'covenantal nomism' would have us believe, and that regardless, Paul would have rejected 'covenantal nomism'. But on the question of what Paul actually *means* by διαθήκη, Das offers no new insight. Although he critiques Sanders for not defining what he means by 'covenant', Das himself does not define the term, either for himself or for Paul. With respect to the key text, Gal. 3.15-18, Das reiterates the common view that Paul equivocates between 'testament' and 'covenant' in the use of διαθήκη. Paul divorces covenant from law by defining 'the covenant' as the covenant with Abraham, which, unlike the Mosaic covenant, did not have a law attached to it.

In a recent article in *CBQ* (2005), Scott Hahn (2005) argues that in Gal. 3.15-18, Paul means the same by διαθήκη as he does in every other use of the word in his epistles: the ברית of Israel's scriptures, 'an elected… relationship of obligation under divine sanction [i.e. oath]' (Hugenberger 1994: 171). In Gal. 3.15 Paul gives a 'human' example (not 'an example from everyday life', a mistranslation) of a *covenant*, not a testament. Covenants were legal institutions just as testaments were. However, covenants, unlike testaments, could not be altered or augmented once ratified by oath. In Gal. 3.15-18, Paul argues that what is true of human covenants (their inviolability) must *a fortiori* be true of divine covenants as well (vv. 15, 17). He pushes his opponent's logic to its *reductio ad absurdum*: if the Abrahamic covenant promises are dependent on obedience to the (later) Mosaic law, then God would have been guilty of adding conditions to an unalterable covenant made 430 years earlier (v. 17). This is not tolerated among human beings and is unthinkable with respect to God.

Several allusions to Gen. 22 in Gal. 3.8-18 suggest that the background for Gal. 3.17 is God's oath at the Akedah (Gen. 22.15-18), which 'ratified' or 'established' a divine covenant of grant to Abraham (cf. Williamson 2000: 263) concerning the blessing of all nations through his seed (cf. Gal. 3.8). Paul, like the authors of *T. Moses* and other Second Temple documents (cf. Halpern-Amaru 1994: 55-68), understood Gen. 22.15-18 to be the establishment of a covenant with Abraham, since an 'oath' was the essential element of covenant establishment (cf. Hugenberger 1994: 182-85). This covenant-promise of blessing to all nations through Abraham's seed (Gen. 22.18) was 'ratified beforehand' (προκεκυρωμένην) by God with an explicitly sworn oath (Gen. 22.16) long before the giving of the

Mosaic law, and is now being fulfilled by the blessing of the spirit being poured out on the Gentiles through Abraham's 'seed' Jesus Christ. Therefore, in Gal. 3 and elsewhere, Paul does not abandon the covenantal framework of Judaism; rather, he works within it. In Christ he sees the fulfillment of the covenant *with Abraham* ratified at the Aqedah, not *the covenant with Moses*, which he sees as divine pedagogy and discipline. The sworn blessings of the covenant with Abraham as ratified in Gen. 22.15-18 have no conditions, not even circumcision (as opposed to Gen. 17). Paul and his fellow Jews differed over which covenant was primary and thus constituted the people of God. Paul gave historical priority and theological primacy to the *Abrahamic* covenant as ratified in Gen. 22.16-18—a 'covenant of divine commitment'. His opponents gave primacy to the *Mosaic* covenant at Sinai—a 'covenant of human obligation'.

Covenant in Hebrews

The book of Hebrews uses the term διαθήκη more than all the undisputed Pauline epistles combined. Nonetheless, the work on the concept of covenant in Hebrews in the past decade has been limited to two articles. The first, by S.R. Murray (2002), gives a competent review of the scholarship on the subject, especially the key disputed passage, Heb. 9.15-18, where the author is usually understood to vacillate between the meanings 'testament' and 'covenant' in a way similar (supposedly) to Paul in Gal. 3.15-18. Murray favors a consistent rendering of the term throughout vv. 15-18, either as 'covenant' or 'testament', but he does not provide a definite solution to the problem.

The second article, again by Scott Hahn (2004), offers a new reading of Heb. 9.15-18. The author of Hebrews, like Paul, uses διαθήκη for the Hebrew concept ברית and does so consistently. The biblical and ancient Near Eastern notion of death as the penalty for breaking a solemnly sworn covenant is the key to unlocking the controversial passage Heb. 9.16-17. Here, the 'covenant' being discussed is the transgressed Sinai covenant (v. 15). The sense of the verses is as follows:

> For since there is a [transgressed] covenant, the death of the covenant-maker must be borne. 17 For a [transgressed] covenant is confirmed upon dead bodies, since it certainly is not in force while the [offending] covenant-maker is [still] alive.

The point of these verses, stated succinctly, is that a broken covenant can only be enforced by applying the covenant curse of death to the covenant-breaker.

Hahn's larger conclusion is that the thought of the author of Hebrews is steeped in the covenant logic of Israel's scriptures, and these scriptures—rather than the Greco-Roman literary tradition—are the proper hermeneutical context for explicating the book's more difficult passages.

Synopsis of Covenant Research in the Past Ten Years

E.W. Nicholson (1986) may have attempted to bring scholarship on the covenant 'full circle', that is, back to the minimalism of Wellhausen, but this has not taken place. The advances in covenant scholarship in the past ten years have been made by scholars who understand covenant always to have been a constituent part of Israel's religious faith; or by those who may grant the 'lateness' of covenant historically, but for all practical purposes ignore this datum by engaging in a 'canonical' analysis of the text.

The reductionist idea that covenant means only 'obligation' and is essentially one-sided has been largely abandoned. Most scholars contributing to the field recognize that the covenant always involves mutuality and relationship; indeed, even when the terms only express obligations for one party, there seems to be the assumption of reciprocal loyalty on both sides. Covenants have not only legal but social, ethical, familial and cultic-liturgical aspects. In the Scriptures the influence of covenant thought cannot be limited only to passages where the terms ברית or διαθήκη occur. Covenant is a multifaceted theme encompassing a variety of phrases, terms and concepts (e.g. the 'covenant formula'), and is tied to other important biblical themes such as creation, wisdom and the eschaton.

With regard to the treatment of specific covenants in Scripture, Williamson's synchronic reading of the Abrahamic narrative (Gen. 12–22) will add precision to the discussion of the Abrahamic *covenants* in the future. The Davidic covenant has received a fair amount of attention (Knoppers, Gakuru) due to the debate between Weinfeld and Knoppers over its (un)conditionality. The influence of the Davidic covenant in the prophets seems to be an area ripe for further exploration.

While treatment of other covenants (Sinaitic, New) and the role of covenant in Second Temple and Qumran literature has been adequate, research on covenant in the gospels and the life of Jesus has been meager. In Paul the discussion has been dominated by the debate over Sanders's 'covenantal nomism'. Despite much use of the term 'covenantal', scholars have not been asking what Paul actually *means* by 'covenant'. The advances

by Old Testament scholars in the definition and typology of covenants, and in narrative-synchronic reading of Old Testament covenant texts, have not been fully appropriated in New Testament scholarship. The multiple divine covenants, including at least two and probably three with Abraham (Gen. 15, 17, 22) and two with Israel through Moses (one at Sinai and one on the Plains of Moab; see Deut. 29.1 ET; 28.69 MT) are too often amalgamated into '*the* covenant' with Israel. We should not assume that New Testament writers failed to notice the distinctions between these covenants or viewed them as theologically insignificant.

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