

1. THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

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At its most fundamental level, the subject matter of biblical theology is the Bible's understanding of God's character and purposes. This 'theology' is displayed in the developing relationship between God and his people (Israel and the church) and, through them, in God's relationship with the world (the nations and the created order). The primary matrix of God's self-revelation is therefore not private religious experience, but the events recounted and interpreted in the Scriptures that establish and maintain these relationships.¹

1. As James D. Smart, *The Past, Present, and Future of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), pointed out, the nature of the link between 'theology' as God's self-revelation and 'history' as the discernible nexus of cause and effect is the key question of Biblical Theology. Smart's own answer, advocated by many today, was to follow Barth's separation of theology from history by relocating revelation in the human experience of God reflected in the Scriptures (see pp. 90-92). In contrast, the position taken here is that Scripture is not a record of religious beliefs or experiences in response to a divine revelation outside itself, but is itself divine revelation. In this regard, see the helpful distinction established by John S. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology, A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), pp. 13-15, between God's self-revelation in the Bible and religion as a human act in accordance with that revelation. Sailhamer follows

History, not the heart, is the locus of divine revelation. Moreover, since biblical history focuses on God's rescue of humanity from its rebellion against its creator and sustainer, it can be called the 'history of redemption' or 'salvation history'. Thus God's relationship with his people within the salvation history recounted in Scripture is the subject matter of 'biblical theology'. To call it 'theology' is especially apropos in that the intention of biblical salvation history is unequivocally *theocentric*, being focused on God's self-revelation of his righteous character in and through his relationship with his people, the nations and the world. Biblically speaking, the purpose of theology is doxology.²

This means that God's relationship with the world and his people is not a theoretical abstraction, nor is it fundamentally a subjective experience. Rather, with salvation history as its framework, this relationship is expressed in and defined by the interrelated covenants that exist throughout the history of redemption. This leads to the apostle Paul being able to refer to the various covenants throughout Israel's history (cf. Rom. 9:4; Eph. 2:12), as well as to references to the 'old' or 'new' covenant as the two epochs of salvation history.

Nevertheless, although all would agree that there are various individual covenants throughout the Scriptures, it is significant that the term for covenant in the Old Testament (*b'rit*) never occurs in the plural when describing God's covenants with Israel.³ Rather, the biblical writers refer either to a specific covenant or to 'the' covenant between God and his people. This is because the covenants of the Bible all embody the same fundamental covenant relationship. For this reason, 'covenant' is the biblical-theological concept used to

E. Hirsch in tracing the shift from a faith based on the Bible as revelation, to a faith based on the Bible as a religious response to revelation, to the work of Sigmund Baumgarten in the mid-eighteenth century.

2. This conviction first came home to me through the teaching of John Piper as crystallized in *The Justification of God, An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), pp. 90-97, in which he establishes that God's righteousness 'consists most basically in God's unswerving commitment to preserve the honor of his name and display his glory' in everything he does (p. 97). See, e.g., Exod. 14:4, 18; 1 Kgs 8:41-45; Ps. 31:1-3; 79:9; 143:1-2, 11; Isa. 43:6-7, 21-25; 46:13; 48:11; Jer. 14:7-21; Ezek. 20:9-44; 36:20-32; Dan. 9:7-19; Rom. 11:32-36; Eph. 1:3-14.

3. As Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula, An Exegetical and Theological Investigation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), pp. 8, 79, has pointed out, though James Barr emphasized this point in 1977, it has not been taken seriously enough in subsequent scholarship.

explain (1) the essential character of God as King or Sovereign Ruler, (2) the election of a people under his rule who, as his 'adopted' children, live in dependence upon him, and (3) the corresponding nature of God's bond with them as their 'Sovereign Father'. The content of this covenant relationship is thus summarized in what has come to be known as the 'covenant formula', i.e., that YHWH declares, 'I will be God for you [= your God] and you shall be a people for me [= my people],'⁴ a mutual belonging between God and Israel that eventually encompasses the nations and consummates history (Ezek. 37:26–28; Zech. 2:11; Rom. 15:10; Rev. 21:3).

This 'covenant relationship', in which the basic categories of kingship (Sovereign Ruler) and kinship (Father) are mutually interpretive,⁵ is not static. It is the dynamic, historical arena within which God reveals himself. As such, it provides the interpretive lens for understanding who God is, who his people are and how they relate to one another. Hence, as Rolf Rendtorff has observed, 'covenant' is 'the most comprehensive and the most theologically weighty term for God's attention to humans in the Hebrew Bible'.⁶ John Walton concludes that it is the 'single most important theological structure in the Old Testament'; indeed, 'both the Old and New Testament weave their theology on the loom of history with the thread of the covenant'.⁷ The covenant relationship con-

4. For an insightful treatment of this theme, see Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula*. See his p. 11 for this literal translation and pp. 50, 73, for his conclusion that the covenant formula is 'at once the unfolding and the endorsement of the . . . covenant', and as such 'the expression of the fundamental relationship between God and Israel'. Rendtorff's study is based on an analysis of the context and significance of the distribution of the three forms of the formula: (A) 'I will be God for you'; (B) 'You shall be a people for me'; and (A) and (B) combined. For a listing of the passages according to these categories, see his pp. 93–94.
5. For the programmatic insight that the concept of 'covenant' in the Bible is based in tribal and family 'kinship' relationships, which later become interpreted in terms of kingship, see F. M. Cross, 'Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel', in *From Epic to Canon* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1998), pp. 3–21.
6. Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible, A Theology of the Old Testament, Tools for Biblical Study 7* (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2005), p. 433.
7. John H. Walton, *Covenant, God's Purpose, God's Plan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 10. In accord with my emphasis, Walton's thesis, p. 24, is that God's sovereign plan is to be in relationship with the people whom he has created, but that people must know God to be in relationship with him. Therefore God has instituted 'as a primary objective a program of self-revelation . . . the mechanism that drives this program is the

sequently provides not only the content but also the context for understanding the revelation-in-relationship and the history-of-redemption within which the biblical narrative and theology unfold.⁸ Brevard Childs is right: a scripturally interpreted *Heilsgeschichte* and the notion of the covenant are the two key categories for constructing a biblical theology.⁹

This does not mean that the 'covenant relationship' is the one, central theme of the Bible. The attempt to isolate such a theme has proved to be too specific to gain a consensus or too general to be of explanatory power. More appropriately, the concept of the covenant relationship provides the *structure* that serves to integrate the interrelated themes developed throughout the history of redemption delineated in the Scriptures.¹⁰ Like the hub and rim of a wheel respectively, the old (establishment) and new (restoration and consummation) covenants define and hold together the different 'spokes' of divine revelation manifested in the words and deeds of redemptive history. In so doing, the covenant becomes the interpretive lens for seeing clearly the conceptual and historical unity of the Bible in the midst of its diversity.

The covenant concept of the Bible

In 1933 Walther Eichrodt shocked the scholarly world of his day, which emphasized critical reconstructions and the disunity of the Old Testament, by arguing

covenant, and the instrument is Israel. The purpose of the covenant is to reveal God.' See his pp. 26, 29 and esp. 31–43 for his fourteen key texts in support of this thesis.

8. For the history of the debate surrounding this complex issue, see Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Salvation Historical Fallacy? Reassessing the History of New Testament Theology* (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2004).
9. Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 92; cf. p. 419.
10. James Barr's conclusion concerning scholarship's search for the centre of biblical theology is instructive in this regard: "To sum up the question of the "centre," it seems to me that the discussion of it has not been a vain waste of breath, as some have thought, and that valuable results have emerged from it. It is not a matter of reaching a definitive answer, but rather of weighing possibilities for the expression of structure. Whether writers of Theologies define a "centre" or not, they will very likely have to work with some idea of one (or more?), as a simple necessity for the organization of their work' (*The Concept of Biblical Theology, An Old Testament Perspective* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999], p. 343).

that Old Testament religion is a 'self-contained entity' with 'a constant basic tendency and character'.¹¹ Moreover, this character was displayed in the Old Testament concept of the covenant, which Eichrodt saw to be an antidote to the 'bloodless abstraction of "ethical monotheism"' and to the 'bloodless abstractions of a rationalist individualism'.¹² After fielding twenty-four years of criticism, Eichrodt retained the 'covenant' as the central concept of the Old Testament, 'by which to illuminate the structural unity . . . of the message of the Old Testament', since in the concept of covenant 'Israel's fundamental conviction of its special relationship with God is concentrated'.¹³ The criticisms have not abated, but Eichrodt was right. Yet, to make the case today, three important distinctions must be drawn in speaking of the covenant as the integrating concept of Scripture.

First, we must distinguish between covenant terminology and covenant reality. The relative scarcity of covenant terminology in the canon, together with its uneven distribution, has caused many to doubt its viability as an integrating motif within Scripture, not to mention as its integrating centre.¹⁴ It is important, however, not to fall prey to the fallacy of assuming that a reality can only be referenced if a specific term is used. The explicit use of covenant terminology need not be present for the reality to be presupposed or even in view.¹⁵ The realities associated with covenant, centred on kingship and kinship, often reference the covenant relationship between God and his people, but

11. Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Volume 1, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 11.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 17.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

14. According to Accordance 6.4.1 (OakTree Software, November, 2004), *bērit* ('covenant') occurs in the Old Testament 287 times in 267 verses. These occurrences are concentrated in the Law (82 times, 27 times in both Genesis and Deuteronomy), Joshua (22 times) and 1–2 Kings (26 times), Isaiah (12 times), Jeremiah (25 times), Ezekiel (18 times), Hosea (5 times) and Malachi (7 times), and the Psalms (21 times) and 1–2 Chronicles (30 times). In the New Testament, *diathēkē* ('covenant') occurs 33 times in 30 verses. Of these, it occurs only 6 times in the Synoptics and Acts (none in John), 9 times in Paul, once in Revelation 11:19 and 17 times in Hebrews.

15. A point well made by Gordon Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant, A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage Developed from the Perspective of Malachi*, *VTSupp* 52 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), p. 6 (pointing to the reference to the covenant with David in 2 Sam. 23:5 and Pss. 89, 132, even though no corresponding covenant terminology appeared originally in 2 Sam. 7).

occur without an explicit mention of a 'covenant' per se.¹⁶ For this reason, the covenant relationship embodied in its various covenants may be described in the Scriptures from one or more of its interrelated elements, such as the sovereignty and fatherhood of God, divine election and 'adoption', the people of God as a divinely constituted 'family' or 'bride', the mutual belonging expressed in the covenant formula, the call to obedience to specific commands in response to divine provisions, and God's promises of blessing and judgment.

Indeed, Childs emphasizes that while the classic formulation of Israel as 'the people of YHWH' occurs in a standardized covenant formula (cf. Exod. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Judg. 5:13; Jer. 11:4; Ps. 95:7),¹⁷ even to speak of 'Israel' is to speak of both the covenant relationship and covenants of the Bible. Israel exists as God's people only because of God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:1–21). She continues on under the Sinai covenant only due to the promises made to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 17:7; Exod. 2:24; 6:4–5; Deut. 4:31; 7:12; 29:12–13).¹⁸ Eventually Israel incorporates the Gentiles and finds her own final redemption through the new covenant established by the Messiah, in fulfilment of these same promises to the patriarchs (Rom. 11:17–24, 26–29, quoting Isa. 59:20–21; Jer. 31:33; Isa. 27:9; cf. too Isa. 41:8–9; 51:1–3). Thus it is not overstating the case to maintain that the entire Scripture 'is a record of God's activity in creating and defining Israel' in answer to the question of who will inherit the covenant promises made to 'Israel' as the true, elect people of God.¹⁹

Second, we must distinguish between the establishing of the formal 'covenants' and the continuing personal relationship they either initiate, presuppose or ratify, and thereafter embody.²⁰ The covenant itself is the formal

16. So Childs, *Biblical Theology*, p. 415, with my own expansion of some of these covenant realities.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 421.

18. Emphasized by Bruce C. Birch, Walther Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), p. 151. So too Rendtorff, *Canonical*, pp. 438, 443.

19. So David E. Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel, One Covenant or Two?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 30.

20. For the fact that a specific covenant need not create a relationship, but often presupposes and ratifies an existing relationship, see W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation, A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1984), pp. 13–14, 19, 26, 42–43, 47, 76 (on the Abrahamic covenant), 81, 89 (on the Sinai

and/or ceremonial act, both verbal and/or symbolic, that provides the recognized, 'legal' framework for living within the relationship to which it belongs. As a matter of definition, 'covenant' is not a synonym for 'relationship', although the existence and maintenance of a relationship is central to the covenant itself.²¹ A covenant is the formal declaration, sealed with a ratifying oath (whether given in a verbal declaration and/or symbolized in a sign or ceremony), of the parties involved, the framework for the commitments of the relationship it defines. As such, a covenant represents 'an elected, as opposed to natural, relationship of obligation under oath', i.e., it establishes or reflects 'a relationship under sanctions' based on 'a sanction-sealed commitment to maintain a particular relationship or follow a stipulated course of action'.²² A covenant and the relationship it represents is therefore 'an *elected* vs. natural relationship of obligation – established under divine sanction'.²³

Against this backdrop, YHWH's covenant with Israel and the church as divine King (Lord) and Father is an extension of the 'natural relationship' that exists within the household-family and tribe (with marriage seen as a covenant) to a nation and people. In other words, the covenant extends the otherwise inherent familial or tribal bonds to those not related by birth or blood ties, so that those within this covenant relationship now belong to God and to one another as 'family'. Election not blood, rebirth not birth, defines the people of God. By virtue of the covenant, God, the King, becomes the 'Father' of his elect 'children', and they become 'brothers and sisters' in the people of God.

covenant), 127 (on the Davidic), etc., and Hugenberger, *Marriage*, following McCarthy, pp. 169, 175. McCarthy points to thirteen examples of formal covenants ratifying an existing relationship within secular covenants as well (see Hugenberger, *Marriage*, p. 169 n. 5). In fact, ratifying an existing relationship may be the typical use of covenant making. On the other hand, E. Katsch, Perlitt and Nicholson go too far when they conclude that a covenant *never* establishes a relationship (rightly, Hugenberger, *Marriage*, pp. 169–170).

21. For this important point and its implications, see Hugenberger, *Marriage*, pp. 4, 169–171, 176–177.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 171 n. 5, quoting M. Kline. Thus Mendenhall could define a 'covenant' as a 'solemn promise made binding by an oath' (quoted by Hugenberger, p. 11 n. 76), while D. J. McCarthy called it 'a union based on an oath' (quoted by Hugenberger, p. 12). For the important addition that a covenant may secure a stipulated course of action as well as a relationship, as in Ezra 10:3; 2 Kgs 11:4; 2 Chr. 23:11; Jer. 34:8–10, see Hugenberger, p. 169.

23. Hugenberger, *Marriage*, p. 171.

As a result, God is now his (adopted) people's 'Divine Kinsman', who is no longer simply a family God (the 'God of the Fathers'), but the ruler of all by virtue of an extended 'kinship-in-law'.²⁴ In this extended covenant relationship,

The Divine Kinsman, it is assumed, fulfils the mutual obligations and receives the privileges of kinship. He leads in battle, redeems from slavery, loves his family, shares the land of his heritage (*nahālā*), provides and protects. He blesses those who bless his kindred, curses those who curse his kindred. The family of the deity rallies to his call to holy war, 'the wars of Yahweh', keeps his cultus, obeys his patriarchal commands, maintains familial loyalty (*hesed*), loves him with all their soul, calls on his name.²⁵

Third, we must distinguish between the covenant *relationship* that exists between God as King and Father and his people *throughout* history and the covenant *epochs* that take place *within* history. The Bible divides all of history into two opposing epochs: this age and the age to come. From the biblical perspective, history moves from creation to new creation, from this fallen age to the restored age to come, from the evil kingdoms of this world under the rule of Satan to the kingdom of God. In accordance with this two-age conception, the Bible also divides the history of God's relationship with his people into two main periods of time, the 'old covenant' of this age and the 'new (or everlasting) covenant' of the age to come (Isa. 55:3; 61:8; Jer. 31:31–34; 32:40; 50:5; Ezek. 16:60; 37:26; Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6, 14; Eph. 1:21; Heb. 8:6–10).

The transition from this age to the age to come will take place through the last 'great and awesome day of the LORD' (Mal. 4:5; cf. Isa. 13:6–9; Joel 1:15; 2:1–31; Zeph. 1:7, 14; 2:1–3; Amos 5:18–20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:1–2; 2 Pet. 3:10; etc.).²⁶ On this 'day', God will decisively judge this evil age and in so doing deliver his people once and for all from sin and its consequences. Through this coming day of judgment, God will establish his unrivalled rule and reign as King and, under his undisputed sovereignty, bring about the new creation and its covenant. This coming day of salvation

24. Cross, 'Kinship', pp. 6–7.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 7. Walton, *Covenant*, pp. 21–22, makes the same point by emphasizing that, unlike the earthly suzerain who employed the covenant language in the Ancient Near East as a means of maintaining subservience, YHWH was the sovereign who actually loved his people.

26. See Paul House's essay on the Day of the Lord in this volume.

is therefore often pictured in the Bible as a 'second-exodus' redemption of God's people. Like the first deliverance from slavery in Egypt, with its covenant at Sinai, God will once again rescue his people from captivity (to sin) in order to bring them into his presence as their sovereign ruler, albeit now in accordance with an everlasting 'new covenant' associated with a restored Zion (Jer. 32:36-41; Ezek. 34:25-31; Isa. 2:1-4; 55:3; 61:8; Zech. 8-9).

The only, but crucial, modification to this linear development of history is the fact that the first coming of the Messiah was intended to inaugurate the kingdom of God without consummating it.²⁷ The great second-exodus redemption of God's people from their slavery under the presence, penalty and power of sin takes place first not through the judgment of the world, but through the death and resurrection of the Messiah himself as the suffering Servant of the Lord.²⁸ Only the substitutionary death and vindicating resurrection of the Christ himself can make the new covenant possible in order that, under its provisions, God's people might be prepared for their final deliverance at the judgment to come. Thus the kingdom of God is here (Matt. 12:28; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 10:9; 13:18-21; Rom. 14:17; Gal. 3:14; Col. 1:13; Heb. 6:5), but not yet here in all its fullness (Matt. 24:30; 25:34; Luke 20:34-35; 1 Cor. 15:20-28; 2 Pet. 1:11; 3:1-13). The new age of the new creation under the new covenant is dawning in the midst of this evil age *without* bringing it to an end (2 Cor. 3:6; 5:17; Gal. 6:15)! This 'overlapping of the ages' is the 'mystery of the kingdom' (Mark 4:1-34).

In this way, the linear development of history presented in the Bible, from creation to new creation, overlaps with and is inextricably tied to the sequential development of the biblical history of redemption, from the old covenant to the new. The covenants and story of the Scriptures match one another. This age and the age to come correspond to the two redemptive epochs within

27. For the paradigmatic presentation of this 'inaugurated eschatology', see Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964). This perspective was established in the English-speaking world largely through the work of G. E. Ladd; of his many works, for a concise presentation, see *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (1959; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). For the biblical-theological implications of this basic two-age structure and its modification with the first coming of the Christ, see Roy Ciampa's essay on the history of redemption in this volume.

28. See Frank Thielman's essay on substitutionary atonement and Stephen Dempster's on the Servant, in this volume.

history, that of the old and new covenants, with their respective bodies of literature. The history of 'this age' is first established, and then re-established, by what may be called the two 'covenants of creation', the first with Adam (and Eve) before the fall and the second with Noah after the flood (cf. Gen. 1:28-30 with 9:1-3, and 1:27 with 9:6). These two covenants with humanity ensure God's *providential* provisions necessary for history itself, in order that God may also establish a *redemptive* covenant relationship with his chosen people. These covenants also prefigure the final judgment to come upon rebellious humanity through the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden and the destruction of humanity from the earth, even as the exile of Israel from the Promised Land makes the same point regarding the judgment of those who break his salvific covenants.

The history of redemption, made possible by the re-established 'creation' after the flood, thus stretches from the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:15-18), to the consummation of the new covenant of peace between God and his people (Isa. 54:10; 66:22), to the new creation after final judgment (Isa. 65:17-25; 2 Pet. 3:1-13; Rev. 21:1-8). This 'salvation history' unfolds based on a series of specific covenants, which build on one another and mark out its turning points: from the covenant established between God and Abraham, through the covenant established with Israel at Sinai (Exod. 19-24), which together make up the epoch of the 'old covenant', to the 'new covenant' established with the church by the Messiah (Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 8:6-13; 9:15).²⁹

The unity of the Bible is therefore built upon a two-age, two-covenant conception, within which the individual covenants play their respective roles in the unfolding drama of a continuous history of salvation. The various covenants and stages of redemptive history are distinguished by the increasing knowledge of God's unified purposes and the manner of their accomplishment, climaxing in the coming and return of the messianic Son of God (cf. Dan. 9:24-27; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; Heb. 1:1-4; John 1:1-5, 14; 1 John 3:2; 1 Cor. 13:8-13). This is reflected in the fact that the same covenant formula remains the purpose of God from

29. Within these covenants between God and his chosen people there are two important subsidiary covenants, that of kingship with David (2 Sam. 7:12-14; 2 Sam. 23:5; Jer. 33:21; Pss. 89, 132) and of priesthood with Levi (Num. 25:12-13; Deut. 33:10; Jer. 33:21; Mal. 2:4-7; Neh. 13:29). These covenants establish the instruments needed for maintaining and consummating the covenant relationship with Israel under the so-called 'Sinai' or 'Mosaic covenant', both of which are fulfilled under the new covenant by the Messiah, who is 'priest' and 'king'.

the covenant with Abraham, through the Sinai covenant, to its consummation in the new covenant, since this relationship is the means by which God reveals his glory.³⁰ The specific content of the covenant provisions, stipulations and promises develops as time goes on, but there remains *one* covenant people, in two epochs, with *one* kind of covenant relationship that spans the individual covenants of redemptive history. This 'unity' reading of the Bible, though highly contested,³¹ stands at the heart of the proposal before us.

The covenant relationship

Scripture testifies to one, constant relationship³² between God and his people throughout redemptive history that is formalized and embodied in its successive covenants. Although disagreement remains over various historical, liter-

30. For this point, see Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula*, pp. 3, 20, 22, 26, 43, 47–49, 69, 80, 88–92, who points to the interrelationship at the key turning points in the biblical canon between the 'covenant', covenant formula, self-identification formula ('I am Yahweh') and recognition formula ('You will know that I am the Yahweh, the Lord').

31. One need think only of the conflict theories of biblical theology embedded in the majority of the paradigms employed for understanding the flow of biblical history, whether in the traditional Lutheran law-gospel perspective, the Reformed understanding of the covenant of works and covenant of grace, or the Dispensational understanding of the dispensations of law and grace. For an overview of the various positions within evangelicalism, see John S. Feinberg (ed.), *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1988); for a survey of the issue within scholarship at large, see David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible, A Study of the Theological Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, rev. ed. (Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), pp. 19–176.

32. This seems more appropriate than talking about one 'covenant' in the Bible; there are various covenants, but one covenant relationship based on one covenant structure. In contrast, Walton, *Covenant*, pp. 44–45, 49, 60, 106–107, 148–149, argues for a single 'covenant' in the Bible made up of 'constituent phases of development' based on the fact that all the covenants have the common purpose of revealing God in order to establish a relationship with Israel and the nations (p. 44). The continuity between covenants exists in that 'each is a part of a single, unified program of revelation' (p. 49).

ary and theological issues surrounding the origin and significance of the biblical covenants, a 'substantial scholarly consensus' exists today concerning 'the major elements that typically comprise an ancient covenant'.³³ Specifically, Hugenberger points out that within Israel's history a covenant always entails (1) a relationship (2) with a non-relative (3) that involves obligations and (4) is established through an oath.³⁴ Thus the covenant relationship between God and his people is determined by divine election on the one hand (as their 'Father', God 'adopts' his dependent 'children' through acts of deliverance) and by the commitments and stipulations of the relationship on the other. This relationship is then guaranteed by a covenant ratification ceremony, which is centred on the taking of an oath of allegiance to the promises and obligations of this relationship. The specific components of actual covenants and their corresponding ceremonies, although seldom preserved in full, embody these elements.

The biblical covenants did not arise in a vacuum. There were a variety of such treaties or covenants in the Ancient Near East, most likely based on intrinsic, tribal, kinship allegiances.³⁵ Largely due to the programmatic work of G. E. Mendenhall,³⁶ scholars have widely recognized that the structure of the covenant relationship as we now have it in the biblical text finds its historical location in affinity with, but not necessarily direct dependence on, the well-known Near Eastern suzerain treaties, starting with the treaties between the Hittite kings and their vassals (c. 1400–1200 BC).³⁷ In accord with the ele-

33. Pointed out by Hugenberger, *Marriage*, p. 111.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 215. An 'oath' can be any sign (verbal or non-verbal) 'which invokes the deity to act against the one who will be false to an attendant commitment or affirmation' (p. 215). Moreover, these oaths need not be explicitly self-maledictory, but can be 'a solemn positive declaration or depiction of the commitment being undertaken' (p. 215).

35. So Cross, 'Kinship', pp. 7–11, 19. 'Often it has been asserted that the language of "brotherhood" and "fatherhood", "love", and "loyalty" 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).

36. 'Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition', *BA* 17 (1954), pp. 50–76.

37. For a convenient listing of the fifty-seven examples of such treaties, see J. H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), pp. 95–107. The modern history of the study of the covenant structure is a complex one in which no consensus exists concerning the origin or development of the various kinds of treaty formulas found in the Ancient Near East and the

ments of the covenant outlined above, these treaties were generally comprised of (1) a *preamble*, in which the sovereign identified himself and sometimes summarized the covenant itself; (2) a *historical prologue*, which gave the historical basis of the covenant, often centred in a great act of deliverance or provision on behalf of the vassal; (3) the *covenant stipulations*, which mapped out the requirements that constitute loyalty to the relationship, by which the covenant is maintained; (4) the *covenant blessings or curses* contingent on keeping or breaking the covenant; and (5) the (often divine) *witnesses* to the covenant.³⁸

In the biblical text God takes this treaty form, typically used between a sovereign emperor and his dependent vice-regents, and applies it to his relationship with his people. God's self-revelation thus employs the concept of kingship as the fundamental framework for explaining his divine character and purposes, albeit a kingship modelled on kinship, in which the King was also the committed 'Father' of his people. Biblically speaking, divine kingship ('God') and kinship ('Father') become mutually interpretive (Isa. 9:6-7; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 4:6; Phil. 4:20; 1 Thess. 1:3; 3:11, 13; Rev. 1:6; etc.). As Jesus taught his disciples to pray in Matthew 6:9-10,

Our *Father* in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your *kingdom* come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Old Testament. For a helpful survey, in spite of his own historical scepticism concerning the early nature of the covenant concept in the Old Testament itself, see Ernest W. Nicholson, 'Covenant in a Century of Study Since Wellhausen', in his *God and His People, Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), pp. 3-117.

38. For the historical span of this treaty-form, see the Hittite treaties presented in William W. Hallo (ed.), *The Context of Scripture, Vol. II: Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 93-106, and the two later treaty inscriptions in Aramaic from Sefire (prior to 740 BC), pp. 213-216. Such evidence, together with the parallels between covenant language and early tribal kinship terminology and concepts, has led Cross, 'Kinship', pp. 17-18, to declare that 'the antiquity of covenant forms, of the language of kinship-in-law, and of religio-military federations of tribes is not in doubt. This has been clear since the discovery of the texts of international treaties of the second millennium.'

For as we have seen in the covenant formula, mutual belonging and 'love', like that between members of a family, becomes the 'glue' holding the covenant relationship between God and his people together (on God's love: Deut. 7:8; 10:18; 1 Kgs 10:9; Pss. 33:5; 146:8; Jer. 31:3; John 3:16; Eph. 2:4; 5:2; 1 John 4:10, 19; etc.; on our love for God: Deut. 6:4; Lev. 19:18; Mark 12:29-31; etc.).

In the ancient world, the ideal king, like the tribal 'father' or kinsman, expressed his love, manifested his power and magnified his rule by providing for and protecting his people (Pss. 68:5; 103:13). So, too, God's acts of deliverance and provision in the past, as well as his promises of blessing for the future, serve to reveal God's glory as the supreme, sovereign, self-sufficient supplier of all things for the sake of his people. God's self-revelation as 'King' is therefore the driving force of redemptive history, from the reign of God over his creation as reflected in humanity's exercise of dominion as his 'image' (Gen. 1:26-27) to the demonstration of his rule over the nations at the exodus (Exod. 15:18), and from the promise of his rule after the exile (Isa. 52:7; Dan. 7:13-18) to the dawning and consummation of the kingdom of God in the first and second comings of the Messiah (Mark 1:14-15; 1 Cor. 11:26; 15:24; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Tim. 4:1, 18; 1 Pet. 1:3-9). From the old covenant 'song of Moses' to the new covenant 'song of the Lamb', redemptive history is moving towards the full revelation of God's glory as the 'King of the nations' (Rev. 15:3). Hence, although well known for his emphasis on the covenant as the integrating centre of the Scriptures, Walther Eichrodt rightly points out that 'that which binds together indivisibly the two realms of the Old and New Testaments - different in externals though they may be - is the irruption of the kingship of God into this world and its establishment here'; this is 'the unitive fact' of the Scriptures.³⁹ The thematic lines of Scripture can therefore be summarized under the following fourfold rubric:

Divine Kingship as Father
via
Creation-Provision-Redemption
for
Humanity
in
Covenant

With great theological import, therefore, the relationship between the

39. Eichrodt, *Theology*, p. 26.

divine King and his people is interpreted throughout the Scriptures in terms of a family relationship between a father and his children. The parallel between humanity being in the image/likeness of God as King in Genesis 1:26 and Seth being in the image/likeness of Adam as his father in Genesis 5:3 indicates that God rules over his people as a father relates to his son. Exodus 4:22 makes it clear that Israel is not only God's subject, but also his 'son'. The people of the covenant are not merely those over whom God reigns, they are his 'children' (Ps. 103:13; Isa. 1:2-4; 63:16; 64:8; Hos. 1:10; John 1:12; 1 John 3:1; Rom. 8:16, 21). They thus relate to one another as members of the same 'family' (cf. Lev. 19:17-18; Deut. 15:12-18; Lev. 25:35-38).⁴⁰ As an expression of their covenant commitment, the kings of Israel took their place under God's authority as his 'sons' (Pss. 2:7; 89:26-28). So, too, Jesus knew himself sent by his Father as his royal and dependent 'Son' (Mark 1:11; 9:7; John 3:35; 5:19-26), called God '*Abba*' (Mark 14:36) and taught his disciples to pray to God as their heavenly Father (Matt. 6:9; Rom. 8:15). In response, the church declared God to be the 'Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; 11:31; Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3; Rev. 1:6) and declared themselves related to one another as brothers and sisters in God's 'family' (Isa. 43:6; 2 Cor. 6:18).

This is a consistent pattern. Reflecting its origins, the covenant relationship in the Bible translates the concept of divine kingship in terms of fatherhood, the category of vassal subjects in terms of sonship, the exercise of sovereignty in terms of love, and the call for obedience in terms of faithfulness within a family. With no diminution of God's absolute sovereignty, the biblical covenant thus becomes not only a political arrangement, but also a familial experience of belonging. Once again, this is the import of the covenant formula. Indeed, this same relationship can be expressed in terms of the relationship between a husband (God) and his wife (Israel), or between Christ and his bride, the church (Jer. 31:32; Hos. 2:16-20; Eph. 5:32).

The threefold covenant structure

The implications of God's covenant relationship with his people can now be drawn. From Genesis 1:1 onwards, divine kingship, expressed in kinship, is revealed through the provisions and providence of creation and new creation, as well as through God's acts of deliverance and protection, judgment and

40. So Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 751.

vindication on behalf of his people. Taken together, this revelation of God's glory is the context within which the faith of his people is understood. God's acts as 'King' and 'Father' bring about a response of childlike dependence from the people of his 'kingdom'. Moreover, God's provisions in the past provide the foundation for trusting his promises for the future. This active reliance on God's promises takes the form of obedience to the 'King's' commands as the organic expression of trust in his sovereignty and love. When one trusts God's word, one obeys his commands. The track record of God's ongoing provisions in the past and present and the corresponding surety of his promises for the future therefore establish and maintain a relationship of mutual faithfulness between the King/Father and his people/children.

This relationship of mutual belonging is codified in covenants in accordance with their provisions, stipulations and promises. The threefold covenant structure of the relationship between God and his people may therefore be outlined as follows:⁴¹

God's Unconditional Acts of Provision (as King/Father)
by which he Establishes the Covenant Relationship
(The Provisions and Promises of the Covenant,
given by grace in the *past*)

which leads to

The Covenant Stipulations or 'Conditions'
upon which the Covenant Relationship is Maintained
(The Commands of the Covenant,
kept by grace in the *present*)

which leads to

The Covenant Promises or Curses
based on Keeping or Not Keeping the Covenant
(The Consummation of the Covenant Promises or Curses,
to be fulfilled by grace in the *future*)

41. I have tried to map out this threefold structure and its implications in *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith, Understanding the Heart of the Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001). The following section is expanded from chapter 2 of that work. The punctuation of the outline is for reasons of emphasis.

There are several implications of this threefold covenant structure. First, its sequence demonstrates that God, as the Sovereign Ruler ('King'), always takes the first and decisive step in establishing the covenant relationship. As the 'Divine Kinsman' ('Father'), God does so by invading history (and the human heart!) with his great deeds of deliverance and provision on behalf of his people ('family'). In Rendtorff's words, covenant is 'always at God's behest and on his initiative'.⁴² Brought about by divine initiative, characterized by benevolence and extended to those who are not by nature his own, these divine provisions are acts of unconditional grace. Hence, to speak of a covenant relationship is to speak first and foremost of God's sovereign, self-determined election motivated by his love. Throughout redemptive history, God takes the initiative in establishing, swearing, keeping and remembering his covenant with his people.

Second, the inextricable link between the three elements of the covenant (Provision, Stipulation, Promise) makes clear that God's great acts of provision and deliverance, from the creation to new creation, together with God's rule over the lives of his people, are not isolated acts of divine power and love. God's provisions never stand alone. Every act of God's provision in the *past* brings with it promises for the *future*. In fact, the history of redemption demonstrates that the promises of God for the future are extensions of what he has done in the past. Moreover, the covenant formula itself reveals that the primary provision and promise of the covenant relationship is knowing God himself. Knowing God is not a means to something else, but all of God's other gifts are intended to bring his people into an ever-growing relationship with God himself. In other words, within the covenant relationship, 'the power, the ready assistance, the faithfulness of Yahweh experienced thus far are offered to the people for their permanent enjoyment'.⁴³ These provisions and promises (YHWH is *their* God) are the means by which God initiates and sustains their relationship with him (they are *his* people).

Specifically, God's provisions and promises create both the basis and motivation for responding to God with the trust and hope that honour him as one's Lord. God's people depend on God in the present because of his track record of faithfulness in the past; they desire to do so because of his promises for the future. Within the covenant, this response of faith and hope in God and his promises is defined in terms of obedience to a specific command towards God or neighbour as an embodiment of love (see, again, Deut. 6:4; Lev. 19:18;

42. Rendtorff, *Canonical*, p. 433.

43. Eichrodt, *Theology*, p. 38.

Mark 12:29-31; cf. Exod. 20:6; Deut. 5:10; John 14:15; 21:15-17).⁴⁴ Created by God's past provisions and motivated by his future promises, the commands of the covenant embody the necessary response to the God who provides. These commands express the significance of the life-determining reality of what God has done, is doing, and will do on behalf of his people. The commands of God, as the embodiment of love, are the provisions and promises of God applied to the daily circumstances of life. In other words, love is the direct expression of trusting in God's provision and hoping in his promises. Faith, hope and love are thus shorthand summaries of the covenant stipulations.

Third, the movement within the covenant structure from historical prologue to covenant blessing indicates that the focus of the covenant relationship is on the future. On the one hand, in the words of Jon D. Levenson, 'the function of the prologue is to ground the obligations of Israel to YHWH in the history of his gracious acts on her behalf'.⁴⁵ Yet, as Levenson points out,

The revelation of God in history is not, according to covenant theology, a goal in and of itself, but rather, the prologue to a new kind of relationship, one in which the vassal will show fidelity in the future by acknowledgment of the suzerain's grace

44. Cross, 'Kinship', p. 14: 'It should be stressed that adoptive sonship places obligations of kinship on the father, as is generally recognized, and also on the son, which is often forgotten. Kinship obligations are necessarily mutual. . . . There are no 'unilateral' covenants in a kinship-based society.' 'The whole design and motivation of the covenanted league was the establishment of mutual obligations' (p. 17). Cross's own surprising distinction, pp. 14 n. 41 and 15 n. 41, between conditional and unconditional promises, based on different types of dynastic clauses in suzerainty treaties, cannot be discussed here. Suffice it to say that this distinction is determined by the content of the promises themselves. I am not convinced that in the case of Abraham and David God makes unconditional promises concerning land and dynasty to future generations based on the covenant faithfulness of their forefather (thus establishing, as Cross puts it, a 'reservoir of grace'). Rather, based on Abraham's and David's keeping of the covenant, God promises that he will continually raise up a faithful remnant who hope in these promises in order that the promises may continue until they are fulfilled (cf. Gen 18:19; 1 Kgs 8:25-26). The 'reservoir of grace' is that God promises to be gracious to their descendants, not that the promise is independent of the faithfulness of future generations.

45. Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai & Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 37.

towards him in the past . . . The historical prologue is only the prologue. It ceases to be at a point when the covenant takes effect. From that moment on, what is critical is not the past, but the observance of the stipulations in the present and the sort of life that such observance brings about.⁴⁶

From this perspective, the commands of the covenant set forth the conditions by which our relationship with God will continue by indicating the ways in which his acts of grace are to be honoured. In doing so, God's commands describe the effects of that grace itself, since to be brought into a relationship with God is to be transformed by it. God's promises (or curses) for the future are therefore dependent upon keeping (or not keeping) his commands in the present, as they flow from what God has done (or not done) in the past and continues to do (or not do) in the present. For, as Elmer Martens has stressed, a 'covenant' is 'an arrangement between two parties in which the greater commits himself to the lesser in the context of mutual loyalty'.⁴⁷ So too, Eichrodt: the covenant relationship is always based on God's 'primal act in history', but maintained 'on definite conditions', so that it is always bilateral or two-sided, albeit with the burden for the keeping of the covenant 'unequally distributed', being 'protected by a powerful divine Guardian'.⁴⁸ The threefold structure of the covenant, with its divine initiative, provisions and promises of grace, and 'unequal distribution' of commitments, therefore guards against a legalistic distortion of the covenant relationship it embodies. The biblical covenants cannot be degraded 'to the level of an agreement based on mutual service between two partners of equal status'.⁴⁹

Fourth, the fact that the covenant stipulations of faith, hope and love are the essential link between experiencing God's provisions in the past and present and inheriting his blessings in the future signifies that all the promises of God are conditional (Eph. 2:8b: we are saved *through faith*). Nevertheless, there is no such thing as a merited or earned promise in the Bible, in the sense

46. Ibid., p. 43.

47. Elmer Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology*, 3rd ed. (N. Richland Hills: Bibal Press, 1998), p. 78.

48. Eichrodt, *Theology*, pp. 36–37. See too, Steven L. McKenzie, *Covenant* (St Louis: Chalice, 2000), p. 37: 'The covenantal relationship is best described as "divine commitment and human obligation"' (cf. pp. 39, 50, 120, 140–141). Significant is the fact that both God's commitment and his people's obligation to respond in obedience can be expressed in terms of 'loving loyalty' (*hesed*) (p. 141).

49. Eichrodt, *Theology*, p. 44.

of deserving God's blessings by virtue of our own abilities, efforts, ethnic identities, personal accomplishments, feelings or beliefs. In the words of Ephesians 2:8a, we are saved *by grace*. Although all the promises of God are conditional, the provisions of God that make inheriting those promises possible are given unconditionally. These include not only the acts of redemption culminating in the first and second comings of the Christ, but also the provisions in our personal lives needed to fulfil God's covenant conditions. In the words of Ephesians 2:8c, 'this [entire process of salvation by grace through faith] is the *gift of God*'. And again, the fundamental provision of God is the presence of God himself. Our lives of obedience are therefore 'fruit of [God's] Spirit', not exercises of our own willpower (Ezek. 36:26–27; Gal. 5:22–23 – note the condition in Gal. 5:21!). In this way, God's commands embody his gifts, since God demands from us in accordance with what he provides for us.

As redemptive history progresses, it therefore becomes clear that an essential aspect of God's deliverance from sin is the provision, through his transforming presence, of the ability itself to respond to his commands in order to inherit his covenant blessings (Deut. 30:1–10; Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 11:19–20; 36:25–28; 2 Cor. 3:3–6, 18; 5:17; Heb. 9:15; 10:11–31; Jas 1:5, 16–18; 3:13–18; for the expression of this truth by contrast, see Deut. 29:2–4). God's foundational act of deliverance on behalf of his people is their rescue from the penalty and power of sin, while his presence in their midst becomes his ongoing provision.

Finally, the covenant structure destroys all attempts to define 'faith' as a passive, mental assent to data from the past, or as an emotional attachment centred in private, religious 'experience'. The inextricable link between the provisions, stipulations and promises of the covenant reveals that to live in relationship with God is to respond with Spirit-determined obedience to God as the expression of one's ongoing trust in God. In Jesus' words, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments' (John 14:15). Thus, 'Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him' (1 John 2:4; cf. 4:20). This obedience, therefore, is not something added to faith; it is the organic expression of faith itself. In other words, the commands of God simply make it clear what trusting God looks like in concrete circumstances. Hence, every command is an implicit call to trust God's provisions and promises. In this regard, although this point cannot be developed here, the organic relationship between the covenant stipulations of faith, hope and love themselves means that where one exists all exist (1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5–6; Col. 1:3–5; 1 Thess. 1:2–6; 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:3–9, 21–22; Heb. 6:9–12; 10:19–25; Jas 2:14–26).

The common approach to the Bible that divides it into two messages, a 'law message', in which God demands something *from* us, and a 'gospel message', in which he gives something *to* us, is therefore inaccurate. Although we may wrongly try to prove ourselves or to earn God's favour with our own efforts (self-justification), the covenant relationship never begins with the commands of God or the efforts of humanity as the precursor to receiving his blessings. We are not called to obey God in order to gain what we do not have, but in response to what we already possess. The commands of God do not establish the covenant relationship, they reflect it. Biblically speaking, the covenant relationship always starts with the great acts of God in the past that embody and lead to his provisions in the present and his promises for the future. Only then, sandwiched between what God has done for us in the past and what he promises to do for us in the future (including our ongoing life with God 'in between'), do we find the commands of God for our lives now. As Goldsworthy puts it, 'In both Testaments the demand to be holy stems from the prior saving activity of God.'⁵⁰ This is true whether we are talking about God's relationship with Adam in the garden, with Israel in the wilderness and Promised Land, with Jesus throughout his earthly life, or with the church throughout the world.

The 'covenant' at creation

God's relationship with Adam and Eve established in the garden of Eden provides the basis and contours of the relationship between God and his people throughout history. There we see that God's provisions of creation for Adam and Eve in the *past* (Gen. 1:3–25, 29; 2:8–14) were the foundation upon which they were to obey him in the *present* (Gen. 1:26–28; 2:15), the result of which would be continuing in his covenant blessings in the *future* (Gen. 2:16). As we have seen, this interplay between the past, present and future in relationship to God is at the very centre of biblical theology.

Within this context, God's Sabbath rest after his creative activity indicated that, having conquered chaos, he was now reigning over his creation for the good of his people, having given them *everything* they needed to fulfil their mandate (Gen. 2:1–3). Like a sovereign sitting upon his throne, God's 'rest' was the expression of his control over his kingdom and the sufficiency of his

50. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom, A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (1981; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), p. 64.

completed provision. Hence the covenant stipulations that flowed from God's provision, both positive and negative, were not opportunities to earn from God something they did not already have. Rather, they were an expression of what dependence on God would look like in view of his pronouncement that what he had made for Adam and Eve was 'very good' (Gen. 1:31), that is, sufficient to meet their needs.⁵¹ As long as Adam and Eve trusted God for their future, in view of what he had already provided for them in the past, they could exercise dominion over the earth. In contrast, to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would be a declaration of independence⁵² flowing from a discontent with God's provisions and a lack of dependence on the promise of their sufficiency as embedded in God's Sabbath rest.

Whether we call the relationship between God and Adam and Eve at creation a 'covenant' relationship or not, since the specific word 'covenant' is not used in Genesis 1–3, the point to be made is that humanity did not initiate this relationship. God's command to Adam and Eve in 1:26 was not only self-determined, but also based on his acts and word of provision (Gen. 1:3–31). Furthermore, God's acts of provision were sovereign and free acts of grace. Nothing forces God to create, provide, rescue or deliver his people. In turn, God's commands flow from his gifts of grace. And, as Genesis 2:17 makes clear, God's promises of blessing or curse are based on the keeping or breaking of his commands as they reflect the reality of God's provision. Adam and Eve therefore reflect the reality of the invisible God as those created in his image (Gen. 1:26a) as they exercise the dominion made possible by dependence on their sovereign Lord (Gen. 1:26b).

The fact that Adam and Eve exist in this relationship with God explains why, as those created in the image of God, they reflect this relationship in their 'marriage covenant' with one another.⁵³ In line with this, Abraham's 'deep

51. John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), pp. 65, 136, 138.

52. So too, Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, p. 50.

53. For both Genesis 2:23–24 and Malachi 2:14 as references to marriage as a covenant, and its implications, see Hugenberger, *Marriage*, esp. pp. 152–165. See especially the parallels between the covenant-ratifying declaration formulae of 2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Chr. 11:1 and Gen. 2:23 (Hugenberger, p. 167). As Hugenberger, p. 202, points out, in Gen. 2:23 Adam is taking a covenant oath and speaking to God as his witness, not to Eve or himself. The meaning of the oath in Gen. 2:23 therefore is: 'I hereby invite you, God, to hold me accountable to treat this woman as part of my own body' (Hugenberger, p. 165). This is the biblical basis for Paul's

sleep' at the time of the covenant ceremony in Genesis 15:12 may recall Adam's 'deep sleep' at the time of his 'marriage' to Eve in Genesis 2:21.⁵⁴ God's subsequent relationship with Israel as his people, based on their 'creation' at the exodus, is also understood in terms of a marriage covenant (cf. Hos. 1–3; Isa. 43; 49; 51; 62; 63; 54:5–8; Jer. 2; 3:1–3; 30; Ezek. 16; 23). Israel's breaking of their marriage vows with one another, as well as their intermarriage with foreigners, can consequently be taken as an indication of their corresponding lack of covenant faithfulness to YHWH (Mal. 2:10–16; Prov. 2:17). The words of Malachi 2:10, 14–15 are therefore framed in the terms of the creation context and 'covenant' mandate of Genesis 2:24. Conversely, the church, brought about by the dawning of the new creation under the new covenant, is identified as the renewed 'bride' of Christ in fulfilment of the marriage mandate from Genesis 2:24 (Eph. 5:31–32). The use of the husband/wife analogy to describe the relationship between God and his people is unique to the Bible in the ancient world.⁵⁵ Moreover, this use of the marriage covenant as a way of explaining and evaluating the relationship between God and his people under both the old and new covenants supports the conclusion that God's solemn declaration of divine provision and corresponding command in Genesis 1:28–30 are best understood as delineations of the covenant relationship between God and humanity created from the beginning.

The example of Abraham

The life of Abraham is the patriarchal, and hence foundational, model of what it means to live in a covenant relationship with the 'God of our fathers' (Deut. 26:7; 1 Chr. 12:17; 20:6; Acts 3:13; 5:30; cf. Rom. 4; Gal. 3). In an act of undeserved mercy designed to redeem humanity after the judgment of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:7–9), God appeared to Abraham when he was an idolater in Ur and called him to go to Canaan (Gen. 11:31–32; 15:7; Josh. 24:2–3; Acts 7:2). Once in Canaan, he would inherit the land and become the father of a great nation through whose blessings from God the other nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3). Whereas fallen humanity had tried to make a

corresponding affirmation in Eph. 5:28 that 'husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.'

54. I owe this suggestion to Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, *Holy People, Holy Land, A Theological Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), p. 49.

55. Hugenberger, *Marriage*, p. 178.

'name' for itself with a city and the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:4), now God promises to make a 'great name' for Abraham (Gen. 12:2). But Abram stopped in Haran, halfway to the Promised Land of divine blessing (Gen. 11:31). In his continuing mercy, God therefore steps in once again to bring Abram to the final destination to which he had originally called him. In calling Abram a *second* time to go into Canaan (Gen. 12:1), God was following up on his prior act of having invaded Abram's life with yet another act of grace. As the apostle Paul would later put it, God's people can be sure that 'he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion', all the way to the day when Christ comes to judge the world (Phil. 1:6; see Deut. 31:6; Heb. 13:5). Abraham reaches the Promised Land not because of his great commitment to God, but because of God's great commitment to him (cf. Deut. 15:1–21; 17:1–21).

Clearly, then, the call of Abraham and the continuation of his covenant relationship with God are both acts of sovereign, unconditional election and grace. All we learn about Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia is that he was a pagan who worshipped other gods (Josh. 24:2) and that, before he left for Haran, God himself brought Abram out of Ur (Gen. 15:7; Acts 7:2). God did not rescue Abram from idolatry because of who Abram was, but in spite of who Abram was! Apart from God's saving acts in his life, Abram would have remained an idol worshipper in Mesopotamia. And if God had not continued graciously to intervene in Abram's life, he would have died in Haran with his father, Terah (Gen. 11:32).

Abraham and Sarah subsequently learned to trust God's promises through the ups and downs of their lives, even the promise of a miracle son to come in their old age. Thus, when eventually called to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham's willingness to do so was not an irrational leap into the dark, but the only sensible response to the God who had invaded his life with his presence. By means of some 'theological arithmetic', Abraham surmised that if God himself called his own promises into question (cf. Gen. 17:16–19; 21:12), then God would have to raise Isaac from the dead in order to keep his covenant commitment (Gen. 22:1–6, 8; Heb. 11:19). For when Abraham named the place where he attempted to sacrifice Isaac 'The Lord will provide' (Gen. 22:14), he was declaring the fundamental promise of the covenant relationship.

On his part, Abraham's steps of faith-obedience throughout his life, brought about by God's transforming presence and circumstantial provisions (sometimes even miraculously so), fulfilled the covenant stipulations. Abraham's life illustrates that 'faith' is not 'believing the unbelievable', but trusting in God's word because of the track record of God's faithfulness. Moreover, such faith always 'goes public' in acts of obedience, since biblical faith is not mental assent to data from the past or a passive reception of the

actions of others, but an active dependence on God for one's future. And to 'bank one's hope on the promises of God', rather than on one's own ability to provide for oneself, inevitably determines one's behaviour.⁵⁶

An alleged 'faith' that does not express itself in obedience is, by definition, not a true faith (Jas 2:21–26; Heb. 11:17; Gal. 5:6). Abraham's faith is expressed in his actions, from his leaving Ur and Haran to his leaving his servants with wood and knife in hand. His binding Isaac and laying him on the altar, like Abraham's denying the birthright to Eleazar and Ishmael, indicates that, no matter what the consequences, God was to be taken at his word and obeyed. For this reason, Genesis 15:6 is not the initiation of Abraham's covenant relationship with God, nor the first time he has responded to God in faith – it is the summary statement of a principle that describes the pattern of Abraham's life ('Abraham . . . believed the LORD') and God's evaluation of it ('and he counted it to him as righteousness').⁵⁷ In the same way, God declares in Genesis 26:5 that he will keep his covenant promises to Abraham 'because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws'. This is no contradiction in terms; it merely reflects the organic unity of faith-obedience and the persevering character of genuine faith within the covenant relationship. And so the New Testament can speak by way of illustration of Abraham being justified at four (!) different times in his life: when he left Ur/Haran in Genesis 12:4 (Heb. 11:8), when he later trusted God for an heir instead of turning to Ishmael in Genesis 15 (Rom. 4:1–3), when he subsequently trusted God for an heir in his and Sarah's old age in Genesis 17 (Rom. 4:19), and when he offered Isaac upon the altar in Genesis 22 (Jas 2:21).

Accordingly, Paul recognizes that Abraham is the 'father' or patriarch of all those 'who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised' (Rom. 4:12). From beginning to end, it was Abraham's faith alone that constituted him 'righteous' in relationship to God, inasmuch as faith is the only right response to God's covenant provisions and promises (cf. Rom. 4:3, quoting Gen. 15:6).⁵⁸ No self-generated or 'natural'

56. I owe this definition of 'faith' and its organic expression in hope and obedience, which plays such an important role throughout this essay, to the programmatic study of the nature of biblical faith in Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God's Plan for Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 251–402.

57. So too, Dumbrell, *Covenant*, pp. 54–55, 64–65, 67–69.

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54; and Mark A. Seifrid, 'Paul's Use of Righteousness Language Against Its Hellenistic Background', in D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien and Mark A.

human distinction or achievement (i.e., 'works') can constitute one just in God's sight (Rom. 4:4–5). God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). Not even circumcision, the old covenant mark of God's chosen people, justifies one in God's sight, since it is clearly 'the seal of the righteousness that [Abraham] had by faith while he was still uncircumcised' (Rom. 4:11). Anyone who 'shares the faith of Abraham', whether Jew or Gentile, therefore becomes part of the 'offspring' promised to Abraham by God's grace in Genesis 12:1–3 (Rom. 4:16).

The Sinai covenant

Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt extends the same covenant relationship to Israel as a people that was established at creation and re-established with Abraham. As part of the unbroken history of redemption, the Sinai covenant, like the Abrahamic covenant before it, 'must be part of God's purpose to make for himself a people on the basis of his grace'.⁵⁹ Hence, in explicit fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham (Exod. 2:23–25; 6:1–9), 'Sinai is dependent upon the covenant with Abraham and is an exposition of it'.⁶⁰ Like the call of Abraham, the exodus thus calls Israel as a nation to respond in trust-obedience to the God who saved her (see below). Rather than establishing a different covenant way of relating to God, 'Sinai fits into a God-Israel relationship in which obedience is already an integral component'.⁶¹ This is confirmed by the fact that the covenant formula declared to Abraham in Genesis 17:7–8 as the purpose of God's covenant with him is repeated in Exodus 6:7 and Deuteronomy 7:6–8 as the purpose of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt.⁶² Moreover, the covenant formula appears only twice as an explicit and direct

Seifrid (eds.), *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Vol. 2: The Paradoxes of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), pp. 39–74, 60–61, who argues both linguistically and contextually that the 'reckoning of faith as righteousness' in Paul's use of Gen. 15:6 in Rom. 4:3–5 is not an acceptance of faith as something it is not, i.e., an 'imputation' ('as if it were righteousness'), but 'a recognition of faith for what it is' (p. 60).

59. Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, p. 61.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

61. Birch et al., *Theological Introduction*, p. 151, pointing to Exod. 15:26; 16:4; 19:5.

62. I owe this parallel to Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula*, pp. 21, 23, 65: these texts provide 'the unfolding and continuing endorsement of the promise of the covenant given to Abraham' (p. 21).

explication of the term 'covenant', once at its first occurrence in Genesis 17:7 and then again at its last use in Deuteronomy 29:13, with the link between Abraham and Sinai in Exodus 6:7 functioning as the 'bridge' between them.⁶³

In fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham, the delineation of the covenant itself in Exodus 19:3-6 and 20-24 thus becomes a foundational explication of the threefold covenant structure as applied to Israel's relationship with God. God's bearing Israel to himself 'on eagles' wings' (19:4) leads to the covenant stipulations in response, the doing of which will mean the inheritance of God's promise and the fulfilment of his purpose for the nation. In the words of Exodus 19:5-6,

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

This text and its context make clear that Israel's redemption is an extension of God's sovereign right as Creator and that the covenant stipulations are once again framed by God's provision in the past, his presence now (see Exod. 19:9; cf. 24:45) and his promises for the future.

The movement from the historical prologue of God's deliverance from Egypt and the presence of his glory to the corresponding covenant stipulations is recapitulated in the famous 'prologue' of Exodus 20:1-2 and the ten 'words' that follow. Here, too, the Exodus passage recalls the Abrahamic covenant, focusing on the revelation of God's glory and his deliverance from Ur that likewise grounded the covenant stipulations with Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:7 with Exod. 20:1-2). Understood covenantally, the commands of God merely apply his character, power and promises to specific situations. For, to quote Martens again, the historical prologue in Exodus 20:2 illustrates that

the prior relationship which will form the framework for the law is the salvation by Yahweh of his people. The deliverance is the basis for obedience. The Ten Words are given to a people freed from bondage, and must be viewed in the context of redemption. The issue is not to establish a close relationship but rather to perpetuate it . . . It must not be thought that observance of the Ten Words is God's appointed way for humankind to establish acceptance with God. Far more does the covenant

63. Ibid., p. 69.

context invite us to consider the law as a way of expressing or maintaining the relationship that has already been established.⁶⁴

We are not surprised, therefore, when this same historical prologue grounds not only the 'ten words', but also the 'book of the covenant' in Exodus 20-24 and the 'holiness code' summarized in Leviticus 11:1-47 and 26:1-46 (see Lev. 11:45; 26:13). Nor are we surprised to find the same covenant formula affirmed as the purpose of the covenant (see Lev. 11:44-45; 26:12). The threefold covenant structure, based on God's redemption of Israel from slavery and the subsequent track record of his faithfulness in providing for his people in the wilderness, is then repeated throughout Deuteronomy's summary of Israel's covenant with the Lord.⁶⁵

The historical development within the Bible does not proceed from a creation order with humanity based on obedience to a qualitatively different order with Abraham based on faith, only to return to an obedience-based relationship with Israel. Rather, God's original covenant relationship with humanity before the fall based on creation is re-established with both Abraham and Israel as an act of redemption. Theologically, and from the perspective of the Torah as a whole, God's relationship with humanity in the garden of Eden is therefore understood from the perspective of the covenant with Israel and vice versa, so that the Sabbath as the climax of creation is made the sign of the covenant with Israel (Exod. 20:8-11; 31:12-17). Deuteronomy's focus on Israel's covenant relationship with God, now carried on in terms of the Sinai covenant (Deut. 4:9-14, 23; 5:1-2), casts its interpretive shadow all the way back to creation (Deut. 4:32-33; 5:12-15 [in which the exodus replaces God's rest at creation as the foundation for keeping the Sabbath, cf. 5:12-13 with Exod. 20:8-11]; 32:6-8). Conversely, Deuteronomy also looks all the way forward to Israel's restoration after the exile (Deut.

64. Martens, *God's Design*, p. 79. For Martens' delineation of this same covenant structure in Joshua 24 and in the book of Deuteronomy, see pp. 79-83. In this light, Martens, p. 79, warns us about the wrong-headed, 'legalistic and harsh' connotation that the term 'commandment' carries in our culture. In view of the Old Testament designation of the 'Ten Commandments' as the ten 'words' (Exod. 20:1; 34:28; Deut. 10:4), Martens suggests that 'if Exodus 20 is viewed against the ancient Near Eastern covenant stereotype, the harsh color of "commandment" is quickly softened to "rightful response".'

65. See, e.g., Deut. 6:20-25; 7:2-9; 10:12-11:32; 13:5; 15:15; 23:14; 24:17-18; 26:5-11, 16-19; 27:9-10; 29:1-15; 30:15-20.

4:29–31; 30:1–10). Israel's relationship with God does not start with creation and move forward, but begins with Israel's own experience of God as King and Father at the exodus (Exod. 4:21–23; 13:14–16; 15:18), from which she learns that God is also the universal God of gods and Lord of lords (Deut. 10:17).⁶⁶

As it was at creation, so too at Sinai, the sign of God's covenant promise to exercise his sovereignty on behalf of his people is once again the establishment of the Sabbath, since the Sabbath is God's declaration of the sufficiency of his provisions and of his ongoing commitment to meet the needs of his people (Exod. 31:16). Keeping the Sabbath is therefore a symbolic, public demonstration of one's dependence on God to lead, guide and provide for his people. Hence the practice of the Sabbath is instituted even before Israel reaches Sinai (Exod. 16:22–30), thereby indicating that the Sinai covenant itself is not the means of creating a relationship, but the ratification of a relationship already established. Beginning already with the manna in the wilderness, Israel's repeated failure to keep the Sabbath by not trusting in the Lord thus revealed her persistent, hardened heart of unbelief. Israel was different from the nations around her symbolically (she did not work on the Sabbath), but not really (she did not trust in YHWH, which the Sabbath was intended to symbolize). Indeed, Ezekiel declares that Israel broke the covenant by profaning the Sabbath in the wilderness before Sinai (Ezek. 20:13; cf. Exod. 16:27–30), after Sinai (Ezek. 20:16, 20–21), and during Israel's history in the land (Ezek. 22:8, 26; 23:38), the latter two of which lead to God's judgment in the exile (Ezek. 20:23–24; 24:1–14). In turn, Israel's future restoration will entail a return to a proper keeping of the Sabbath (Ezek. 44:24; 45:17; 46:3–4).

Jesus' declaration that as the Son of Man he is 'lord of the Sabbath' (Mark 2:28) is to be understood in this light. Through the forgiveness of sins (Mark 2:10), the circumstantial provision of what is needed for his disciples to follow him (Mark 2:25–26) and the showing of mercy (Mark 3:1–5), the Son of Man, like YHWH under the old covenant, is committed to meeting the needs of his people in accordance with his sovereignty. In turn, under the new covenant, God's people will respond in faith, thus truly keeping the Sabbath. As a result, the old covenant symbols become a matter of preference, but are no longer obligatory (Rom. 14:5–6; cf. this to circumcision as well in 1 Cor. 7:19 and to 'kosher' constraints in Rom. 14:2–6). The inauguration of this renewed 'Sabbath relationship' through the Messiah will one day be consummated in

66. See, too, Eichrodt, *Theology*, p. 33, following O. Procksch, for this important point.

the full Sabbath rest still to come for those who keep the new covenant through their dependence on God (Heb. 4:1–13). It is to this new covenant reality that we now turn our attention.

The 'new covenant'

The pivotal passage concerning the 'new covenant' is Jeremiah 31:31–34. My understanding of the argument of the text, with the explicit and implicit logic of its constituent propositions highlighted, runs as follows:

- v. 31 'Behold, the days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.
- v. 32a *Specifically*, I will not make it like the covenant which I made with their fathers. . .
- v. 32b *since* they broke this covenant of mine
- v. 32c *even though* I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD.
- v. 33a 'The reason the new covenant will be different in this regard is that this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' declares the LORD, 'I will put my Law within them, and I will write it on their heart.
- v. 33b *The result of this new covenant will be that* I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
- v. 34a *The ultimate consequence of this new covenant relationship in which I am their God and they are my people is that* they shall not teach again each man his neighbour and each man his brother saying, 'Know the LORD,'
- v. 34b *because* they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,' declares the LORD.
- v. 34c 'The basis for all of this is that I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.'

The initial thing to note concerning the 'new covenant' promised in Jeremiah 31:31–34 is its need.⁶⁷ When he smashed the tablets of the covenant stipulations

67. For a fuller exposition of this summary, see my *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel. The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3*, WUNT 81 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1995, and Paternoster, 2005), pp. 129–135. For a detailed study of the promise of the new covenant from Jer. 31:31–34 within its canonical context (and its relationship to Ezek. 11 and 36), in which it is maintained that this promise occupies the very centre of the Old Testament,

after Israel's idolatry with the golden calf, Moses demonstrated that the Sinai covenant had been broken from the beginning (Exod. 32:19). God delivered Israel as a people from slavery circumstantially, but she was largely still enslaved to sin; in a word, she remained 'stiff-necked' (Exod. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut. 29:4), with an 'uncircumcised heart' (Deut. 10:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26; Acts 7:51; cf. Ezek. 20). The history of Israel as a people under the Sinai covenant was consequently marked by faithlessness.⁶⁸ God therefore declared through Jeremiah that under the present covenant not even the intercession of Moses, not to mention Jeremiah himself, could avert God's wrath and the eventual judgment of the exile (Jer. 15:1; cf. 9:12-16; 11:14; 14:11; 26:8-11; 36:23-25, 31). For, as Jeremiah declares,

From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers. (Jer. 7:25-26)

Despite the chance to repent offered to the nation (cf., e.g., Jer. 26:1-3; 36:1-3, 7; etc.), there was therefore no longer any hope for the people in their present condition. What was needed was nothing less than a new beginning, a 'new covenant', under which Israel would be decisively changed in her relationship

representing as it does the 'perspektivische Fluchtpunkt' (perspectival point of departure) for the Old Testament, see Christoph Levin, *Die Verbeisung des neuen Bundes in ihrem theologiegeschichtlichen Zusammenhang ausgelegt*, FRLANT 137 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985). Levin's central thesis is that the promise of the new covenant combines with God's fundamental promise to Israel that 'I am the Lord, your God' to encompass all of the promises of the Old Testament (p. 12). Hence Levin concludes that the promise of the new covenant in Jer. 31 is not principally and qualitatively new in contrast to the past; rather, it is a renewal of God's intended relationship with Israel, which had been lost due to Israel's history of unfaithfulness (cf. pp. 138-141). The covenant promised in Jer. 31:31-34 is 'new' in the sense that it is a radical break with the past, but it is not new in its structure, content or purpose. In this latter case it is a 'renewal' (cf. pp. 140-141). These central points are fundamental to the position argued here.

68. For the motif of the 'stubbornness' of Israel's evil heart in relationship to the perpetual disobedience of the people, see Jer. 3:17; 7:24; 9:13; 13:10; 16:12; 17:23; 18:12; 19:15; 23:17. For the point that the covenant people and their leaders have continued to break the covenant, see Jer. 2:8; 5:31; 6:13, 17; 10:21; 14:18; 23:13-14; 27:16; 28:2; etc.

to God. Such a 'new' covenant would be the divine answer to the perennial problem of Israel's hard-hearted rebellion. Jeremiah 31:31-34 thus looks to a future in which Israel's present state of rebellion and 'stubbornness' will no longer undermine her covenantal relationship with God.

Second, Jeremiah 31:32-33 describes the nature of this 'new covenant' by contrasting it to the Mosaic/Sinai covenant made with the fathers at the exodus (cf. Jer. 11:1-6). This former covenant is rehearsed in Jer. 11:3-5, followed by the grim news that both the fathers 'when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt' (Jer. 11:7) and the Israel and Judah of Jeremiah's own day (Jer. 11:9-10; cf. 22:9-10) have broken this covenant 'in the stubbornness of [their] evil heart' (Jer. 11:8). They consequently stand under the wrath and judgment of God (Jer. 11:11). Hence the essential difference between the new covenant and the Sinai covenant is the fact that the new covenant will not be broken like the previous one. God, like a 'father', remained faithful to his covenant commitments in the old covenant; the people did not. In short, the new covenant, as an 'everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten' (Jer. 50:5; cf. 32:40), is a 'renewed' covenantal relationship.

The reason for this confidence concerning the new covenant is given in verse 33. Unlike the Sinai covenant, God declares that in this new covenant he will place his law 'within them' and 'write it on their heart'. Writing the law on their hearts is the reversal of the present situation, in which the sin of Judah is 'written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart' (Jer. 17:1). In the context of Israel's stubborn rebellion from the exodus onwards, this can only mean that under the new covenant Israel's rebellious nature will be fundamentally transformed so that her hardened disobedience will be replaced with an obedience to God's covenant stipulations. The metaphor of the law written on the heart thus corresponds to the new covenant promise found in Ezekiel 11:19-20 and 36:26-27 of a new 'heart of flesh' and the pouring out of the Spirit, by which God will cause his people to obey his statutes. The law 'within' and 'written on the heart' are images for a people who accept God's law as their own and obey it willingly, rather than reject it as foreign or obey it only externally.⁶⁹

69. On the theme of the law written on the heart, W. J. Dumbrell, *End of the Beginning: Revelation 21 - 22 and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), pp. 91-92, rightly points to Deut. 6:4-5; 10:16; 11:18 to show that the law was always intended to be in the heart, and to Ps. 40:8; Isa. 51:7 to show that doing the will of God depends on the placing of the law in the heart. Hence 'Jer. 31:33 may plausibly be viewed as simply saying Yahweh is returning to the idealism of the Sinai period in the New Covenant relationship' (p. 92).

As a result of keeping God's covenant stipulations, their relationship with YHWH will be maintained, rather than repeatedly broken.

The consequence of this 'new covenant', unlike that of Sinai, will be the realization of the relationship between God and his people promised to Abraham and initiated with Israel, once again summarized in the covenant formula, 'I will be their God, and they shall be my people' (31:33b). This pledge picks up and underscores the covenant relationship of the Bible, occurring in various forms around twenty-five times in the Bible.⁷⁰ More important than its frequency is the fact that the covenant formula unpacks in summary form the covenant relationship ratified in the redemptive covenants of the Scriptures, from the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:7) to the Sinai covenant (e.g., Exod. 6:7; 29:45-46), and from the summaries of Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut. 4:20; 29:12-13) to the promise of the new covenant (Jer. 24:7; 31:33; 32:38-40; Ezek. 36:26-28; 37:26-28).

Here, too, we see the unity of the Bible. Jeremiah 31:31-34, like the Sinai covenant before it, equates the past establishment of the covenant relationship with its future realization after the exile; the former is restored in the latter. This equation is also prefigured in the past-future link regarding the covenant formula found between Exodus 29:45 and Leviticus 26:12 and between Leviticus 26:42 and 26:45. This correspondence reflects the fact that there is no difference in the covenant formula or its constituent structure when it is related to the patriarchs, exodus, Sinai or new covenant.⁷¹ Indeed, the covenant formula of mutual, kinship-type belonging, 'God as the God of Israel and Israel as the people of God', occurs in only two basic contexts within the history of redemption: in the establishment of God's relationship with his people through Abraham and Sinai under the 'old covenant' and in the eschatological restoration of this relationship with Israel (and the nations) after the

70. Besides the texts listed here, Martens, *God's Design*, p. 72, points to Lev. 26:12; Deut. 26:16-19; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1; 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23. Cf. Rom. 9:25-26; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 21:3.

71. Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula*, pp. 80-81, quote from p. 83. Rendtorff argues that the same covenant relationship established with Abraham is called to remembrance and confirmed 'whenever new presuppositions or constellations arise' (p. 81). Thus in Exod. 6 the foundation laid with Abraham in Gen. 17 is extended to the people of Israel (p. 83) and to the nations in the new covenant. Therefore 'there can in fact really be no other further covenant', as reflected in the fact that the covenant is already called 'everlasting' at its foundation with Abraham in Gen. 17:7, 19 (p. 83). As its fulfilment, in Exod. 31:16 the Sinai covenant is also called 'everlasting'.

exile.⁷² The first is based on the exodus from Egypt in fulfilment of the call of Abraham, in which God established his intention to dwell among his people, although this covenant was broken by all but a remnant. The second is based on the promised 'second-exodus' redemption of Israel from the exile, in which God will finally fulfil his purpose of dwelling with his people as a whole. Rendtorff therefore concludes that the covenant formula is used as the 'first and last cornerstones' of the Old Testament canon.⁷³

The covenant formula makes explicit that within the covenant relationship, whether inaugurated or realized, God and his people belong to one another in mutual obligation. YHWH's declaration to be Israel's God underscores that he is committed to them in a way unlike his commitment to any other people (Gen. 15:1; Exod. 19:5-6; 33:13-16; Deut. 33:29). In turn, their identity as 'his people' points to the exclusivity with which they must trust in him for their future (Exod. 20:1-6; Deut. 6:4). And the two sides of this covenant relationship are inextricably related. For, as Martens concludes, 'In the demand which can be heard in the "my people" of the formula there shines through the initiative of God in taking for himself a people,' just as 'in the promise, "I will be your God" . . . there is implicit also the demand that Israel recognize no God but Yahweh.'⁷⁴ So at the same time that it brings forth God's demand, the covenant formula leaves no doubt that the obligation of being God's people is always grounded in God's prior acts of deliverance and redemption.

Third, the line of thought from Jeremiah 31:32-33 represents yet again the threefold structure of the covenant relationship. In the new covenant, as in the Sinai covenant before it, keeping the law, made possible by God's prior act of redemption (cf. Jer. 31:1-40), is what maintains the covenantal relationship between God and his people. Rather than suggesting that the law is somehow negated or reinterpreted within the new covenant, Jeremiah 31:31-33 emphasizes just the opposite. The law written on the heart is the Sinai law itself as

72. Cf. its use in regard to the Sinai covenant after the first exodus in Gen. 17:7-8; Exod. 6:7-8; 29:45-46; Lev. 26:11-12; Deut. 4:20; 7:6; 14:2 and in regard to the future eschatological restoration of Israel after the 'second exodus' from exile in Jer. 24:7; 31:31-34; 32:38-40; Ezek. 11:20; 34:24; 36:26-28; 37:21-28; Zech. 8:1-8. So Scott Hafemann, *Second Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 284. This was first pointed out to me by James Scott, 'The Use of Scripture in 2 Corinthians 6:16c-18 and Paul's Restoration Theology', *JSNT* 56 (1994), pp. 73-99. See also Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula*, pp. 89-90.

73. Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula*, p. 89.

74. Martens, *God's Design*, p. 86.

the embodiment of the will of God. The contrast between the 'old' and new covenants is not a contrast between a covenant with and without an external law; nor is it a contrast between two different kinds of law. Rather, the contrast between the two covenants is a contrast between two different conditions of the people who are brought into these covenants and their correspondingly different responses to the same law. Furthermore, there is absolutely no synergism in the new covenant, as if our obedience were added to God's grace. The mutuality of the covenant relationship is not a partnership in which we add our willpower to God's grace. As the metaphor of the 'law written on the heart' in Jeremiah and its decoding in Ezekiel 11:19–20 and 36:26–27 indicate, the very ability to keep the covenant, like its establishment, is the direct and continuing result of God's transforming presence, manifested in his Spirit. The new heart granted by God is not an enablement for covenant-keeping. Instead, it is the cause of covenant-keeping.

Fourth, verse 34 states both the result and ground of this new covenant transformation of God's people. As a result of having God's law written on their hearts, the people of the new covenant will have no need to be taught to 'know' the Lord, since they will all know him. The transformed heart, which is essential to the new covenant, thus provides the conceptual transition from verse 33 to verse 34, since in Old Testament anthropology the 'heart' is not only the seat of volition and desire, but also the organ most often associated with the function of understanding and intellectual knowledge.⁷⁵ Under the new covenant there will no longer be any distinction within the covenant community between those who know and do not know the Lord, i.e., between those who do and do not have a transformed heart. By definition, all those who belong to the new covenant community will do so by virtue of their transformed heart.

Unlike the role played by the prophets and the other members of the remnant under the old covenant, in the new covenant community there will no longer be any need to admonish 'one's neighbour', that is to say, others

75. Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), pp. 46–47, 51, pointing to Deut. 29:3; Prov. 15:14; and Ps. 90:12. It is thus significant that the use of the 'heart' occurs most often in the Wisdom literature (99 times in Proverbs; 42 times in Ecclesiastes), and second in the 'strongly didactic Deuteronomy' (51 times) (p. 47). As that which describes 'the seat and function of reason', the heart 'includes everything that we ascribe to the head and the brain – power of perception, reason, understanding, insight, consciousness, memory, knowledge, reflection, judgment, sense of direction, discernment' (p. 51).

within the covenant community, to enter into a covenant relationship with the Lord. The people of the new covenant, all of them, will stand in continuity with the faithful remnant of the old covenant. Those delivered from the penalty and power of sin by the death and resurrection of Christ and the pouring out of the Spirit will enter into the covenant relationship first established with the faithful remnant of Israel. In Romans 4:9–17, 23–25, Abraham is therefore the example of faith and the father of all who believe, while in 2 Corinthians 3:18 Moses' experience of the Lord in the tent of meeting is identified with the experience of all Christians. In Romans 11:1–6, the 7,000 who did not bow their knee to Baal are paralleled to the present-day remnant of believing Jews, and the long list of the faithful from the Old Testament in Hebrews 11 illustrates the definition of faith itself (cf. Heb. 11:1).

Fifth, the foundation of the new covenant is the fact that, despite her past sin, a new possibility for the forgiveness of Israel's iniquity will be opened up so that God will 'remember their sin no more' (v. 34). The changed condition of God's people, and their resultant obedience to the covenant, together with the promise that the covenant community will no longer be a mixed multitude of believers and unbelievers, are both based upon the divine forgiveness that makes the new covenant possible. Here, too, Jeremiah's promise of the forgiveness to come corresponds to the new covenant declarations in Ezekiel 36, this time to the promise that, as with the ritual cleansing of the priests under the old covenant, God will one day 'sprinkle clean water' on all his people so that they 'shall be clean from all [their] uncleannesses' (Ezek. 36:25).

Finally, the promise of the new covenant points to the first coming of the Messiah as the turning point of redemptive history. In fulfilment of this promise, he is the centre point of history. Without the life and death of the Christ, there would be no new covenant, nor would the remnant of believers under the old covenant have experienced the forgiveness of sins declared and symbolized in the old covenant sacrificial system. Planned by God before creation, but manifested in the midst of history, the cross of Christ is applied retroactively to the saints of the old covenant as well as proactively to those of the new as the sole foundation for the life of faith (Rom. 3:21–26; 1 Pet. 1:17–21; Heb. 10:1–22). The history of redemption therefore hinges on the inauguration of the new covenant through Christ's life, death and resurrection. As the corollary to the establishment of the new covenant, Jesus' enthronement as the messianic Son of God at his baptism not only identifies him with his people as they confess their sins, thus previewing the cross, but also inaugurates the kingdom of God, which is declared and demonstrated throughout his subsequent ministry (Mark 1:9–11, 14–15). Its consummation is then

foreshadowed at the transfiguration of Jesus as God's Son (Mark 9:7), proclaimed symbolically at his 'triumphal entry' into Jerusalem as the 'Son of David' (Mark 11:1-10), effected by the death of the Son on the cross (Mark 15:39), and ratified by his resurrection and enthronement as the Son of God at the right hand of the Father (Rom. 1:4).

Paul: an apostle of the new covenant

The apostle Paul joins the other apostles in his role as a messenger of the redemption and the reality of the Spirit brought about by the Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-11). As such, in fulfilment of Jeremiah's promise, he understands himself to be 'a minister of a new covenant' (2 Cor. 3:6; cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-26). The context of this statement is instructive. Paul has just finished contrasting his ministry of the Spirit, who is at work in the heart of the Corinthians, with the old covenant ministry of the 'writing' that took place on the stone tablets of the law (2 Cor. 3:3; cf. Exod. 24:12; 31:18; 32:15; 34:1; Deut. 9:10). In doing so, Paul pictured the Corinthians' new identity in Christ in terms of the 'new covenant' imagery of Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26-27: the Corinthians, as Christ's 'letter', have been written not with 'ink', but with the Spirit, not on tablets of 'stone', but on 'tablets of human hearts' (2 Cor. 3:3).⁷⁶ Under the old covenant, the locus of God's activity was in the law; in the new age promised by Ezekiel 36:25-27, God will be at work in human hearts by the power of the Spirit. The Corinthians need look only at their own transformed lives for proof that the new age of the new covenant has dawned (cf. Joel 2:28-29; Isa. 32:15; 44:3; 59:21; and the use of Jer. 31:31-34 in 2 Cor. 3:6).⁷⁷

If Moses is the 'law-giver' who mediates the Sinai covenant as a result of

76. In 2 Cor. 3:3c Paul establishes *two* contrasts, not one: a contrast between the two *means* of writing (human agency of ink versus the divine agency of the Spirit) and a contrast between the two *spheres* of the writing (the old covenant tablets of the law versus the new covenant 'tablets' of the human heart). This reading differs from the common attempt to read 3:3c as a single contrast between writing with ink on tablets of stone (!) and the Spirit's effect on the heart. To do so mixes Paul's metaphors to the point of self-destruction.

77. For a development of this argument in detail, see my *Suffering and Ministry in the Spirit. Paul's Defense of his Ministry in 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:3* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990; reprinted, Paternoster, 2000).

the exodus, Paul is the 'Spirit-giver' who mediates the new covenant as a result of the 'second exodus' that has come about through Christ. Like Moses, Paul is called to be mediator between God and his people. Unlike Moses, the essential content and context of Paul's ministry is not the law given to a hard-hearted people (2 Cor. 3:12-14), but the Spirit poured out to a forgiven people of transformed hearts (3:7-11). Whereas the law without the Spirit remains merely a 'letter' that kills, the power and presence of the Spirit 'gives life' by transforming God's people into his own image (2 Cor. 3:6, 7, 18).⁷⁸

Paul's ministry of the Spirit in fulfilment of Jeremiah's promise (2 Cor. 3:8) leads him to allude to the call of Jeremiah himself in 2 Corinthians 10:8 and 13:10 in order to underscore his call to be a servant of the new covenant. In the former text, Paul tells the Corinthians that the Lord gave him apostolic authority 'for building you up and not for destroying you'. In the latter, Paul closes his letter by introducing a verbatim inclusio to 10:8 when he asserts that in confronting the rebellious in Corinth he is acting in accordance with the 'authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down' (13:10). The reference to Jeremiah is clear. For, in calling Jeremiah, the Lord had declared,

Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.

See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms,

to pluck up and to break down,

to destroy and to overthrow,

to build and to plant.

(Jer. 1:9b-10)⁷⁹

Despite the positive and negative content of his call, due to Israel's covenant unfaithfulness Jeremiah's subsequent ministry was focused on the divine judgment to be meted out in Israel's exile.⁸⁰ Yet the promise of a new covenant was

78. For Paul's argument from the Old Testament in 2 Cor. 3:7-18, see my *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, pp. 189-436.

79. Cf. Jer. 24:6; 38:27-28; 42[LXX 49]:10; 45[LXX 51]:4[34] for the continuation of this theme, and esp. LXX 38:27-28; 49:10; 51:4, where the related vocabulary of 'to tear down' and 'to build up' found in Paul is used.

80. As Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 160, points out, 'This note of doom is sounded at the beginning of Jeremiah's call with four of the six verbs that describe his task as a prophet . . . "to uproot, to destroy, to tear

also intimated in Jeremiah's call (cf. 'to build and to plant'). In short, 'Looking back on the failure of the covenant at Sinai, which has led to the judgment of exile, Jeremiah announces a new covenant.'⁸¹

Paul's statement in 10:7-8 thus reflects his conviction that the new covenant restoration of God's people, announced by Jeremiah by way of prophetic sign (cf. his buying land during the Babylonian siege, Jer. 32:14-27), has now taken an eschatological step forward, including its extension to the nations, as in Corinth. Paul's role as a 'servant' of the new covenant, detailed in 2 Corinthians 3:4-18, is now explicitly tied to Jeremiah's role as a prophet of the new covenant. In 2 Corinthians 2:16-3:18, Paul argued that he was called like Moses, but with a distinctively different ministry from that of Moses. So, too, Paul argues in 10:7-8 that he was also called like Jeremiah, but with the distinctively different ministry to come that Jeremiah himself had announced. In this way, both the law and the prophets find their goal in Paul's ministry, made possible by the inauguration of the new covenant brought about by the coming of the Messiah.

This is why Paul's role as a minister of the new covenant is to mediate the Spirit, since Paul's primary purpose as Christ's apostle is salvation, not judgment (cf. 1:11, 23-24; 2:3; 3:6-11, 17-18; 4:6, 13-15; 5:13-15; 6:2). Although Jeremiah and Paul were called both to save and to judge, the accents of their respective ministries have been reversed. Jeremiah anticipates this 'role reversal' when he introduces the promise of the new covenant in 31:27-28 as follows:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the LORD.

down, and to smash . . . (1:10)" . . . Jeremiah, whose call resembles those of Moses and Samuel, had a mission that was largely negative . . . The prophetic task of destruction constitutes the main theme of Jeremiah's activity. It was a wrecking ministry, a ministry of demolition. . . In fact, God's uprooting of what he had planted in Judah, now beginning to take place through his prophet, functions in Jer. 45:4-5 as an introduction to the oracles against the nations in chapters 46-51. Thus, 'this judgment of Judah, expressed in tearing down and uprooting, has been a prelude to universal judgment' (Dempster, p. 163, emphasis mine).

81. Ibid., p. 159. Cf., too, Jer. 24:6-7; LXX Jer. 38:27-28; 49:10.

Given the new covenant context and content of Paul's ministry, it is only natural, then, that the Jeremiah theme of 'building up' becomes a common description of Paul's call to plant churches and to strengthen the faith of believers (cf. 2 Cor. 3:9-10, 12, 14; 8:1; 14:3, 5, 12, 26; Rom. 14:19; 15:2, 20; 1 Thess. 5:11). The establishment of Israel and the intended restoration of the nations, both 'torn down' under God's judgment in the exile, are now being 'built up' as a result of the divine 'yes' to God's promises in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). It is of note, however, that whereas Paul adopts Jeremiah's language of building up Israel and restoring the temple and applies them both to the church in Corinth, he does not pick up the language of God once again planting Israel in the land after the exile, although this too is inextricably linked to the new covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34 (cf. Jer. 31:1-26; 31:38-40; 32:36-44). This may reflect Paul's conviction that the church is not yet the consummation of the new covenant promises. The coming of the Christ and Paul's ministry as his apostle are not the 'climax of the covenant',⁸² but its penultimate ante-climax. The kingdom will be consummated only when the Christ returns.

The church as the family of the new covenant

As the corollary of his self-understanding, in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 Paul addresses the church in Corinth as the 'family of God' (kinship) living between the first and second comings of the Messiah (kingship).⁸³ At the heart of this

82. Contra one of the central points of N. T. Wright's programmatic works; see my review of his *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) in *JETS* 40 (1997), pp. 305-308.

83. This paragraph and the next are taken in large measure from my *Second Corinthians*, pp. 279-289. The reality of the church as the 'children of God' is a common theme in the New Testament. Cf. Mark 3:33-35; 10:30; John 1:12; 11:52; 1 John 3:1-2, 10; Rom. 8:14-19, 21; Eph. 5:1; Phil. 2:15; Heb. 2:10-11; 12:7-10; Jas 1:2, 16-19; 4:11; 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:17; 2 Pet. 1:10; etc. The corollaries to this conception are, on the one hand, the 19 explicit references to 'God the Father' in the New Testament and the 12 uses of 'God and Father', and, on the other hand, the pervasive theme of the mutual love that members of God's people are to have for one another. In our present passage, Paul links the concept of the church as God's 'children' with their identity as 'the temple of the living God' (6:16) due to their reception of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:3; cf. 2 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). For the development of the temple motif throughout biblical theology, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and*

understanding, therefore, is the covenant relationship that exists between God and his people. In line with this, in 2 Corinthians 6:16 Paul applies the covenant formula from Leviticus 26:11–12 to the church in Corinth. Now, however, Paul formulates it in the third person ('I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people'), rather than the second, as in the original text ('I will make my dwelling among you . . . and will be your God. . .'). This alternation is not Paul's own doing, but derives from his conflation of Leviticus 26:11–12 with the new covenant promise of Ezekiel 37:27 ('My dwelling place shall be with them. . .').⁸⁴ By interpreting Leviticus 26:11–12 in terms of Ezekiel 37:27, Paul is reflecting his conviction that the original covenant promises and the expectation of Israel's restoration after the judgment of the exile are continuing to be fulfilled in the Corinthian church! Moreover, in combining these texts Paul brings the law and the prophets together to make his point, unified as promise and fulfilment. Thus, 'Paul's conflation of Leviticus 26:11–12 and Ezekiel 37:27 intentionally reflects this correspondence between the Sinai covenant of the first exodus and the new covenant of the "second"'.⁸⁵

In 2 Corinthians 6:17–18 Paul draws the scriptural conclusion (note the 'therefore' [*diō*] of 17a) that flows from a covenant relationship with God: three commands from Isaiah 52:11 ('go out . . . be separate . . . touch no unclean thing') and three ensuing promises from Ezekiel 20:34 (LXX), 2 Samuel 7:14 and Isaiah 43:6 ('then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me'). Paul's application of these commands to the Corinthians again demonstrates that he sees the beginning fulfilment of the promised restoration of God's people already taking place in the establishment of the Corinthian church. If the Corinthians are part of God's new covenant people, then they too, like Israel, must separate from unbelievers (now, however, within the church). The 'covenant prologue' of their

the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God (Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

84. I owe this insight to James Scott, 'The Use of Scripture', p. 82. As he points out, the conflation of these two texts is confirmed by the Septuagint rendering of Lev. 26:11, which reads 'covenant' where the Hebrew text says 'dwelling'. Moreover, Scott, p. 82, points out that Lev. 26:12 is often used in Jewish tradition typologically in the context of the return from exile and the restoration of the broken covenant (cf. Jubilees 1:17, which combines Lev. 26:12 with Zech. 8:8 to refer to the new covenant).

85. Hafemann, *Second Corinthians*, p. 284.

redemption in Christ, by which they have become the 'temple of God's Spirit' (6:16b; 7:1a), leads inextricably to the corresponding 'covenant stipulations' of purity (6:14–16a; 7:1b).

In accordance with the covenant structure, the threefold commands of 6:17abc lead directly to the threefold promises of 17d–18, which are also a conflation of Old Testament texts.⁸⁶ In its original context, Ezekiel 20:34 is God's promise of welcome to those who will return home from the exile after their 'second exodus' deliverance.⁸⁷ If Isaiah 52:11 calls God's people to 'come out' from the world, then Ezekiel 20:34 indicates that God will 'welcome them in' when they do so. Its combination with the promise of a Davidic Messiah from 2 Samuel 7:14 points to the Jewish expectation that this restoration from exile would take place through and under the reign of David's long-promised 'son'.

Knowing that the Messiah would bring about this 'second exodus' deliverance of God's people, Paul goes on in 6:18 to quote the adoption formula from 2 Samuel 7:14. But he now makes it plural ('sons') in accordance with the previous texts and combines it with the reference to 'daughters' from Isaiah 43:6 (cf. 49:22; 60:4), where Israel's 'second exodus' restoration is expressed in terms of the rescue of 'sons and daughters'. As a result of this collage of texts, God's promise to become the 'father' of David's 'son', who came to be seen as the Messiah, is expanded to include all of God's people as his 'sons and daughters'.⁸⁸ Here, too, Paul is thinking covenantally. Scott has shown that the statement 'I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me' is an 'adoption' formula that is specifically used in Scripture to indicate the covenant relationship between God and his people.⁸⁹ In

86. As Scott, 'Use of Scripture,' p. 86, points out, this becomes evident in the Greek text, where Paul's use of the crasis-form 'and I' (*kagō*) in v. 17d is best understood to be the combination of the 'and' (*kai*) from Ezek. 20:34b (LXX) and the 'I' (*egō*) of 2 Sam. 7:14a (LXX).

87. For the use of the verb 'to welcome' as a promise of deliverance from exile, see Hos. 8:10; Mic. 4:6; Zeph. 3:19, 20; Zech. 10:8, 10; Jer. 23:3; Ezek. 11:17; 20:34; 22:19, as adduced by Scott, 'Use of Scripture', p. 85 n. 51.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

89. *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88, where he points out that the *adoption* formula in 2 Sam. 7:14 corresponds to the *covenant* formula used in 2 Sam. 7:24, and that Jer. 31:1 (*covenant* formula) corresponds to 31:9 (*adoption* formula). So, too, Jubilees 1:24 applies the *adoption* formula of 2 Sam. 7:14 to the Israel of the return from exile as an extension of the *covenant* formula used in Jubilees 1:17. Cf. the use of 2 Sam. 7:14 in

fulfilment of this covenant relationship, established by Jesus as the messianic 'Son' of God, the Corinthians are promised that they too, as God's 'sons and daughters', will participate in the consummation of God's salvation (for the corresponding use of the concept of 'adoption' [*huiothesia*], cf. Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:4-5; Eph. 1:5). The church can therefore be regarded as the 'family' of God, brothers and sisters 'in Christ'. Once again, kingship and kinship are united.

Paul's point is as clear as it is stark. Since the Corinthians are now God's new covenant people in fulfilment of the prophets' hopes (vv. 16c-16e), they must separate from the unbelievers among them (17a-c) in order to continue within the covenant as God's 'sons and daughters' in anticipation of God's future deliverance. This call to purity is necessitated by the fact that the kingdom is here, but not yet here in all its fullness. Hence 2 Corinthians 6:16c-18 reflects the same covenant structure and 'already but not yet' eschatological tension that is characteristic of the Bible as a whole.⁹⁰

Conclusion: the new covenant 'sermon' of 2 Peter 1:3-11

Our survey has shown that the covenant relationship at the heart of the Bible is expressed not only in explicit references to the covenant and its covenant formula, but also in the mode of argumentation found throughout the Scriptures. To illustrate this point, we conclude by looking at a delineation of the threefold covenant relationship from the end of the canon as found in 2 Peter 1:3-11.

The key to this passage is the role of verses 3-4 in relationship to what follows. Although there is a long commentary tradition which considers verses 3-4 to be part of the opening greeting in verse 2, it seems more appropriate to take these two verses to be the opening of the body of the letter, as reflected

the Qumran text 4QFlor. 1:11-13, where it refers to the Davidic Messiah, and T. Jud. 24:1-3, where the adoption formula is applied to both the Davidic Messiah and the eschatological people of God. In the New Testament, cf. too Rev. 21:3 (covenant formula) with Rev. 21:7 (adoption formula); and John 20:17.

90. For the working out of the basic biblical structure of promise - inaugurated fulfilment/promise - consummation in relationship to every major biblical theme, in which the inaugurated fulfilment of the Old Testament promises in the New Testament become themselves promises to be fulfilled with Christ's return, see the encyclopedic work of Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*.

in the punctuation of the Nestle Aland²⁷ text. Though not unattested in later Christian literature,⁹¹ such a lengthy expansion of the greeting is rare in ancient letters and would be unique among the New Testament epistles. It would also be highly unusual both theologically and rhetorically to begin the body of a letter with the inference and imperatives of verses 5a-7b without the prior indicative to support them that verses 3-4 provide. To do so in this case would subvert the crucial theological structure of the text in which, as in the rest of the Bible, the imperatives never precede the indicative realities upon which they are based and from which they organically derive. Moreover, 1:3 is a genitive absolute construction, the regular placement of which is before the main clause that it modifies,⁹² thereby also indicating its forward-looking relationship to verse 5a. As attested in the papyri, such genitive absolutes 'may often be seen forming a string of statements, without a finite verb for several lines', just as we find here.⁹³ As Bauckham rightly observes, 'The connection with v. 2 is largely stylistic, whereas the connection with vv. 5-7 is fundamental to the flow of argument.'⁹⁴

This decision is confirmed by the threefold covenantal structure that emerges once verses 3-4 are aligned with verses 5-11. It is not surprising that this structure is found in 2 Peter 1:3-11, since scholars have pointed out that this Old Testament covenant structure became the basis for a standard homiletic pattern in early Jewish and Christian literature.⁹⁵ The argument of 2 Peter 1:3-11 thus runs as follows:

91. See Ignatius, *Eph.* 1:1; *Rom.* 1:1; *Smyrn.* 1:1.

92. So Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, Vol. III of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, ed. J. H. Moulton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), p. 322. For further substantiation of this point, see Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC 50 (Waco: Word, 1983), p. 174.

93. Quoted from Moulton as found in A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), p. 513. Robertson himself points out that such strings of phrases are less common in the New Testament. This is evidence of the elevated style of 2 Peter.

94. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 173.

95. Cf., *ibid.*, p. 173, where Bauckham recognizes that vv. 3-11 'appear to follow' this pattern and points to the work of K. Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary* (Baltzer: Oxford University Press, 1971), as support for its Old Testament backdrop and to that of K. P. Donfried, *The Setting of Second Clement in Early Christianity*, *NovTSup* 38 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), for its development in the early church. Bauckham himself does not develop this insight further.

1. The Historical Prologue (vv. 3–4);
2. The Covenant Stipulations (vv. 5–7, 10a);
3. The Covenant Promises and Curses (vv. 8–9, 10bc–11).

This covenant structure also explains how the promises that accompany an entrance into the eternal kingdom of God in verses 4 and 11 can be conditional, based on doing the commands of verses 5–7, while at the same time being expressions of grace, having been granted in accordance with one's calling and election as declared in verses 3 and 10. On the one hand, both the stipulations and the promises of God are grounded in the prior act of God's (or perhaps Christ's) calling and made possible by his presence and power as described in verses 3–4: 'His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness. . .'. This 'historical prologue' precedes and supports the covenant stipulations and its promises. Hence the acts of divine deliverance, the fulfilment of the ensuing commands and the reception of God's promises are all expressions of God's sovereign grace and election. On the other hand, inasmuch as the focus of these stipulations is on the still unfulfilled promises of God, the promises remain conditional. One must maintain the covenant relationship with God by keeping his stipulations in order to inherit his promises.

The covenantal structure of this passage indicates that salvation is wholly dependent upon the grace of God's calling and election as its only sufficient condition, while at the same time being dependent on the response of those who have been called as its necessary condition. However, since the fulfilment of the covenant stipulations and inheritance of the promises are both made possible by God's saving activity, past, present and future, the conditional nature of the promises of God cannot be perverted into a 'covenant of partners' in which obedience to the covenant stipulations becomes an independent basis for inheriting God's promises. This would be to add the covenant stipulations to the historical prologue in some kind of functional equivalence. Nor can the obedience described in verses 5–7 be viewed as our contribution to the process in a divine-human synergism.⁹⁶ God's grace and calling do not enable

96. In commenting on v. 5, it is therefore important not to speak of the believer's diligence 'as something brought in alongside of what God has already done (vv. 3–4)', or to conclude that 'the Christian must engage in this sort of *cooperation* with God in the production of a Christian life which is a credit to Him', as is often done (quotes from D. Edmond Hiebert, 'The Necessary Growth in the Christian Life: An Exposition of 2 Peter 1:5–11', *BSac* 141 [1984], pp. 44, 45, quoting

obedience. Rather, they bring it about. Obedience to the covenant stipulations is the inextricable expression of the calling and election of God in the lives of his people. The indicatives of the historical prologue (vv. 3–4) thus lead by nature to the imperatives of the covenant stipulations (vv. 5–7), which in turn lead to the indicative promises of future blessing or curse (vv. 8–11).

In accordance with its covenant structure, the explicit purpose of 2 Peter 1:3–11 is to summarize the covenant relationship that exists in Christ between God and his people in order that it might be continually 'remembered', even after Peter's death (2 Pet. 1:12–15). Indeed, this call to 'remember' Peter's teaching is itself a distinctly covenant act (cf. the inference in 1:12a and Num. 15:39; Deut. 8:2; 15:15; 24:18; etc.). The writing and reading of Peter's letter is therefore in keeping with the Old Testament provisions concerning the necessity of preserving the covenant and its stipulations for future generations. It is this necessity of 'remembering' the covenant that leads Peter to write his 'testament' as an epistle to his churches in order to call them to faithful endurance as they await 'the coming of the day of God' (2 Pet. 3:12). Such 'remembering' links Peter's readers to the faithful covenant partners found throughout the Bible.

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Michael Green as well; emphasis mine). Nor should one conclude, as does Frederick W. Danker, '2 Peter 1: A Solemn Decree', *CBQ* 40 (1978), pp. 64–82, that the letter 'establishes a dynamic reciprocity between three benefactor-entities: Peter, representative of apostolic tradition, the writer's community, and Jesus Christ' (p. 80). Rather than possessing 'a partnership in benefaction' or exercising 'reciprocity between Benefactor and Recipients' (p. 81), the covenant structure indicates that the benefaction in view in vv. 1–11 is completely one-sided, with God's people in total dependence upon him as recipients. There is no doubt that this section reflects a solemn tone also found in imperial decrees; but this merely reflects the subject matter common to both, i.e., a 'solemn call to faithful allegiance to One whom the Christian community would recognize as the greatest Benefactor of the ages' (p. 65).

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and Paul R. House

H

**CENTRAL THEMES *in*
BIBLICAL THEOLOGY**

Mapping unity in diversity

B
Baker Academic
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