
THE COVENANT IDEA IN MELITO OF SARDIS: AN INTRODUCTION AND SURVEY

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Melito of Sardis, as his predecessors generally, did not employ the word "covenant" in writings directed to the church. His homily *On the Passover*, however, offered an original illustration to explain the relationship between the Jewish scriptures and Christian faith and practice. This illustration certainly places him in the tradition of the covenant interpretation of salvation-history found in Justin and Irenaeus.¹—Everett Ferguson

In covenant typology various persons, events and institutions of Old Testament Israel are viewed as prophetic prefigurements of New Testament realities. The Exodus events, Paul writes, were intended as 'types for us' and 'were written down for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages have come' or, more negatively, the ritual laws from Sinai were only 'a shadow...of the good things to come.' In a typological correspondence oriented more specifically to Jesus, the royal and the servant Psalms are applied to the Messiah who represents or incorporates in himself God's servant people and who is heir to David's throne. Similarly, the Exodus 'Passover Lamb' is a type of Jesus, who in his sacrificial death brings the

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¹Everett Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea in the Second Century" in *Texts and Testaments*, ed. W. March (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1980), 151.

covenant of Sinai to its proper goal and end and establishes a new covenant.²—E. E. Ellis

INTRODUCTION

"Covenant signifies a relationship based on commitment, which includes both promises and obligations, and which has the quality of reliability and durability."³ Thus the covenant epitomized the union between God and his people in the OT.⁴ The metaphor remained significant for both Jews and Christians in the Roman era. Indeed, it has been pointed out that covenant was connected with a complex of ideas in both early rabbinic Judaism and Christianity.⁵

The covenant idea was more significant in the writings of particular ante-Nicene theologians than has generally been admitted in patristic research or general surveys of the history of the covenant idea in the Christian tradition (as Everett Ferguson and others have begun to argue recently). A survey of the covenant idea in the ante-Nicene period evidences a significant usage, development and modification of the covenant concept as it is found in the OT and NT writings and in early Judaism. For instance, the covenant idea functions in several arenas of early Christian thought. It is employed: (1) to stress moral obligations incumbent upon Christians; (2) to show God's grace in including the Gentiles in the Abrahamic blessings; (3) to deny the reception of these

²E. E. Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 107; see also 77-121 for comments on and review of early Christian patterns of interpretation.

³B. W. Anderson, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. B. M. Metzger and M. D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 138.

⁴"'Covenant' in the Bible is the major metaphor used to describe the relation between God and Israel (the people of God). As such, covenant is the instrument through which one can recognize and appreciate the biblical ideal of religious community" (Mendenhall and Herion, *Anchor Bible Dictionary [ABD]* 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 1:1179.

⁵Mendenhall and Herion summarize: "In early rabbinic Judaism, 'covenant' was largely a formal or symbolic dogmatic concept that gave meaning mainly to those already within a group whose base of solidarity and cohesion was primarily ethnic. In early apostolic Christianity, on the other hand, 'covenant' was largely a socially enacted historical reality that accompanied sufficient functional changes in old patterns of behavior so as to rupture old ethnic and political bases of social solidarity and cohesion and to replace these with a larger vision of the human community." They later argue, "As long as biblical scholars remain content to deal with covenant 'ideas' in terms of formal elements and rigidly defined categories, most of the matrix of ideas associated with covenant will remain unnoticed and unappreciated" (*ABD*, 1:1201).

promises to the Israel of the flesh, that is, Israel considered merely as an ethnic entity; (4) to demonstrate continuity in the divine economy; and (5) to explain discontinuity in the divine economy.

The general study of the covenant in the ante-Nicene period is still, however, largely underdeveloped. This overview of covenant thought in Melito of Sardis is a small contribution designed to aid in and stimulate discussion of the larger subject. First, the broad outlines of NT covenant-thought are reviewed (as is that of Josephus and Philo) so as to avoid anachronism in our analysis of Melito. Then Melito's writings are surveyed for themes related to the covenant concept, as well as covenant terminology. Specific, comparative conclusions are drawn.

COVENANT IN THE NT: SYNOPTICS AND ACTS

A review of the NT writings, Apostolic Fathers and Justin reveals the contours of Christian covenant thought in the early second century.⁶ For instance, in the Synoptics and Acts the Christ event is sometimes seen as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (esp. Lk 1:72; also Acts 3:25). As Jeremias observed: "When Luke 1:72 says that God remembers his covenant, this means that he is now fulfilling the eschatological covenant promise."⁷ More specifically, in Acts 3:25, the coming of Christ is seen as the fulfillment of God's promise to bless the nations through Abraham (Gn 22:18). In the context of both Luke 1:72 and Acts 3:25, the idea of forgiveness of sins is present and understood as part of the fulfillment of the covenantal promise to Abraham.

In the Mark/Matthew cup-words, the words of explanation ("my blood of the covenant") allude to the institution of the Mosaic (Sinaitic) covenant in Exodus 24:8, and Jesus' death is understood as a covenant inaugurating sacrifice (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24),⁸ which provides the atoning basis for a (new) covenant relationship between God and his people.⁹ In

⁶ For a survey of the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists on the covenant idea, see my thesis *The Covenant Idea in Ante-Nicene Theology* (University of Edinburgh, Scotland, 1995), E. Ferguson's "The Covenant Idea," and also his "Justin Martyr: On Jews, Christians, and the Covenant," in *Early Christianity in Context: Monuments and Documents*, ed. F. Manns and E. Alliata (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1993).

⁷ Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 3rd ed. (London: SCM, 1966), 249.

⁸ "There can be little question that the words of institution, as they have been preserved in the gospel eucharistic accounts, explicitly associate Jesus' death with a sacrifice" (Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* [Sheffield: Almond, 1983], 310).

⁹ "The sacrifice which inaugurated the covenant in the wilderness was intended to atone for the sins of the people so that they might then belong to God in a covenant relationship. This point has been emphasized by R. Pesch, who has drawn attention to the way in which the Targum on Exodus 24:7-8

Matthew 26:28, the covenantal sacrifice is explicitly said to bring about the forgiveness of sins. In addition to the allusion to Exodus 24:8 that has already been noted, Isaiah 53:12 and/or Jeremiah 31:34b seem to be in the background, thus amalgamating the idea of fulfillment of the (new) covenant with the Isaianic Servant concept.¹⁰ In any case, the connection here between the covenant idea and forgiveness of sin is unambiguous.¹¹ The Mark/Matthew cup-word also manifests this connection with Isaiah 53:12 in the phrase "poured out for many." This provides further evidence for the Synoptists' relating of the covenant and suffering servant ideas.

The Lucan cup-word explicitly identifies the cup with the new covenant (Lk 22:20). It is possible to argue then that it looks back to Jeremiah 31:31-34 and that Luke understands Jesus' death as inaugurating the new covenant spoken of by Jeremiah.¹² The presence of an allusion to Jeremiah 31:31-34 in the Lucan cup-word does not, however, *ipso facto* rule out the possibility that it may also (with the Mark/Matthew form) recall Exodus 24:8, and it is not implausible to argue that Luke elsewhere explains the death of Christ in terms of the Exodus event (Lk 9:31).

In both the Mark/Matthew and the Paul/Luke traditions, the eucharistic words and their context suggest that Jesus was understood as

stresses the atoning effect of the blood which was thrown against the altar by Moses. The sacrifice was in effect the means authorised by God for cleansing the people from their sins. By analogy, therefore, Jesus here interprets his own death as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the people that they may become partakers in the new covenant" (Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* [Exeter: Paternoster, 1980], 92).

¹⁰Marshall says: "The concepts of the covenant and of the suffering Servant who bears the sins of the many fit in with one another and form a unified whole (cf. Is 42:6; 49:8). There is a fundamental unity between them which means that they belong together theologically and neither of them need be regarded as a secondary development of an originally simpler interpretation of the death of Jesus" (Ibid.).

¹¹Moo comments: "Specifically, two types of sacrifice seem to be referred to in the Last Supper accounts: the covenant sacrifice and the expiatory sacrifice (comprising the $\epsilon\upsilon\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha$ and the $\theta\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$). The latter is certainly not as prominent as the former, but the phrase $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\phi\epsilon\sigma\iota\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\mu\alpha\rho\tau\iota\omega\nu$ in Matthew is probably to be related to this type of sacrifice" (*Passion Narratives*, 310-11).

¹²"There is no doubt, however, that the New Testament writers saw the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy in the new covenant which Jesus claimed to establish by his sacrificial death. Here in this saying at the Last Supper we have the basis for their conviction that they lived in the era of the new covenant. The death of Jesus represents God's sovereign disposition of grace to the people" (Marshall, *Last Supper*, 93).

the paschal lamb.¹³ If this is so, then for the Synoptists a connection is established between the significance of the Passover and the Last Supper.¹⁴ That is, as the Passover recalls that the blood of the slaughtered lambs established the covenant and delivered Israel from destruction, so also the Supper signifies that Jesus' sacrificial death as the paschal lamb brings the ultimate Passover, redemption from sin in the establishment of the new covenant.¹⁵ Hence, it may be argued that in the eucharistic narratives the Synoptic authors see in the Passover (and in the Exodus event in general¹⁶) a pattern for Jesus' work of covenantal deliverance. Nevertheless, paschal imagery is conspicuously absent in the Synoptics outside of the Supper narratives, and "it is in John's Gospel that references to the Passover are most clearly found."¹⁷

The covenant idea is at the heart of the meaning of the cup-word in each of the Synoptics' eucharistic narratives. Covenant terminology is present in the words of interpretation of each.¹⁸ This is indicative of the importance of the covenant idea in the Synoptic writers' understanding of the meaning of Jesus' death. We may also note that in each of the passages in the Synoptics and Acts where διαθήκη is employed, the context argues for understanding διαθήκη as "covenant" and there are no compelling contextual reasons for rendering it as "testament."

PAULINE LITERATURE

When we turn to the Pauline Corpus we find both repetition and augmentation of these patterns. In 2 Corinthians, Paul sees his ministry as based upon the realization of the new covenant prophesied by

¹³See *ibid.*, 148. I am well aware of the current tendency in NT scholarship to deny that the Last Supper was a Passover meal. I also understand the rationales offered. However, I remain committed to the traditional argumentation.

¹⁴Moo, *Passion Narratives*, 324-25.

¹⁵See, again, Jeremias on Jesus as the "eschatological Passover lamb" (*Eucharistic Words*, 220-26).

¹⁶Marsh says: "There are so many indications that both Jesus and the Evangelists interpreted his life and ministry in terms of the Exodus that it is difficult to give an adequate treatment in a small space" (*The Fulness of Time* [London: Nisbet, 1952], 84-90. See also J. Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality* (London: Burns and Oates, 1960), 153-66; and Moss, "The Covenant Conception in Early Christian Thought" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1964), 82-83.

¹⁷See Moo, *Passion Narratives*, 312-24.

¹⁸Jeremias says: "The possibility that Jesus spoke of the covenant at the Last Supper cannot be disputed" (*Eucharistic Words*, 195); Marshall adds: "Since all our sources contain the covenant idea and since there is no good reason for denying that Jesus could have used it, we are justified in regarding it as an integral part of the saying" (*Last Supper*, 91).

Jeremiah.¹⁹ As Moses was the messenger of a covenant characterized by the law, so Paul is the messenger of a (new) covenant characterized by the Spirit (1 Cor 3:6,12,13). According to Paul, this new covenant was established by the death of Christ (1 Cor 11:25). That is, Jesus in his sacrificial death effected the new covenant relationship and its attendant blessings, which had been predicted by Jeremiah.²⁰ Elsewhere, Paul can also speak of Christ's death in paschal terms (1 Cor 5:7).

The new covenant is, for Paul, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (Gal 4:24). Paul makes this clear in his identification of Christ as Abraham's "seed" to whom the promises were given (Gal 3:16).²¹ This can also be seen from Paul's view of the nature of the Abrahamic blessing and the ministry of the new covenant. The Abrahamic covenant entailed a blessing for the Gentiles and that blessing, according to Paul, is the gift of the Spirit (Gal 3:14). The new covenant ministry, the ministry of the Spirit, is based on the realization of the promise of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:5,6,8; also cf. 3:3; Ez 36:26-28; and Jer 31:33).

Paul uses the covenant idea to provide structure for his presentation of redemptive history.²² He identifies three covenants, points of epochal significance in God's dealings with humankind: the Abrahamic (Gal

¹⁹See W. L. Lane, "Covenant: The Key to Paul's Conflict with Corinth," *Tyndale Bulletin* 33 (1982): 8-10.

²⁰"This New Covenant is grounded in the blood shed by Christ on the Cross, in which the congregation receives a share in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:25). And the evidence that this New Covenant has taken effect and that the church of Christ may understand itself in terms of it is the spiritual renewal of the church itself, which he terms an epistle of Christ, prepared by his labor as a minister of the New Covenant, written not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tables of stone but on tables of flesh in the hearts (2 Cor. 3:3). In all these qualifications the apostle is clearly reflecting on that which had been promised in prophecy concerning the New Covenant (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26)" (Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* [London: SPCK, 1977], 336).

²¹R. V. Moss says: "Paul regarded Christ as the fulfiller of the Abrahamic covenant. In a sense, this great covenant overarches history and finally achieves realization in the coming of the one who was the 'offspring' of Abraham" ("Covenant Conception," 145).

²²Moss suggests that "in Gal 3 we find Paul's attempt to work out history in covenant terms" and concludes his discussion by asserting that "Paul interprets redemptive history in covenant terms, and more specifically in terms of the covenant with Abraham" (Ibid., 142, 144). See also P. S. Liao, "The Place of the Covenant in the Theology of the Apostle Paul" (PhD diss., Hartford Seminary, 1973) who says: "For Paul, the significance of the history of salvation is unfolded in the covenant relationship of God with His people," 181. Our argument, however, is not that Paul structures his redemptive history *exclusively* via the covenant concept.

3:17); Mosaic (Gal 4:24) and new (2 Cor 3:6). These covenants, in turn, indicate different economies in salvation history.

Paul does not designate these economies as "covenants," but refers to them by implication (e.g., "before faith came" for "Mosaic economy" [Gal 3:23] and "now that faith has come" for "Christian economy" [Gal 3:25]).²³ When Paul employs the term "old covenant" in 2 Corinthians 3:14, he means the Torah. When he speaks of "new covenant" in 2 Corinthians 3:6, he seems to mean the new covenant relationship established by Christ rather than the redemptive economy that resulted from Christ's establishment of the new covenant.

For Paul, the fundamental dividing-point of salvation history is the incarnation of Christ; hence there are two redemptive economies (which we designate for convenience as the old economy and the economy of the new covenant).²⁴ The former was temporary, spanning the time before and terminating with Christ (Gal 3:25; 2 Cor 3:11). The new covenant economy is permanent and was initiated in Christ (2 Cor 3:11; 1 Cor 11:25). Within redemptive history in the old economy, Paul sees a distinction between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant (Gal 3:16-18).²⁵ The Abrahamic covenant is characterized by promise, while the Mosaic covenant is characterized by law.

²³F. F. Bruce comments: "The 'coming of faith'—the 'faith in Jesus Christ' just mentioned (in other words, the gospel)—may be understood both on the plane of salvation-history and in the personal experience of believers. On the plane of salvation-history the coming of faith coincides with the appearance of Christ...." (*Commentary on Galatians*, NIGTC [Exeter: Paternoster, 1982], 181). E. D. Burton says: "The coming of faith is a historic event, identical with the giving of the gospel (see 4:4,5 Rom 1:16,17, not an experience of successive individuals" (*Epistle to the Galatians* ICC [New York: Scribners, 1920], 201-2).

²⁴Paul contrasts the whole of the historical period before the coming of Christ with the age of the new covenant. The period 'before faith came' contrasts drastically with the time in which 'faith has come' (Gal 3:23,25). The coming of Christ, and his consequent position as object of faith, has altered the entire course of history. God's dealings with men cannot return to the old patterns once the Christ has come" (Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980], 58).

²⁵Kline says: "The unquestionable fact emerges in Galatians 3 that Paul saw in the Old Testament alongside the covenant of promise another covenant which was so far from being an administration of promise as to raise the urgent question whether it did not abrogate the promise. In the Galatians 3 passage Paul calls only the revelation of promise by the name 'covenant.' It would, however, be indefensible to assume that Paul repudiated the propriety of the terminology of the Old Testament according to which that administration of law which Paul here distinguishes so sharply from the covenant of promise was itself known as a 'covenant.' Moreover, in the following chapter of Galatians Paul

Paul stresses discontinuity when comparing the old (Mosaic) economy with the new covenant economy (2 Cor 3:6-11; Gal 3:16-18, 24-25; 4:21-26).²⁶ The old economy is one characterized by law, death, condemnation and fading glory, whereas the new economy is superior, characterized by the Spirit, life, righteousness and unfading glory. This does not mean, however, that Paul's view of the relation between God's redemptive economies with Israel and the Church is essentially one of discontinuity, because he stresses continuity when relating the Abrahamic covenant to the new covenant. This continuity is expressed in the principle of promise (covenantal promise, to be precise) and fulfillment.²⁷

Paul, in some passages, tends to stress the sovereign disposition of the covenant (e.g., Rom 11:27; Gal 3:17),²⁸ and links the covenant idea to the forgiveness of sins (Rom 11:27).²⁹ He also simultaneously affirms the historical election of Israel (Rom 9:4; 11:5,26-27) and asserts that the promise of Abraham is not to his descendants according to the flesh but to the children of promise (Gal 3:26-29; 4:28-29; Rom 2:28-29; 9:6-8).³⁰ We also note that Paul's usage of διαθήκη suggests that he means

himself applies the designation 'covenant' to the Sinaitic administration" (*By Oath Consigned* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968], 24-25).

²⁶G. Vos says: "Paul, while recognizing the greatness (of the Mosaic economy), dwells on its limitations, as compared with the glory of his own ministration under the New *Diatheke*, in 2 Cor 3" (*Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948], 105).

²⁷Bruce says: "The gospel is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham that in him and his offspring all nations would be blessed" (*Galatians*, 219). For a discussion of the relation of the covenant idea to the promise and fulfillment motif in Paul, see Liao, "Place of Covenant in Paul," 199-216.

²⁸However, Paul can apply the term διαθήκη to a relationship which he recognizes to be distinctly two-sided (see Gal 4:24). Kline observes of this passage that "in the vocabulary of Paul the Sinaitic administration as such, that is, the administration of law, bondage, condemnation, and death (cf. II Cor 3:6ff.) was a 'covenant'" (*By Oath Consigned*, 25).

²⁹See Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3d ed. (London: Tyndale, 1965), 102-3.

³⁰Paul is able to argue for continuity between ethnic Israel and the Church by appealing to the principle of the remnant (Rom 9-11). See Liao, "Place of Covenant in Paul," 188-95, 198; and Ridderbos, *Paul*, 327-61.

"covenant,"³¹ not "testament," with the possible exception of Galatians 3:15.³²

HEBREWS

Hebrews provides the single richest source of explicit covenant terminology for the study of NT covenant thought. The author of Hebrews sees the priestly work of Christ as the fulfillment of Jeremiah's new covenant (Heb 8:6-13) and, less prominently, the Abrahamic promise (6:13-20).³³ The sacrificial death of Christ establishes the new covenant (9:15). As the blood of the covenant sprinkled at Sinai inaugurated the first covenant, so Christ's blood shed at Calvary inaugurated a new covenant. Christ also functions as the mediator of the new covenant (8:6; 9:15; 12:24), as did Moses and the high priests under the old administration (7:26-28; 9:7,18,19).

This new covenant is superior to the first (Mosaic) covenant because whereas the first was unable to effect a complete cleansing of the conscience (Heb 9:9), the new covenant brings realization of the forgiveness of sins (10:14,18). Hence, in Hebrews, the (new) covenant idea is closely connected with the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, while the first covenant was temporary, the new covenant is permanent. In it "the whole religious process comes to rest."³⁴ In both of these aspects of the new covenant the author stresses its discontinuity with the old order. Nevertheless, there is continuity between the first and second covenants. In both economies the same God has revealed himself (1:1,2) (though the latter revelation is ultimate), and in both drawing near to God is the aim of the priesthood and covenant.³⁵ "I will be your God and you will be my people" is the motto of both covenants, though its fullness is only realized in the new priesthood and covenant.

³¹Liao observes that Paul "inherits the Old Testament concept that 'covenant' is a relational term, defining the relationship between God and His people. Paul sees in the New Covenant, inaugurated by the blood of Christ, the perfect fulfillment of this relationship" ("Place of Covenant in Paul," 113).

³²See Liao's extensive survey of this issue, (Ibid., 62-69); he favors the translation "testament" in Galatians 3:15.

³³See Kaiser, "Old Promise and New Covenant: Jeremiah 31: 31-34," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 15 (1972): 21-23.

³⁴Vos, "Epistle of the Diatheke," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. R. B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 183.

³⁵Vos says: "The priesthood fulfills itself in being and bringing near to God, and the purpose of the covenant is precisely the same. Both look to communion with God. There is no risk in affirming that the author was clearly conscious of this parallelism" (Ibid., 220-21).

Following on this, the idea of covenant as a relationship is manifest in Hebrews. The mutually-binding character of the covenant is illustrated on both the divine and human sides. God binds himself by oath to covenant faithfulness in establishing Christ's priesthood (7:21-22, 25). Those who repudiate the covenant relationship into which they have been brought by virtue of Christ's blood are liable to the full force of the covenantal curse (10:29).

Again, as elsewhere in the NT traditions, every occurrence of διαθήκη in Hebrews can be reasonably rendered as "covenant," though it is possible to translate it as "testament" in 9:16,17. Whatever the case there, the idea of "covenant" is clearly dominant in the author's general usage of διαθήκη.³⁶ Indeed, the importance of the covenant idea in the author's presentation of redemptive history is readily apparent. The first (Mosaic) covenant and the second (new) covenant mark epochs in salvation history. The new covenant abrogates the Mosaic covenant, but it does so by fulfilling it. In this way the author asserts both the continuity and discontinuity of the divine plan. As Vos has said: "More than any other New Testament document Hebrews develops what might be called a philosophy of the history of revelation."³⁷

JOHANNINE WRITINGS

The covenant concept is not absent from the Johannine literature.³⁸ Not only the paschal teaching and covenantal imagery of the divine presence (e.g., Jn 1:14; Rev 11:19; 21:3), but also the Johannine ecclesiology reveal covenantal influence.³⁹ The testament idea is apparently deployed in Revelation 5:1-4 (though not in connection with διαθήκη), but covenant thought is clearly dominant and covenantal mutuality is highlighted throughout the Johannine writings. Pryor astutely observes, "It is in the area of obligations, which result from the community's status as covenant people, that the covenant ideas in John are most visible."⁴⁰

³⁶See Mendenhall, *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) 1:723.

³⁷Vos, "Epistle of the Diatheke," 192.

³⁸H. A. A. Kennedy noted this long ago in his study "The Covenant-Conception in the First Epistle of John," *Expository Times* 28 (1916-17): 23-26; more recently the covenant motif in the Gospel of John has been highlighted by J. W. Pryor in *John: Evangelist of the Covenant People—The Narrative and Themes of the Fourth Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 157-80.

³⁹As Pryor has noted, "The accumulated evidence of the gospel leads to the conclusion that John looks upon the church(es) as the true, eschatological people of God gathered by its covenant Lord, Jesus" (*Ibid.*, 157).

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 161.

COVENANT IN EXTRA-NT TRADITIONS: JOSEPHUS AND PHILO

NT era contemporaries Flavius Josephus (ca. AD 35-100) and Philo Judaeus (ca. 20 BC-AD 50) provide interesting material for contrast with the NT data and the usages of διαθήκη in the post-apostolic era. Josephus employs διαθήκη or its variants some thirty-nine times in *Antiquitates Judaicae* (*AJ*) and *De Bello Judaico* (*BJ*). Almost invariably these are references to Herod's will⁴¹ and hence have little to offer in the way of theological significance. But Josephus also uses συσθήκη 39 times, and though in most of those instances he is speaking of non-biblical events in which agreements, conditions or contracts,⁴² or articles of surrender⁴³ are made, he begins *AJ* with an interesting set of references to biblical covenants. In *AJ* 4.118, Josephus calls the agreement between Balaam and Balak (Nm 22) a συσθήκη, and in 5.54-55 identifies the covenant established between Israel and the Gibeonites as a συσθήκη (Jos 9). Again, in *AJ* 6.230,236,252-253 and 7.111, the covenant between David and Jonathan is classified as a συσθήκη (1 Sm 18), as is David's peace treaty with Abner (*AJ* 7.25; 2 Sm 3). Rehoboam's (broken) settlement with Shishak (cf. 2 Chr 12) and Ahab's with Benhadad (1 Kgs 20) are cited as συσθήκαι respectively in *AJ* 8.258 and 8.388. Finally, the macabre arrangement between two starving mothers in 2 Kings 6:28-29, Josephus reports as a συσθήκη (*AJ* 9.65-66).

At least two things about Josephus' usage are worthy of mention. First, we may note that διαθήκη never means covenant for him, but rather testament.⁴⁴ Second, pacts designated as ברית in OT narratives are uniformly referred to as συσθήκη by Josephus. Many of these instances are naturally classified as compacts between equals, but certain ones are clearly prominent OT ברית types: suzerainty-vassal treaty (Jos 9) and royal grant (*AJ* 7.111-114; 2 Sm 7).⁴⁵ Unfortunately, Josephus uses neither διαθήκη nor συσθήκη in connection with divine-human covenants, so we do not know what terminology he would have employed and cannot draw further theological inferences from his terminology.

⁴¹Josephus discusses the intrigues surrounding Herod's succession in detail in *AJ* 17-18 and *BJ* 1-2 and so comes back to the subject of Herod's testament often (see, e.g., *AJ* 17.53, 78, 146, 188, 195, 202, 224, 226, 228, 238, 244, 246, 249, 321, 322 and 18.156; *BJ* 1.451, 573, 588, 600, 625, 646, 664, 668, 669 and 2.3, 20, 21, 31, 35, 38, 98, 99).

⁴²See, e.g., *AJ* 2.253, 13.392, 15.173, 16.118, 270, 346, 351, 390, 17.111, 18.110-111 and *BJ* 1.104, 116, 182, 586, 2.397, 602, 640, 4.112, 382, 6.320, 7.221.

⁴³See *BJ* 2.452-453.

⁴⁴See E. D. Burton, *Galatians*, 497.

⁴⁵See "covenant (religion)" by J. J. M. Roberts in *Academic American Encyclopedia*, online edition (Danbury, CT: Grolier Electronic, 1993).

Philo, on the other hand, provides a very different picture. The great majority of his covenant references are connected to biblical divine covenants, and his emphasis on grace (divine blessing or favor) is unmistakable. The term διαθήκη appears some 23 times in his writings,⁴⁶ while συνθήκη is found only twice,⁴⁷ yet Philo proves to be a far more fruitful source for assessing the theological usage of covenant terminology than is Josephus. In *Legum Allegoriarum* 3.85, he refers to God's ratification of his promises to Abraham concerning Isaac in a rough quotation of Genesis 17:19, "I will establish my covenant towards him (Isaac) for an everlasting covenant." Philo's point is to show that God shows favor to some men before they are even born. He returns to the same theme in *De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 56-57, where he says that no one should look to himself as the cause of God's blessing; rather, God's covenant is the source of benediction. God blessed Israel (cf. Dt. 9:4-6) not because of her own righteousness, but because of the nations' wickedness and in order that God might "establish the covenant which he swore to our fathers." Significantly, Philo also says here, "Now by the covenant of God his graces are figuratively meant..." (*Sac* 57).

Philo's emphasis on the gracious character of the covenant is conspicuous in *De mutatione nominum* (*Mut*) and *De somniis* (*Som*). In *Mut* 51-53⁴⁸ where Philo mentions having written two commentaries περὶ

⁴⁶We will not review the less significant passages, e.g., *Quod deterius potiori insidari soleat* 67-68 (which expounds Dt 33:9, but sheds little light on the meaning of διαθήκη), *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit* 313 (which is interesting for its quotation of Gn 15:18—a passage overlooked in early patristic covenant thought—but otherwise uninformative), or *De specialibus legibus* 2.16 (where διαθήκη=oath).

⁴⁷Philo uses συνθήκη in the sense of agreement, in *Legatio ad Gaium* 37 and, apparently, in the sense of covenant, in *De congressu eruditionis gratia* 78, where the allegory is drawn from Genesis 16.

⁴⁸The portion of the passage with which we are concerned reads: εὐλόγως οὖν ἔφη· "γίνου ἀμεμπτος," μέγα πλεονέκτημα πρὸς εὐδαίμονα βίον ὑπολαβὼν εἶναι τὸ ἀναμάρτητον καὶ ἀνυπαίτιον. τῷ δὲ ἡρημένῳ ζῆν τὸν τρόπον τοῦτον καὶ κλῆρον κατὰ διαθήκας ἀπολείψειν ὁμολογεῖ τὸν ἀρμόζοντα δοῦναι μὲν θεῷ, λαβεῖν δὲ σοφῷ. φησὶ γάρ· "θήσω τὴν διαθήκην μου ἀνὰ μέσον ἐμοῦ καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον σοῦ." διαθήκαι δὲ ἐπ' ὠφελείᾳ γράφονται τῶν δωρεᾶς ἀξίων, ὥστε σύμβολον εἶναι διαθήκην χάριτος, ἣν μέσσην ἔθηκεν ὁ θεὸς ἑαυτοῦ τε ὀρέγοντος καὶ ἀνθρώπου λαμβάνοντος. ὑπερβολὴ δὲ εὐεργεσίας τοῦτο ἐστὶ, μὴ εἶναι θεοῦ καὶ ψυχῆς μέσον, ὅτι μὴ τὴν παρθένον χάριτα. *Philo* (Loeb) vol. 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 166, 168. "With good reason did He say, 'Become blameless,' for He holds that freedom from sin and guilt is a great furtherance towards a happy life. And to him who has elected to live in this fashion He promises to leave a covenanted portion such as is fitting for God to give and man to receive, for He says, 'I will set my covenant between Me and between thee' (Gen. xvii.2). Now covenants are drawn up for the benefit of those who are worthy of the gift, and thus a covenant is a symbol of the grace which

διαθηκῶν,⁴⁹ he declares ὥστε σύμβολον εἶναι διαθήκην χάριτος and μὴ εἶναι θεοῦ καὶ ψυχῆς μέσον, ὅτι μὴ τὴν παρθένον χάριτα, though earlier he asserts that the covenant is for those who are worthy (*Mut* 51).⁵⁰ Furthermore, Philo maintains that God himself is the ultimate expression of the covenant (*Mut* 58)⁵¹ and that his covenant with Israel had a universalistic aspect (*Mut* 263), being intended to produce virtue in all humankind.⁵² The connection between covenant and grace is again evident in *Som* 223-24, as is the identification of law (νόμος), word (λόγος), justice (δίκαιον) and covenant (διαθήκη)(cf., *Som* 237).⁵³

If we were to digress to review the covenant idea in early Christian writers such as Clement of Rome, Barnabas and Justin, the study would reveal a more theologically developed usage of the covenant than one finds in Philo, and also (of course) a Christological focus.⁵⁴

God has set between Himself Who proffers it and the man who receives. And this is the crowning benefaction, that there is nothing between God and the soul save the virgin grace" (F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, trans., *Philo* [Loeb], 5:169).

⁴⁹"I have dealt with the whole subject of covenants in two treatises, and I willingly pass it over to avoid repetition..." (Ibid.).

⁵⁰The themes of God's gracious bestowal of the covenant and that of the covenant being received by righteous persons, appear in tandem in each covenant passage in *Mut* and *Som*.

⁵¹"There are very many kinds of covenants, which distribute graces and gifts to those who are worthy to receive them; but the highest kind of covenant of all is *I myself*: for God, having displayed himself as far as it was possible for that being to be displayed who cannot be shown by the words which he has used, adds further, 'And I too, behold my covenant;' the beginning and fountain of all graces is *I myself*" (C. D. Yonge, trans., *The Works of Philo* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993], 346); see also the introductory comments of Colson and Whitaker, *Philo* (Loeb), 5:131.

⁵²"...I will make my covenant with Israel, that the race of mankind may receive each kind of virtue..." *Mut* 263; trans. Yonge, *Philo*, 363.

⁵³"God says that he is about to erect firmly his covenant full of grace (and that means his law and his word) in the soul of the just man as on a solid foundation..." (Yonge, *Philo*, 404). "...[J]ustice and God's covenant are identical..." (Colson and Whitaker, *Philo* (Loeb), 5:543). "Since then all steadiness, and stability, and the abiding for ever in the same place unchangeably and immovably, is first of all seen in the living God, and next in the word of the living God, which he has called his covenant..." (Yonge, *Philo*, 405).

⁵⁴See my thesis *The Covenant Idea in Ante-Nicene Theology* (University of Edinburgh, Scotland, 1995); E. Ferguson's "The Covenant Idea"; and also his "Justin Martyr: On Jews, Christians, and the Covenant," in *Early Christianity in Context: Monuments and Documents*, ed. F. Manns and E. Alliata (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1993).

THE COVENANT IDEA IN MELITO OF SARDIS

The extant fragments of Melito of Sardis reveal noticeable differences from and similarities to the covenant thought of those who went before him. For instance, his discussions of the role of Israel in redemptive history stand in stark contrast with Barnabas' quasi-Gnostic rhetoric, yet Melito's *adversus Judaeos* polemic surpasses that of Ignatius and is as brutal as any of his successors.⁵⁵ On the other hand, while never employing the term "covenant" in *Περὶ Πάσχα* (*PP*), he will duplicate current usages of covenant thought in explaining the church's receipt of the blessing of Israel, the Jewish people's loss of the inheritance and the newness and oldness of the divine economy.

The only surviving passage from Melito's writings in which the word *διαθήκη* occurs is found in a fragment⁵⁶ preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea: ἀνελθὼν οὖν εἰς τὴν ἀνατολὴν καὶ ἕως τοῦ τόπου γενόμενος ἔνθα ἐκηρύχθη καὶ ἐπράχθη, καὶ ἀκριβῶς μαθὼν τὰ τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης βιβλία (*HE* 4.26).⁵⁷ Here, Melito designates the older Scriptures as the "books of the Old Covenant," an appellation which would soon after become commonplace in Christian writings, but which (as far as we know) had not heretofore been employed in written reference to the church's Jewish Scriptures.⁵⁸ There is little internal evidence to assist in

⁵⁵Considerable differences are apparent in the various evaluations of Melito's anti-Jewish rhetoric. See e.g., S. G. Wilson, "Melito and Israel" in *Separation and Polemic*, vol. 2 of *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, ed. S. G. Wilson (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), 81-102. Wilson notes the opposing treatments of the subject evidenced in the work of E. Werner, "Melito of Sardis: The First Poet of Deicide," *Hebrew University College Annual* (1966): 191-210, and S. G. Hall, "Melito in the Light of the Passover Haggadah," *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971): 29-46. D. P. Efroymson takes up a similar debate (in evaluation of Tertullian) with R. Ruether in his "The Patristic Connection," in *Anti-Semitism [sic] and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. A. T. Davies (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 98-117.

⁵⁶S. G. Hall expresses no doubt as to the authenticity of this fragment (no. 3). See *On Pascha and Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), xxx.

⁵⁷"So, going back to the east and reaching the place where it was proclaimed and done, I got precise information about the books of the Old Covenant," trans. Hall. A. D. Nock and others have disputed the historicity of this claim, but see S. G. Hall, *PP*, 66-67 (n10, n12), and 53 (n55). For further argument for the genuineness of the event, see R. Beckwith, *The OT Canon of the NT Church* (London: SPCK, 1985), 184-85.

⁵⁸Of course, Paul had referred to the writings of Moses as the "Old Covenant" (2 Cor 3:14). J. N. D. Kelly believes that Christian designation of the Scriptures as Old and New Testaments/Covenants can be traced to this usage in Paul; see *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. 5th ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), 56. W. C. van Unnik rejects Kelly's view; see, "Ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη—a Problem in the early history of the Canon" (*Studia Patristica* 4 [1961]: 220).

determining Melito's exact understanding of διαθήκη in the phrase τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης βιβλία.⁵⁹ What is clear is that in Melito's time⁶⁰ the διαθήκη idea was deemed important enough in the church's understanding of redemptive history to serve as a standard designation for her sacred writings.⁶¹ In fact, not long after this time (ca. 192/3), an anonymous Christian writer applies καινῆς διαθήκης to the newer Christian Scriptures.⁶² In light of the instinctive usage of this terminology in the last quarter of the second century, it is safe to assume that the connection between covenant and Scriptures was a conventional one for Christians at least as early as the mid-second century. Even Kinzig, who finds the covenant references in Melito and the anonymous anti-Montanist to be inconclusive as evidence of the use of διαθήκη as a title for Scripture, concedes that "it is no doubt correct to assume that there is a close relation between 'New Testament' as a book title and the theology of the time." He furthermore admits that "the development of this type of theology ("the theological concept of God's covenant with his people") is one of the necessary preconditions for the emergence of the title under discussion."⁶³ Whatever the case may be, Melito's *PP* provides us with testimony to another representative use of covenant thought in this same era.

⁵⁹Does the phrase involve a covenantal (relational), dispositional (administrative), historical (epochal) or testamentary (legal documentary) understanding of διαθήκη? Hall translates "books of the Old Covenant"; G. A. Williamson, "the Old Testament books" (*History of the Church* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965], 189); and A. C. McGiffert, "books of the Old Testament" (*Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, 2d ser., 1:206).

⁶⁰This text dates from ca. 170; see van Unnik, "'Η καινή διαθήκη,'" *Studia Patristica* 4 (1961): 218.

⁶¹Certainly Melito would not have prefixed a label to his list of Jewish Scriptures which would have been unintelligible or unfamiliar to his Christian correspondent Onesimus.

⁶²The full phrase is τῶ τῆς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου καινῆς διαθήκης λόγῳ, HE 5.16.3 (which seems to allude to Rv 22:18-19). The presence of ἐπιδιατάσσεισθαι in the context confirms that διαθήκη is here employed in a documentary (perhaps even a testamentary) sense; see the comments of van Unnik in *SP* 4:217-18. However, note that Ferguson believes this is a reference to "the total message" or "an era," not only a collection of books, "Covenant Idea," 150. In contrast, J. N. D. Kelly argues that Irenaeus is the first to apply καινή διαθήκη to the NT Scriptures (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 56). More recently, W. Kinzig has put forward yet another view, asserting that "the first unequivocal testimonies" to καινή διαθήκη being employed to designate the NT "are found around the year 200 in the writings of Clement of Alexandria," see "Καινή διαθήκη: The Title of the New Testament in the Second and Third Centuries," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 45/2 (1994): 529.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 522.

MELITO'S USE OF COVENANT THOUGHT IN ΠΕΡΙ ΠΑΣΧΑ (PP)

Ferguson and Kinzig both have concluded that a covenantal history-of-salvation approach was typical of the second-century Christian theologians.⁶⁴ This is confirmed in Melito's *PP*, which was produced sometime in the third quarter of the second century (160-170?).⁶⁵ It is an ancient homily, bearing the distinctive marks of Greek rhetoric⁶⁶ and commemorating "the whole saving work of Christ as the fulfillment of the ancient Pascha..."⁶⁷

In *PP*, we find Melito employing a covenantal approach to redemptive history not dissimilar to that of Justin Martyr, but without using the term διαθήκη. This is evidenced in three ways: (1) Melito's treatment of continuity and discontinuity in redemptive history; (2) his anti-Jewish polemic; and (3) the possible sacramental significance of *PP*.

Melito's stress on redemptive historical continuity may be seen in a variety of ways. In the first lines of *PP*, Melito takes as the starting point of his sermon Exodus as scripture: 'Η μὲν γραφή τῆς ἐβραϊκῆς Ἐξόδου ἀνέγνωσται (*PP* 1). Here we have a parallel with Clement of Rome's exhortation to Christians based on OT covenant texts (cf. 1 Cor 15:4 and 35:7).⁶⁸ Hence, OT historical events are seen to relate directly to God's dealings with the church (*PP* 40).

Furthermore, though the Pascha is interpreted as a "Christian event," the historical reality of God's relationship with his people Israel is neither denied nor downplayed (as is the case in Barnabas). It is Israel who is marked (*PP* 16) and guarded (*PP* 30-31) in the Pascha. Israel is "the people" and Egypt is the uninitiated enemy (*PP* 16). Melito freely asserts that God chose and guided Israel "from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to Isaac and Jacob and the twelve patriarchs"

⁶⁴Ferguson, "Covenant Idea," 155. Kinzig corroborates Ferguson's claim when he says that Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement "championed the theology of the covenants" ("Καὶνὴ διαθήκη: Title of the NT," 522). See also his volume *Novitas Christiana: Die Idee des Fortschritts in der Alten Kirche* (Göttingen, 1994).

⁶⁵Exact dating is perilously dependent on Eusebius' identification of the work Περὶ τοῦ Πάσχα with Melito's Περὶ Πάσχα (HE 4.26.3-4), and the resolution of the difficulties connected with the attendant chronological note. See Hall's comments in *PP*, xix-xxii. R. J. Daly suggests 165-70 in Origen, *Treatise on the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 7.

⁶⁶See A. Wifstrand, "The Homily of Melito on the Passion," *Vigiliae Christianae* 2 (1948): 201-23.

⁶⁷Hall, *On Pascha*, xxv.

⁶⁸Incidentally, if Melito is doing here what Clement was doing there, then it is possible to read even the strongly anti-Jewish polemic in the sermon as admonitory exhortation for Christians.

(*PP* 83).⁶⁹ In contrast to Barnabas who contends that Israel lost the covenant from the start, in the shadow of Sinai (*Barn.* 4.6,8), Melito insists that Israel received real divine benefits from God throughout her history: the manna, the inheritance of the land, the law, the prophets and kings (*PP* 85).

Melito's typological exegesis also approximates the covenant patterns of other second-century theologians and manifests his emphasis on continuity. According to Melito, the angel of death in Egypt honored the life, model and Spirit of the Lord in the slaughter, death and blood of the sheep (*PP* 31-33). The whole Passover event was a comparison (*παραβολῆς*), prefiguration (*προκεντήματος*) and preliminary type (*προτυπώσεως*) (*PP* 35) of the gospel, the church and the Lord (*PP* 39-43). The salvation and reality of the Lord were prefigured in "the people" (*PP* 39), meaning OT Israel, and "the people" were also a type (*τύπος*) of "the church" (*PP* 40). The law "pre-proclaimed" (*προεκηρύχθη*) the gospel (*PP* 39). Indeed, whereas the law was a parable (*παραβολῆς*) of the gospel, the gospel is the fullness or fulfillment (*πλήρωμα*) of the law (*PP* 40). Both "sides" of these redemptive-historical events (both shadow and reality) are clearly part of the same divine plan in Melito's thought.

According to Melito, the Lord set forth his sufferings clearly in the OT that they might be more readily believed:

The Lord made prior arrangements for his own sufferings in patriarchs and in prophets and in the whole people, setting his seal to them through both law and prophets. For the thing which is to be new and great in its realization is arranged for well in advance, so that when it comes about it may be believed in, having been foreseen well in advance (*PP* 57).⁷⁰

This is why τοῦ κυρίου μυστήριον is both old and new, and not merely new. It was revealed of old in the law (*PP* 58). It was proclaimed in the voice of the prophets Moses, David, Jeremiah and Isaiah (*PP* 61-65). The OT was filled with types of the Paschal mystery: Abel, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, David, the prophets and the Passover sheep (*PP* 59-60).

Even when Melito is highlighting the superiority of the new covenant blessings (e.g., the life, salvation, and Spirit of Lord, the spotless Son, the Christ and Jerusalem above), he refuses to deny the reality or devalue the original quality of the corresponding old covenant blessing. He repeatedly insists on the value of the slain sheep, the death of sheep, the blood of sheep, the speechless lamb, the temple below, the Jerusalem below, the narrow inheritance and little plot (of Canaan) (*PP* 44-45, cf. 85,88). They are each of great worth (*τίμιος*), he says, though the new covenant realities are of relatively greater value and though the typical blessings have now become worthless with the arrival of their

⁶⁹Hall, *On Pascha*, 47.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 31.

realization (*PP* 43). In other words, Melito's contrast between old covenant and new covenant realities is not absolute (that is, between what was not valuable and what is truly valuable), but relative (that is, between what was once valuable and what is now valuable). The type was valuable before the coming of the fulfillment (*PP* 41).

Melito is not one-sided, however, in his redemptive history and so also vividly displays the discontinuities of the divine economy. This (as with his approach to continuity) he does in various ways. The mystery of the Pascha itself attests to these discontinuities. According to Melito, the Pascha is "old as regards the law, but new as regards the word; temporary as regards the type, eternal because of the grace; perishable because of the slaughter of the sheep, imperishable because of the life of the Lord; mortal because of the burial in earth, immortal because of the rising from the dead" (*PP* 3-4).⁷¹ This is the discontinuity of progress rather than of opposition or contradiction, as has been seen in Melito's typology: "the type existed, but then the reality appeared" (*PP* 4). The type, from the beginning, was designed to be discontinued. The appearance of the reality, then, though discontinuous in certain aspects with the type, is actually proof of an underlying unity of design. Hence, the discontinuity is complementary to, confirmatory of and, indeed, absolutely essential for redemptive continuity.

Melito also contends that since the coming of Christ, the ancient law can be contrasted with the recent word, though they are both about Christ (*PP* 6). According to Melito: the law has become the word, the old has become new, the commandment has become grace, the type has become reality, the Passover lamb has become the Son, the Passover sheep has become Man and the representative Man has become God (*PP* 7). Indeed, Melito can employ the strongest words of contrast possible. At the revelation of the Lord, the type was abolished (ἐλύθη), made empty (κενοῦται) and is now worthless (ἄτιμος) (*PP* 42-45). Nevertheless, this is for Melito "a relative contrast in absolute terms." This is not only evident from the above discussion, but also from Melito's explanatory word on the way in which the gospel fulfills the law. He says the gospel fulfills the law in the way that an interpretation fulfills a parable. The content of the two is not different (much less opposed), but that of the latter is better elucidated (*PP* 43).

It is important to note that for Melito, this discontinuity was part of the divine plan from the beginning and was historically effected by the coming of the reality (Christ), not by the disobedience of OT Israel at Sinai (as in *Barnabas*). Melito very emphatically asserts that the sin of Adam against the law brought about the wickedness of humanity, for whose redemption the sufferings of Christ were necessitated (*PP* 47-49).

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 3 (slightly modified).

Melito does later argue (*PP*72-99) that the Jewish rejection of the Son and subsequent involvement in his death brought the divine judgment and rejection of Israel. But this is in stark contrast to Barnabas, who suggested Israel had been rejected at Sinai.

This leads naturally to a discussion of the second type of evidence of standard second-century covenant thought found in *PP*—redemptive history in controversy with the Jews.⁷² We have already noted that Melito charges Israel with the responsibility of Jesus' death (*PP* 72-99). Melito's graphic rhetoric in his accusation against Israel is well known. The Lord was murdered by Israel in the middle of Jerusalem (*PP* 72). Israel has committed a strange crime (*PP*73). Though even the gentiles admired him, Israel cast the opposite vote against their Lord (*PP* 92). Indeed, Melito says, "You killed your Lord at the great feast" (*PP*79) and "the King of Israel has been put to death by an Israelite right hand" (*PP* 96).⁷³

This sensational language usually draws most of the attention in evaluating Melito, and hence his more conventional and covenantal arguments in the debate with Judaism are often overlooked. Though his homily on the Pascha is brief, he manages to employ a covenantal redemptive-historical approach in at least two areas that were significant in the ongoing Jewish-Christian controversy and that are reflective of characteristic second-century covenant theology.

First, instead of denying that Israel had ever been a part of the covenantal economy of God (in the manner of *Barnabas* or gnostic writings), Melito explains the exclusion of Israel from the promises in terms of her rejection of the Son. Israel "did not turn out to be 'Israel'" (*PP* 82, cf. Rom 2:28-29; 9:6). Consequently, Israel was cut off from the covenant blessings (*PP* 90, 99). Though the Pascha of Christ was part of God's plan, Israel's involvement in those sufferings brought the decisive

⁷²The reader will remember this as one of the categories of covenant thought mentioned by Ferguson: "'covenant' was an important topic in the dialogue and debate between Christians and Jews" ("Covenant Idea," 135).

⁷³M. R. Wilson claims there is a difference between NT and extra-NT second-century anti-Jewish polemic: "Portions of the New Testament and other early Christian literature contain rather striking anti-Jewish rhetoric. It is crucial, however, to make an important distinction about these polemical outbursts against Jews and Judaism. In the New Testament the *adversus Judaeos* polemic was 'an intra-family device used to win Jews to the Christian faith, in the second century it became anti-Semitic and was used to win Gentiles'" (*Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* [Grand Rapids/Dayton: Eerdmans/Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, 1989], 91-92; the quote within the quote is from R. N. Longnecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984], 40).

judgment of God against the nation (*PP* 74).⁷⁴ This assertion helped the Christian theologians of the second century explain the shift from Judaism to Christianity, from Israel to the church, within the framework of a unified redemptive economy.

Second, and following on this first point, his emphasis on the greater glory of the new covenant fulfillments, and the obsolescence of the old covenant types provided a useful argument against Judaism. It also bears resemblance not only to Hebrews, but also to Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian. This approach to the OT types allowed Melito to "Christianize" the OT texts and to offer an implicit apologetic for Christians as the legitimate heirs of the OT (since they were the recipients of the new covenant realities, and not merely the old covenant shadows).

There is, perhaps, a third kind of evidence for second-century covenant thought to be found in Melito's *PP*—the presence of Christian sacramental language in the Paschal sermon. Though patristic scholars dispute whether baptism was administered in connection with the Paschal homily,⁷⁵ Melito clearly employs the vocabulary of sacred signs in *PP*. For instance, after quoting portions from the institution of the passover (Ex 12) he says:

But while the sheep is being slain
and the Pascha is being eaten
and the mystery is being performed
and the people is making merry
and Israel is being marked [σφραγίζεται],
then came the angel to strike Egypt,
the uninitiated [ἀμύητον] in the mystery,
the non-participating in the Pascha,
the unmarked with the blood,
the unguarded by the Spirit,
the hostile,
the faithless (*PP* 16).⁷⁶

S. G. Hall finds evidence of baptismal terminology in this passage: "Melito regards the Pascha as an initiatory rite with apotropaic effect, and insinuates into 14-16 the language of Christian baptism and unction, especially σφραγίζειν, χρίειν, πνεῦμα, ἀμύητος."⁷⁷ Other traces of

⁷⁴Cf. Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* 95.2.3 and 141.1.

⁷⁵See Hall, *On Pascha*, xxvii, and G. F. Hawthorne, "Christian Baptism and the Contribution of Melito of Sardis Reconsidered," in *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honor of Allen P. Wikgren, Novum Testamentum* supplements, ed. D. Aune (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 241-51. Hawthorne sees little reference to baptism, and Hall says that he "exaggerates the anti-sacramental case."

⁷⁶Hall, *On Pascha*, 9; see also *PP* 13b-15.

⁷⁷Hall, *On Pascha*, 9 (n5).

baptismal terminology can be found in *PP* 30, 67 and 103. If this is the case then we have an example of Christian baptismal theology being read back into and connected with the OT covenant tradition. This may be all the more significant if Cross and Hall are correct about the influence of Haggadah and Mishnah on *PP*.⁷⁸

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The relatively meager evidence of covenant thought in the writings of Melito currently accessible to us allows us neither to assess the total shape of his opinions, nor to estimate the significance of the covenant idea in his theology. Nevertheless, there is more than enough material for comparison with the covenant thought of his predecessors and contemporaries.

First, as "Israel" served as an OT sacral term for the people of God, and as NT writers saw themselves to be essentially related to "the people" (Rom 9-11), so also Melito sees Israel as "the people" and "the church" as its new covenant fulfillment (*PP* 40, 41), indeed, "an eternal people personal to him" (*PP* 68).

Second, whereas Melito repeats the NT identification of Jesus as the paschal lamb (*PP* 4 *et passim*), he does not duplicate the NT connection of the incarnation and work of Christ and the Abrahamic covenant, nor does he link the death of Christ with the Mosaic covenant and Jeremiah's new covenant. Barnabas' and Justin's covenant thought is much more explicit in this area than is Melito's in *PP*.

Third, Melito shares with the NT and Justin an emphasis on both continuity and discontinuity when relating the old and new covenants (*PP* 3, 40-45), but neither explicitly employs the covenant motif as an instrument to structure redemptive history, nor makes express linkage of the covenant idea and forgiveness of sins (though he treats the latter in *PP* 103).

Fourth, it perhaps goes without saying that Melito's extant writings do not offer enough evidence to determine the denotation and connotation of διαθήκη in his theology. It is clear, however, that the διαθήκη idea is significant enough for Melito that the term διαθήκη can serve as part of his appellation for the church's Hebrew Scriptures.⁷⁹

⁷⁸See *ibid.*, xxvi-xxvii and xxvii (n1).

⁷⁹The question is not whether Melito intends τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης to indicate "a collection of OT books" in the sense in which we use the term OT. Kinzig makes much of the fact that Melito uses the genitive and that therefore the meaning of the phrase is clouded ("Καὶνὴ διαθήκη: Title of the NT," 527-28). But this misses the point. Whether Melito means τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης itself to refer to a list of books, or as a theological concept (the time or administration in which the said books were written), it is beyond question that he is employing it

Fifth, whereas Clement of Rome and Barnabas employ covenant thought in the service of moral exhortation, Melito's covenant thought primarily serves the didactic cause of gospel explanation (e.g., *PP* 6-10).

Sixth, Melito stands with Justin and against Barnabas, in his view of Israel's reception of the old covenant (*PP* 83-85).

Seventh, like Barnabas, Justin and Clement of Rome, Melito appeals to OT rather than NT passages as the basis of his teaching (in the standard manner of second-century *demonstratio evangelica*) and manifests the influence of the OT and Judaism (*PP* 1, 66, 68, 86, 93).⁸⁰

Eighth, whereas the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New covenants are mentioned or alluded to in writings of the NT, Apostolic Fathers and Apologists, Melito never explicitly does so in *PP*. He does speak of Adam (*PP* 83), Noah (*PP* 83), Abraham (*Frag.* 15), Isaac (as a type of Christ, *Frag.* 9), Moses (*PP* 59, 61), David (*PP* 59, 62), and Jeremiah (*PP* 63), but never links them with a covenant. Melito does, interestingly, articulate the giving of the law to Adam in the garden (an important theme in Tertullian) as a major part of his discussion of the need for human redemption (*PP* 47-48). There he explicitly equates the command with the prohibition and designates Adam's sin as disobedience.

Ninth, as with the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists, we note slight variations in the covenant thought of Melito and his predecessors and contemporaries.

here as at least part of a designation of a list of books! Zahn, Harnack and even Kinzig seem to miss this obvious point in their detailed musings on διαθήκη as a title for the Scriptures.

⁸⁰See Hall, *On Pascha*, xxvi-xxvii.