You Shall Have No Other Gods Before Me: Covenant in Faith and History

David H. Palmieri
Colby College

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You shall have no other gods before me

Covenant in Faith and History

Colby College
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A Senior Honors Project Submitted to
The Department of Religious Studies
To my grandmother, Alice Palmieri, whose love and kindness, spanning three generations, has been my inspiration.

All my love, Nana.

-David
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Most of all, I extend my deepest love to my greatest teachers, my parents. Their unabated support in my life's journeys has given me the courage to pursue my dreams, no matter how fantastic. "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for [they] are with me; [my] rod and [my] staff—they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

And to all who have tolerated my seemingly endless preoccupation with this paper that ate my life ...
“You shall have no other gods before me”

Covenant in Faith and History
INTRODUCTION

In this paper I have attempted to explore “covenant” in faith and history, as it extends throughout the entire framework of the Bible and the entire history of the people who produced it. With such a monstrous topic, a comprehensive analysis of the material could take a lifetime to do it justice. Therefore, I have taken a very specific approach to the material in order to investigate the evolution of covenant from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) to the Christian Scriptures (New Testament).

I have made every effort to approach this thesis as a text-based, non-doctrinal discussion. However, having my own religious convictions, it has, at times, been difficult to recognize and escape my biases. Nevertheless, I am confident that this final product is, for the most part, objective and free from dogmatism. Of course, I have brought my own perspective and understanding to the material, which may be different from the reader’s, so there may be matters of interpretation on which we differ, but c’est la vie in the world of religious dialogue.

The structure of this paper is symmetrical: Part I examines the traditions of the Torah and the Prophets; Part II, the Gospels and Paul’s letters. I have balanced the Old Testament against the New Testament (the Torah against the Gospels; the Prophets against Paul) in order to give approximately equal weight to the two traditions, and establish a sense of parallelism in the structure of my overall work.

A word should also be said about three matters of style. First, instead of the customary Christian designation of time as B.C. or A.D., I have opted to use the more modern B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era) notations. This more
recent system is less traditional; however, more acceptable in academia, and, certainly, more appropriate for a non-doctrinal discussion. Second, in the body of this paper I have chosen to highlight several texts using a variety of colors. This highlighting serves (1) to call the reader’s attention to specific passages, and (2) to compare the language and imagery of similar texts. All highlighting has been added to the texts at my own discretion. Finally, the divine name, traditionally vocalized as “Yahweh,” is a verbal form of the Hebrew “to be,” and means, approximately, “I am who I am.” This name was considered too holy to pronounce by the ancient Israelites, and, the word adonai (“My LORD”) was used in its stead. In respect of this tradition, I have left the divine name in its original Hebrew form. Accordingly, יהוה should be read as “the LORD” throughout this paper.

All Hebrew and Greek translations, where they occur, are my own. The Greek translations are based on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible.
And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

Deuteronomy 6:5
A. **Introduction**

When two or more parties confront one another, there are two choices: make peace or fight. There is no question of simply living together without defining mutual rights. Defining these rights, if done faithfully, establishes an alliance between the people of both sides. Otherwise, if an agreement cannot be made, or trickery is involved, hostilities grow strong, with the threat of retribution. I would suggest, then, that peace is the fundamental component of any successful relationship.

A peaceful relationship, however, is difficult to maintain unless the involved parties are bound by some form of oral or written agreement. This type of relationship is called a covenantal relationship. "A covenant is an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance." It is more than a mere contract, though; it includes a

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deeply personal and solemn promise that “establishes an artificial blood kinship between the parties.”

In modern times, the idea of covenant has been grossly mistreated by the shuffle of legal papers and general mistrust of the spoken word. It is hard by today’s standards to understand relationships founded upon the idea of promise because so little value is now placed in the word’s meaning. A promise is absolute; it is a solemn vow of obedience to the spoken word—it does not end unless it has been fulfilled. Too often today promises are handed out like hot dogs at a ball game, and disappear just as quickly. In ancient times, however, promises were so fundamental that whole communities lived and died by them. To understand this idea fully it is necessary for us “to exercise our imaginations and our learning, [and] to put ourselves into the different social worlds” where the covenant idea was primary and universal—more specifically the ancient world.

Written documents were seldom used in the ancient world as instruments for establishing relationships between different social groups, so oral agreements served the purpose of written contracts. These covenants were made binding by formal oaths and often involved ritual acts (such as covenant meals or peace-offerings) “that were regarded as essential to the ratification of the binding promise. As instruments for the creation and regulation of relationships between different social groups, covenants combined customary ways of thinking characteristic of both parties.” Seeing that society was not regulated in ancient times as it is today, the understanding and predictability of another party’s behavior was essential in preserving the peace within a shared community.

Since covenants were a means for establishing new relationships between social groups, “both the substance and form had to be valuable and meaningful to both parties.” To achieve that balance, the terms of the covenant had to be determined by the particular

4Hillers. p. 8.
5Mendenhall. p. 1180.
6Mendenhall. p. 1180.
parties involved, making the covenant a unique or kairotic moment in the peoples' history. By no means should it be assumed that a covenant's content was fixed from one condition to the next. The covenants we will explore were established from very particular points of view at very particular points in history. Accordingly, consistent with oral and written traditions over periods of time, the forms, although not fixed, may remain the same, but in different cultures and different ages the substantiates are likely to be different.

It would be false to propose that there was only one kind of arrangement between people which was labeled "covenant." The idea is much broader than that, and can be used to relate to any number of relationships secured by a binding promise. George E. Mendenhall, a professor at the University of Michigan and leading expert on the covenant idea, has identified three forms of covenant: the treaty, the loyalty oath, and the divine charter. In light of my own research, I have recast these three forms as: the treaty ([a] parity and [b] suzerainty), the imposed oath, and the divine promise. I have also stratified the forms of covenant into a system I call the Spectrum of Covenants. This spectrum is simply a way of categorizing the types of relationships found within each form of covenant. Schematically, it looks like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Divine Promise</th>
<th>Parity Treaty</th>
<th>Suzerainty Treaty</th>
<th>Imposed Oath</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increasing degree of obligation</td>
<td>&lt;</td>
<td>Decreasing degree of obligation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The spectrum should become clearer as we discuss each form of covenant, but, for now, understand that each pole of the spectrum involves a one-sided, unilateral obligation.

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7 The word "kairotic" derives from the Greek word kairos (καιρός), meaning "an appointed time" or, in other words, a unique time that defines the identity of a community (i.e., Israel's exodus from Egypt).
8 Hillers. p. 6.
9 Mendenhall. p. 1179.
Chapter 1

B. Parity Treaty

Parity is the state of being equal. A parity treaty, therefore, is an agreement made between two equal parties to ensure peace and the common good. Within the Spectrum of Covenants, mutual obligation can be said to be the intrinsic property in this form of covenant. Other than a sworn oath that binds both sides to the covenant, and possibly a peace-offering, this form of covenant contains no complexly arranged elements. An appropriate illustration of a parity treaty is found in the covenant established between the Biblical figures of Abraham and Abimelech at Beer-sheba.

Abimelech, knowing Abraham is a faithful man, says to him:

22God is with you in all that you do. 23Now swear to me that you will not deal falsely with me, or my offspring, or my posterity. Like I deal with you in kindness, you will deal with me and with the land in which you dwell as an alien. 24And Abraham said, "I swear it."

25Abraham reprimanded Abimelech because of a well of water that was seized by servants of Abimelech. 26But Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this; even you did not tell me. Moreover, I have not heard of it until today."

27Abraham took sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.

28Abraham set apart seven ewe-lambs of the flock, and Abimelech said to Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe-lambs that you have set apart?"

29He said, "These seven ewe-lambs you will take from my hand in order that you will be a witness for me that I dug this well" (Genesis 21).

In one sentence—"like I deal with you in kindness, you will deal with me"—Abimelech extends a gesture of peace, puts himself on equal terms with Abraham, and binds himself to the covenant with his statement of kindness. Abraham's response of "I swear it" binds him, likewise, to the terms of kindness, and a sworn oath is established that mutually obligates both sides to the covenant.

The peace-offering idea is also present in this passage as a means of ratifying the covenant. When Abraham gives the flock of sheep and herd of cattle to Abimelech, it is a...
sign of his allegiance to the covenant between them. Abimelech’s acceptance acknowledges this display of kindness (the term of the covenant) and ensures his allegiance, as well, thereby establishing peace and parity.

C. Suzerainty Treaty

Any nation that controls another nation in its international affairs but allows it domestic sovereignty is called a suzerain. A suzerainty treaty, then, involves a certain degree of imbalance where a lesser party (the vassal) is bound to a greater party (the lord), not by force, but by a sense of obligation for something the lord has done for the vassal. Unlike parity treaties, suzerainty treaties have several complexly arranged elements.

More specifically, there are seven elements arranged as follows:

1. Identification of the Covenant Giver
2. Historical Prologue
3. Stipulations
4. Provisions for Deposit and Periodic Public Reading
5. List of Witnesses
6. Blessings and Curses
7. Ratification Ceremony

Contrary to what we might first assume, suzerainty treaties are not unilateral arrangements within the Spectrum of Covenants. Certainly there is a more weighty obligation on the vassal’s part, but the lord is not free from promise; it is expected that the vassal will be placed under the lord’s protection.

The following example illustrates the form and function of each part of a suzerainty treaty.11

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10 These elements have been adapted from Mendenhall. pp. 1180-1182.
Chapter 1

1. **Identification of the Covenant Giver:**

These are the words of the Sun Mursilis, the great king, the king of the Hatti land, the valiant, the favorite of the Storm-god, the son of Suppiluliumas, the great king, the king of the Hatti land, the valiant.

In the preamble, the great king (the Sun Mursilis) begins by identifying himself, his land, and his numerous elaborate titles. Clearly, he establishes an imbalance in the treaty relationship by recognizing himself as great, favorite, and valiant. “The underlying ideology holds that the great and powerful [king] is bestowing a gracious relationship upon [the vassal].”\(^{12}\) By defining this superiority over the vassal, the great king creates a condition where the bulk of the obligation can later be placed on the vassal.

2. **Historical Prologue:**

Aziras was the grandfather of you, Duppi-Tessub . . . As my father fought against his enemies, in the same manner fought Aziras. Aziras remained loyal toward my father and did not incite my father’s anger. My father was loyal to Aziras and his country; he did not undertake any unjust action against him or incite his or his country’s anger in any way . . . When my father became god [Hittite idiom for “died”], and I seated myself on the throne of my father . . . Aziras, your grandfather, and Du-Tessub, your father . . . remained loyal to me as their lord.

When your father died, in accordance with your father’s word I did not drop you. Since your father had mentioned to me your name, I sought after you. To be sure, you were sick and ailing, but although you were ailing, I, the Sun, put you in the place of your father and took your brothers (and) sisters and the Amurru land in oath for you.

Without a doubt, the great king recounts a very particular and unique history to the vassal. This history provides the foundation upon which the covenantal relationship will be established. By reviewing his many generous deeds, the Sun Mursilis attempts to build the relationship on mutual exchange rather than on military force. The implication

\(^{12}\)Mendenhall. p. 1180.
is that by fixing a sense of gratitude in the vassal, the great king will receive complete
obedience from the vassal to the treaty stipulations.

3. **Stipulations:**

When I, the Sun, sought after you in accordance with your father’s
words, and put you in your father’s place, I took you in oath for the king
of the Hatti land, the Hatti land, and for my sons and grandsons. So honor
the oath to the king and the kings kin! And I, the king, will be loyal
toward you, Duppi-Tessub ... But you, Duppi-Tessub, remain loyal
toward the king of the Hatti land, the Hatti land, my sons (and) my
grandsons forever ... Do not turn your eyes to anyone else!

With my friend you shall be friend, and with my enemy you shall
be enemy ... If anyone utters words unfriendly towards the king of the
Hatti land before you, Duppi-Tessub, you shall not withhold his name
from the king ... Or if the king of the Hatti land is getting the better of a
country and puts them to flight, and they come to your country, if then
you desire to take anything from them, ask the king of the Hatti land for it!
You shall not take it on your own! If you lay hand on it by yourself or
conceal it, you act in disregard of the oath.

The stipulations of a suzerainty covenant define the lord/vassal relationship as an
exclusive one—“Do not turn your eyes to anyone else!”—where the vassal is forbidden
to enter into covenants with other parties. The most basic obligation set upon the vassal
is that of unending loyalty to the lord—“But you, Duppi-Tessub, remain loyal toward
the king ... forever.” In this case, if the vassal should ever violate his oath, he acts “in
disregard of the oath” and will be held in betrayal to the king. The wishes of the king are
expected to be obeyed and defended at all costs of the vassal. Note, however, that the
lord is not free from all obligation to the vassal. The Sun Mursilis clearly states that “I,
the king, will be loyal toward you,” and binds himself, as well, as a protector of the
vassal.

Furthermore, note the use of conditional sentences in this treaty—“If you lay
hand on it ... [then] you act in disregard of the oath”—and the command form—“you
shall not”—which are typical elements in the stipulations of a covenant. Both “impair a
vividness and directness lacking in the laws." It may seem awkward that there are no penalties defined for disregard of the oath, but the stipulations are not by definition that explicit. The penalties are left for the blessings and curses of the treaty.

4. **Provisions for Deposit and Public Reading:**

A duplicate of this tablet has been deposited before the Sun-goddess of Arrina, because the Sun-goddess of Arrina regulates kingship and queenship. In the Mitanni land a duplicate has been deposited before Tessub, the lord of the kurinnu [a shrine] of Kahat. At regular intervals shall they read it in the presence of the sons of the Hurri country.

In the ancient world, treaties were considered sacred objects deserving veneration by the parties involved. Therefore, the treaty was placed in the temples or shrines of the chief gods of both the lord and the vassal. In these sacred spaces, the treaty was considered protected by the gods and read by the gods so that they could be reminded of the stipulations that were sworn to, with them as witnesses.

The public reading frequency generally ranged from one to four times a year. Just as the gods were believed to read and be reminded of the treaty, the parties involved were, as well, expected to venerate and remember this common piece of history.

5. **List of Witnesses:**

At the conclusion of this treaty we have called the gods to be assembled, and the gods of the contracting parties to be present, to listen and to serve as witnesses: The Sun-goddess of Arinna who regulates kingship and queenship in the Hatti land, The Sun-god, the lord of heaven, the Storm-god, the lord of the Hatti land ... [over fifty names of other gods follow], all the gods and goddesses of the Hatti land ... the mountains, the rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, heaven and earth, the winds and the clouds ...

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13 Hillers. p. 34.
14 Mendenhall. p. 1181.
Chapter 1

An exhaustive list of divine and natural witnesses such as this was common in all ancient world treaties. The lord’s gods were first called upon to be witnesses to the vassal’s oath so that should the vassal break his oath, the gods would remember and inflict their punishment. The vassal’s gods were reciprocally called upon so that “there was no god left that [he] could appeal to for protection if he wanted to violate his solemn oath.” The elements of the natural world were also called upon as witnesses (i.e. “Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak. Let the land hear the words of my mouth!” [Deuteronomy 32:1]) because it was believed that each element was controlled by a deity who would cause disaster if the oath was ever broken. The function of this comprehensive list is to fix the vassal’s obligation with esteem for the gods rather than fear of the lord’s army.

6. Blessings and Curses:

The words of the treaty and the oath that are inscribed on this tablet—should Duppi-Tessub not honor these words of the treaty and the oath, may these gods of the oath destroy Duppi-Tessub together with his person, his wife, his son, his grandson, his house, his land and together with everything that he owns.

But if Duppi-Tessub honors these words of the treaty and the oath that are inscribed on this tablet, may these gods of the oath protect him together with his person, his wife, his son, his grandson, his house and his country.

With the gods as witnesses, the blessings and curses explicitly define the rewards and punishments to be delivered upon the vassal. The blessings and curses are not at all limited to the vassal, but are all-inclusive of his whole being—himself, his wife, his children, his property, and his country. The threat of total annihilation, even more so than the consolation of the blessings, provides the most effective guarantee that the vassal will remain loyal to the lord and to the treaty.

\[^{15}\text{Mendenhall. p. 1181.}\]
If at any time the vassal should violate the covenant, the lord holds the authority to annul the covenant and deal with the vassal by force. The lord “could legitimately claim to be an agent of the avenging deity(ies)” and, therefore, choose to command his forces to utterly destroy the vassal and all that was his. Importantly, the Hebrew word to describe such annihilation is herem (הֶרֶם), meaning “to exterminate.”

7. Ratification Ceremony.

“Just as early American Indians sometimes shared a peace pipe to formally seal a treaty, the people of ancient times [frequently] offered sacrifice to seal their covenants.” The ceremony always involved some visible sign that the covenant parties could identify with. For example, the sacrificed animal was associated with the vassal who, if he violated his promise, would receive the same fate of death as the animal. Meals (or banquets) were also frequently held for the establishment of a covenant to signify the union of the two parties involved. Sharing a meal meant to share the same life, and to share the same life meant to be a single living entity. In these meals, the sacrificed meat was drained of its blood and shared among the participants. In ancient times, the eating of meat was reserved for special occasions such as these covenant ceremonies, but the blood of the sacrificed animals was considered sacred because it contained the life of the animal—“Only be sure that you do not eat the blood because the blood is life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh” [Deuteronomy 12:23]. Therefore, the blood was not consumed in the ratification ceremony, but, rather, dashed against the sides of the altar or smeared on its horns, distinguishing the sacrifice from a mere slaughter.

17The sacrificed animals were specifically reserved to cattle, sheep, goats, doves, and pigeons because they exhaust the list of edible species under ancient Israel’s dietary laws.
As I have presented, the bulk of the obligation in a suzerainty treaty falls upon the vassal, but the lord, too, is bound to serve and protect. Unlike the vassal, however, the lord holds the authority to execute punishment if the stipulations of the covenant are violated. This lack of perfect balance puts suzerainty treaties deeper into obligation than parity treaties in the Spectrum of Covenants. For a more elaborate example of a suzerainty covenant we must turn to the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant traditions of the Hebrew Bible, which will be intensively explored in the next chapter.

D. **Imposed Oath**

Moving beyond the treaty forms of covenant, the imposed oath almost speaks for itself. In this form of covenant, the lord imposes the obligation upon the vassal by brute force and reinforces the stipulations by means of elaborate curses. In terms of the Spectrum of Covenants, an imposed oath is completely one-sided with the obligation lying solely on the vassal: he could choose either to obey or to face utter destruction by the lord’s forces. All the standards of a peaceful relationship were surrendered to military force, and the vassal’s only incentive for compliance was his fear of the curses so extensively drawn out in the covenant.

Similar to the suzerainty treaty, the imposed oath has several elements that contribute to its form. These elements are:

1. Identification of the Vassal
2. Identification of the Lord
3. List of Divine Witnesses
4. Stipulations
5. Curses

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19Mendenhall, p. 1182.
The historical prologue, provisions for deposit and periodic public reading, blessings, and ratification ceremony present in the suzerainty form of covenant have all been cast aside to create the harsh effect of the imposed oath. Using the same treaty text cited above, my following modification will illustrate the form of an imposed oath:

1. **Identification of the vassal:**

   Duppi-Tessub together with his person, his wife, his son, his grandson, his house, his land and together with everything that he owns [shall owe unwavering allegiance to ... ]

2. **Identification of the lord:**

   The Sun Mursilis, the great king, the king of the Hatti land, the valiant, the favorite of the Storm-god, the son of Suppiluliumas, the great king, the king of the Hatti land, the valiant.

3. **List of divine witnesses:**

   [You, Duppi-Tessub, shall swear allegiance in the presence of] the Sun-goddess of Arinna who regulates kingship and queenship in the Hatti land, The Sun-god, the lord of heaven, the Storm-god, the lord of the Hatti land ... [over fifty names of other gods follow], all the gods and goddesses of the Hatti land ... the mountains, the rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, heaven and earth, the winds and the clouds ...

4. **Stipulations:**

   You, Duppi-Tessub, [shall] remain loyal toward the king of the Hatti land, the Hatti land, my sons (and) my grandsons forever ... Do not turn your eyes to anyone else!

   With my friend you shall be friend, and with my enemy you shall be enemy ... If anyone utters words unfriendly towards the king of the Hatti land before you, Duppi-Tessub, you shall not withhold his name from the king ... Or if the king of the Hatti land is getting the better of a
country and puts them to flight, and they come to your country, if then you desire to take anything from them, ask the king of the Hatti land for it! You shall not take it on your own! If you lay hand on it by yourself or conceal it, you act in disregard of the oath.

5. Curses:

Should Duppi-Tessub not honor these words of the treaty and the oath, may the gods of the oath destroy Duppi-Tessub together with his person, his wife, his son, his grandson, his house, his land and together with everything that he owns.

Without the more complex and amiable elements of the suzerainty treaty, the imposed oath is extremely severe in its threat of herem to the vassal. The arrangement is intensively unilateral and, thus, places it to the far right in the Spectrum of Covenants.

E. Divine Promise

The last form of covenant turns back to the opposite side of the spectrum where the obligation falls completely with the lord (in this case it is literally the LORD God). Mendenhall identifies this form of covenant as a divine charter—“defining a number of biblical motifs where a deity presents some special privilege, power, or status to a human being.”20 I agree with Mendenhall on the content of his definition, but I think the term charter is misleading because it identifies too closely with written documents such as the charters of early America. Since written documents are in no way associated with this form of covenant, I prefer to use the word promise instead because it associates more closely with the spoken word and is truer to the text.

In the divine promise, God alone is bound by an oath to humankind, and God establishes some unique sign that serves as a reminder of the promise. Humans have no

20Mendenhall. p. 1188.
direct obligations and simply reap the benefits of the heavenly gesture. Similar to the parity treaty, the divine promise has no complex elements so its form cannot be particularly explored. The two most notable divine promises concern Noah and Abraham in the book of Genesis. These two cases will be further detailed in Chapter 2.

F. Conclusion

The preceding discussion should elucidate the fact that there are several arrangements that can be defined as covenants. Through the development of the Spectrum of Covenants, I have attempted to show that the degree of obligation varies from one form of covenant to the next. In common, covenants are established with the purpose of establishing relationships between different parties whether they be equal or not. In contrast, covenants, in any form, are established from very particular points of view at very particular points in history and, therefore, vary in content. Finally, the underlying principle to keep note of is that peace is the intrinsic promise in all these forms of covenant. And in ancient times, this was the promise by which communities lived and died.
CHAPTER 2

Covenant in the Torah:
Noah, Abraham, and Moses

A. Introduction

Just as people may be joined to one another in covenant, so God may be joined to
people. This idea is so central to the Judeo-Christian tradition that it has given name to
the two main divisions of the Christian Bible: the Old Testament and the New
Testament. The word “testament” derives from the Latin word *testamentum*, meaning
“covenant,” so the divisions of the Christian Bible can be understood as the Old and New
Covenants, respectively. Since covenant is a principal biblical theme used to describe the
relationship between God and humanity, it should be clear that the word covenant (or
testament) “refers not to the divisions of the Bible as such, but rather to the particular
alliance between God and [humanity]).¹ It should also be noted that the idea of old
versus new raises several questions concerning the continuity of Biblical history, and the
idea of successionist theology. This old versus new motif will be explored more fully in
the next three chapters.

Chapter 2

The Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, is comprised of thirty-five books and is divided into three major sections, often referred to by the acronym TaNaK: the Law (Torah לְוָיָם), the Prophets (Nevi'ım נְבֵיִם), and the Writings (Kethuvim כְּתֻבִּים).

The Law and the Prophets (specifically Hosea, Amos, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah [Isaiah 40-55] for this research) are essential in developing the covenantal relationship between God and humans in the Hebrew Bible, and, for this reason, will be thoroughly explored. The Writings, albeit important to biblical tradition, are not a fundamental component in the discussion of covenant, and, therefore, will not be significantly considered.

Within the traditions of the Torah, there lie substantial emphases on the covenant berith ברית idea. With the establishment of the covenants between God and Noah, God and Abraham, and God and Moses, new relationships emerge that reaffirm God's steadfast love hesed חסד for God's people. This hesed is a combination of love and covenantal faithfulness as it flows from God's being, given freely from God's own initiative to share God's grace and mercy. God's hesed "is more enduring than the will of humans, and is a forgiving attribute as well as a benevolent attitude to which humans can appeal." In all covenants with God, the intrinsic promise of peace shalom שלום is implied by God's outward gestures of love and, therefore, God's hesed becomes foundational in all of God's covenants with humanity.

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2 The Christian Old Testament is actually a compilation of the Hebrew Bible and some additional Jewish writings (Tobit, Judith, additions to Esther, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees). The Old Testament has also rearranged the order of the Hebrew Bible to better foreshadow the coming of Christ.

3 See Appendix A for the order of books in the Hebrew Bible.


5 Shalom is the Hebrew noun for “peace” (or fullness of life), deriving from the verb shalaman שלמא, meaning “to live in a covenant of peace.”
B. God's Covenant With Noah

The covenant established between God and Noah takes the form of a divine promise:

8God said to Noah ... 9"Behold, I am establishing my covenant with you, and your seed after you, 10and every living creature that is with you ... All the animals of the ark; every animal of the land ... 11All flesh will never more be cut from the waters of the flood, and never more will there be a flood to destroy the land ... 12I gave my bow to the clouds, and it will be for a sign of the covenant between me and the land ... 13When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the covenant, forever, between God and all living creatures of all flesh which are upon the land" (Genesis 9).

In this covenant, God unilaterally promises to never again destroy the land and its creatures by means of a flood. The promise is universal in scope, including Noah, his children, every creature, every animal, and the land. Essentially, this is a covenant of pure grace with God freely bestowing his divine love and protection upon humanity, making it binding for all ages. This solemn promise of God to Noah is the first remarkable indication of God’s steadfast love for humankind, and may stem from a realization that God’s destruction of nearly all life was quite out of proportion to any sum of sin of which humankind might have been guilty. Nevertheless, God has never before been bound so explicitly to humankind.

The establishment of a sign, too, binds God unilaterally to the covenant. The identification of the rainbow as a sign of the covenant serves a twofold purpose. First, the rainbow is for God to see so that God does not forget the divine promise to never again destroy the land; and second, the rainbow signifies that it is God, not humanity, who has to “remember” the everlasting covenant. God specifically says, “I will see [the bow] and remember the covenant, forever.” It is not you who will have to remember, but I (God) who is obligated to “all flesh upon the land.”

Pure and simple, the covenant between God and Noah is a divine promise. The two most basic elements (promise and sign) are present with the obligation falling unconditionally on the side of God. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to illustrate that God did not bind Godself from executing punishment upon humanity in ways other than a flood. For example, the tower of Babel tradition (Genesis 11:1-9) illustrates God’s frustration with human attempts to overstep the bounds of mortality. In response to this frustration, God rains confusion upon the people and scatters them across the earth. Clearly, God has left other options for punishment which will become more relevant in Chapter 3.

C. God’s Covenant With Abraham

Similar to God’s covenant with Noah, God’s covenant with Abraham takes the form of a divine promise. Unlike a covenant of pure grace, though, this covenant can be described as a covenant of promise where God unilaterally binds Godself to a three-fold promise, and establishes a covenant between Godself and the tribe of Abraham:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genesis 17</th>
<th>Genesis 15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4Behold my covenant with you.</td>
<td>9And [God] said to [Abram],</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[1]You will be a father to a multitude of nations.</td>
<td>“Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle dove, and a pigeon.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5No more call your name Abram; your name will be Abraham because I made you the father of a multitude of nations.</td>
<td>10He brought to him all of these and cut them in half, and gave [placed] one piece opposite the other …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6[2]I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and a king will come out from you.</td>
<td>17And it came to pass when the sun went down, and there was a thick darkness, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your seed after you, throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your seed after you.</td>
<td>18On that day יָהֶה made a covenant with Abram, saying, [3]“I give</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When looked at completely, these Genesis passages present a number of important motifs. First, as illustrated above, this covenant of promise involves a three-fold promise to Abraham. These promises are unilateral and binding only to God. God promises: (1) that Abraham will be the father of a great people, (2) that Abraham’s descendants (seed) will become exceedingly fruitful, and (3) that Abraham will have all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession.

Through these promises, it is clear that a new relationship has developed between God and humanity. Like the covenant with Noah, this, too, is an everlasting covenant grounded in God’s steadfast love. However, unlike the covenant with Noah, which was universal in scope, this covenant is more narrow in scope, and concerns only Abraham and his descendants. This new relationship between God and humanity, then, implicates Abraham and his people as the rightful heirs to God’s promises.

Second, and this is important, in 17:5 God changes Abram’s name (meaning “exalted father” ... הָאָבִים) to Abraham (meaning “father of a multitude” ... אָבִּים). In biblical times, names were considered very personal and were chosen carefully because to
know someone’s name was to know the “internal character and being of a person.” 7 “The ancient custom was to give those who were commencing a new station in life a new name.” 8 Today, the use of nicknames reflects the true spirit of biblical names. A nickname like “Honest Abe,” for America’s sixteenth President, says quite a lot about Abraham Lincoln’s personal character and the nature of his being. Certainly, he would have been personally, if not emotionally, attached to his nickname, and, thus, held it dear to his heart. With this in mind, the meaning of Abram’s name, when changed to Abraham, reveals the essence of his being as his name directly reflects God’s first promise: “you will be a father to a multitude of nations.” This name motif will appear again in the discussion of the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant tradition with the revelation of the divine name to Moses.

Third, as in the covenant with Noah, and in keeping with the form of a divine promise, God establishes a sign of the covenant between Godself and his people—this is the sign of circumcision that God directly mandates for the people. Circumcision is a mark to identify the members of the covenant community; those who share in God’s promise. It is an outward sign that serves the same purpose as the rainbow: it allows God to see the sign of the covenant as a reminder of God’s divine promise.

Last, as stated in Chapter 1, covenant forms are not fixed and elements may be added or deleted to suit both of the parties involved. Although this covenant with Abraham should still be considered a divine promise, there are two specific elements which indicate a move towards a more suzerainty-type treaty. First, as in the ratification ceremony of a suzerainty treaty, this divine promise to Abraham is secured by a ritual ceremony. In 15: 10, Abraham prepares a ceremony by cutting animals in half and laying the pieces opposite one another; then, later (verse 17), as Abraham sleeps, God appears as a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch and passes between the sacrificed pieces. The

Chapter 2

presence of God is here symbolized by fire which is consistent with other biblical images describing God, such as Exodus 3:2 ("An angel of the Lord appeared to [Moses] in a flame of fire from among a blackberry bush. He looked and, behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed"). This imagery in 15:17 "represents the manifestation of [God] by which [God] identifies [Godself] with animals as a guarantee of the reliability of God's [divine] promise." But just as the sacrificed animals are associated with the vassal in a suzerainty treaty, so are they identified with God in this promise.

Second, God twice uses the command form to identify two "stipulations" of the covenant. The commands "You will keep my covenant" (17:9) and "you will circumcise the flesh of your foreskins" (17:11) both impart the vividness and directness associated with the more elaborate commands of a suzerainty treaty. So, although this covenant is rightly considered a divine promise because God is the only one bound by oath, Abraham and his descendants are expected to observe the specific directions of God.

Interestingly, though, this covenant tradition foreshadows the Israelite exile in Egypt. God says:

13 Surely know that your seed will be aliens in a land that is not theirs [i.e. Egypt], and they will be slaves, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. 14 But on the nation that they serve I will execute judgment, and afterward they will go out with great possessions (Genesis 15).

Seemingly, this passage predicts the Israelites' oppression and servitude in Egypt, and, ultimately, the exodus. Therefore, the full benefits of this divine promise cannot be reaped until after Israel's four-hundred-year hiatus in Egypt.

In summary, the Abrahamic covenant is also an everlasting covenant, but is more specific than the earlier covenant with Noah. Whereas God's covenant with Noah includes all creation, this covenant is limited to only Abraham and his descendants. Also, the two basic elements of a divine promise (promise and sign) are easily recognizable, but

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9 Mendenhall. p. 1190.
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the addition of both the stipulations and the ratification ceremony make this covenant more complex in its form. The evolution towards a suzerainty treaty is easily apparent.

D. The Mosaic-Sinai Covenant

While still in exile in the land of Egypt a very unique event transpires that begins to set the stage for another covenant in this series of covenants between God and humanity in the Hebrew Bible. This event is the revelation of the divine name to Moses:

13 And Moses said to God, "Behold, I come to the children of Israel and I say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' And they say to me, 'What is his name?' What do I say to them?"

14 And God said to Moses, "I am God. ... Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I am God who has sent me to you.'"

15 And God said further to Moses, "Thus you will say to the children of Israel: 'I am God, God of your forefathers, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and this is my title for all generations" (Exodus 3).

The revelation of the divine name does two things. First, it becomes a unifying factor between God and the Israelites, establishing a new personal relationship with the Israelites, having the special knowledge of God's divine name. Second, the revelation of the divine name to Moses is a gracious display of God's steadfast love for the Israelite people, and begins to build a historical prologue for the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant.

With the groundwork being set for a historical prologue, we can anticipate that "all of the various elements of a suzerainty treaty are either present or reflected in biblical traditions surrounding the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant [i.e. Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy]."\textsuperscript{10} This covenant, which is arguably the most important element in the shaping of the Hebrew Bible, establishes הִנֵּה as the lord and Israel as the vassal. Moses' role is as the "covenant mediator who represents God to the people and the

\textsuperscript{10}Mendenhall. p. 1183.
people to God.”

The following discussion will illustrate the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant in the context of a suzerainty treaty.

1 & 2. Identification of the Covenant Giver and Historical Prologue:

1 God spoke all of these words, saying, 2 “I am יְהֹם your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery” (Exodus 20).

In this covenant tradition, the identification of the covenant giver and the historical prologue have been compounded into a single unit. God simply identifies Godself as “I am יְהֹם your God,” and continues by recounting God’s most generous deed, “who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery.” Furthermore, the revelation of the divine name coupled with Exodus 19:4—“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle’s wings and brought you to me”—give significant weight to the historical prologue in fixing a sense of gratitude in the Israelites. There is no need for God to identify God’s many titles (as a suzerain would typically do) because God is understood to be an inherently superior being. Therefore, by reminding Israel that “I am יְהֹם your God,” and by recounting God’s generous deeds, an imbalance is created with the intention of placing the bulk of the covenant’s obligation on Israel.

3. Stipulations (The Decalogue or Ten Commandments):

3[1] You shall have no other gods before me. 4 You shall not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything which is in the heavens above, or on the land beneath, or in the water underneath the land. 5 You shall not bow down to them because I, יְהֹם your God, am a jealous God, appointing punishment for fathers’ inequity upon their sons to the third and forth generations of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love

[ה違う] to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7[2] You shall not take up the name of ה' your God in emptiness because ה' will not hold innocent anyone who takes up his name in emptiness.

8[3] Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to ה' your God. You shall not do any work—you, or your son, or your daughter, your servant, your maid, your animals, or your guest who is within your gate—because in six days ה' created the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested in the seventh day. Therefore, ה' blessed the seventh day and made it holy.

12[4] Honor your father and your mother in order that your days will be long upon the earth which ה' your God gave to you.


16[8] You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17[9] You shall not desire your neighbor's house, you shall not desire your neighbor's wife, slave or maid, ox or donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's (Exodus 20).

The stipulations of this suzerainty treaty define the relationship between God and Israel as an exclusive one—"You shall not have other gods before me ... You shall not bow down to them or serve them"—where Israel is forbidden to have relations with foreign gods. If Israel should act in disregard of this commandment, God (a "jealous God who will tolerate no rivals for the people's devotion") holds the authority to execute punishment upon the people and their descendants. Clearly, the obligations of the covenant lie heavily with the Israelites, but it is important to see that God does not exempt Godself completely from obligation. God promises steadfast love (ברכה) for "those who love [God] and keep [God's] commandments." God also promises that Israel will be God's "valued possession" (сеググ דב ... ה'כם), and "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" as long as the people "obey [God's] voice and keep [God's] covenant" (Exodus 19:5-6).

12Metzger. p. 95.
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The Ten Commandments can be divided into three groups: the stipulations that regulate relations between God and Israel (Commandments 1-2), those that define Israel's liturgical observance (Commandment 3), and those that regulate the relations among the Israelites (Commandments 4-10). These stipulations, all of which are given in the command form, which stresses their immediacy, define the certain behaviors that must be observed if peace is to be maintained between God and Israel. By inference, then, it can be concluded that the stipulations "represent those characteristics of human behavior that constitute the definition of the will of God."  

Israelite law falls into two categories of legislation: apodictic law and casuistic law. These forms of law can be subdivided into either prescriptive or descriptive classes depending on the way the legislation is used—prescriptive law sets down rules; descriptive law details penalties. In their use of the command form, the Ten Commandments fall under the category of apodictic law, involving set rules. In biblical contexts, apodictic laws are primarily commands that deal with religious questions and bind all regardless of circumstances. Moreover, the Ten Commandments can be categorized as a prescriptive form of apodictic law—commandments (mitzvoth ...). Mitzvoth are imperatives or commands which are generally stated as "you shall [do something]" or "you shall not [do something]," and give no specific punishment. The descriptive form of apodictic law (huqqim ...), however, are the statutes that build upon the mitzvoth to describe the penalties for a transgressor's crime. For example, Exodus 31:14 builds upon Exodus 20:8—"remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"—and establishes that "he who profanes [the Sabbath] shall be put to death."

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13W. Lee Humphrey's in Crisis and Story: Introduction to the Old Testament (Second ed. California: Mayfield Publishing, 1990. p. 37) identifies only 2 groups: Commandments 1-3 which regulate relations between God and Israel, and Commandments 4-10 which regulate humanities obligations to one another.

14Mendenhall. p. 1184.

15Brown. 77:87.
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In contrast, casuistic laws (mishpatim ... יְִּפִּיטִּים) are set ordinances or judgments used in the procedures of deciding cases. They are almost exclusively descriptive in form. Their structure consists of conditional “if ... then” sentences where the conditional sets forth a case and the apodisis (the main clause) describes how to handle it. For example, Exodus 22:2 reads that “if he has nothing, [then] he shall be sold for his theft.” “If he has nothing” sets forth the case, and “he shall be sold for his theft” describes the judgment to be levied.

It is not difficult to see that Israelite law grew out of and became intricately connected with the Ten Commandments and the covenant idea. The Israelite people, intent on maintaining justice within their elite status, developed the mitzvoth (commandments) into policies that defined “those kinds of behaviors which the community was willing to sustain by force.” These policies took the form of the huqqim (statutes) and mishpatim (ordinances or judgments). Perhaps it is useful to look at the Ten Commandments individually and note how, in the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant tradition, Israel developed these into concrete laws.

The First Commandment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exodus 20:3-5</th>
<th>Exodus 22:19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3You shall not have other gods before me.</td>
<td>Whoever sacrifices to any God, except unto יהוה alone, will be exterminated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4You shall not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything which is in the heavens above, or in the land below, or in the water underneath the land.</td>
<td>[Note: the verb here is herem].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5You shall not bow down to them or serve them ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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16Mishpatim is the plural form of the Hebrew noun mishpat (מְִשֵּׁפָּת) meaning “judgment.” It comes from the verb shaphat (שָׁפָּת), meaning “to judge.”
17Hillers. p. 88.
18Hillers. p. 88.
19I am greatly indebted to the work of Delbert R. Hillers in Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea, pp. 89-92, for establishing the groundwork for this discussion.
## The Second Commandment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exodus 20:7</th>
<th><em>Note</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You shall not take the name of יָהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל your God in emptiness because יָהּ will not hold innocent anyone who takes up his name in emptiness.</td>
<td>In the case of this commandment, יָהּ has already stated that &quot;יָהּ will not hold innocent anyone who takes up his name in emptiness.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## The Third Commandment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exodus 20:8</th>
<th>Exodus 31:14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.</td>
<td>You shall keep the Sabbath because it is holy to you. He who profanes it shall be put to death.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## The Fourth Commandment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exodus 20:12</th>
<th>Exodus 21:15, 17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honor your father and your mother in order that your days will be long upon the earth which יָהּ your God gave to you.</td>
<td>15 Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death ... 17 Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## The Fifth Commandment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exodus 20:13</th>
<th>Exodus 21:12, 14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You shall not murder.</td>
<td>12 Whoever strikes a man and kills him shall be put to death ... 14 When a man acts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The Sixth Commandment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exodus 20:14</th>
<th>Deuteronomy 22:22-26</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You shall not commit adultery.</td>
<td>22 When a man is found lying with a married woman, both of them shall die—the man lying with the woman and the woman. And you shall utterly remove the evil from Israel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23 If it was a young woman, a virgin, who was betrothed to a man, and a man finds her in a city and lies with her, 24 you shall take them both out to the city gate and stone them to death with stones. The young girl because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor's wife. So you shall utterly remove the evil from your midst.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 And if the man found the betrothed woman in the country and seized her and lay with her, the man alone who lay with her shall die and to the young girl you shall not do a thing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Seventh Commandment:

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You shall not steal.</td>
<td>16 Whoever steals a man, whether he has been sold or is found in his hand, shall be put to death ... 37 When a man steals an ox</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Chapter 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Exodus 21:16, 37-22:3 (cont.)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep ...  
| ²He shall make restitution. If he has nothing, he shall be sold for his theft. |

*The Eighth Commandment:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Exodus 20:16</strong></th>
<th><strong>Exodus 23:1-2</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. | ¹You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness.  
| ²You shall not pursue the many in evil. When you testify in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the many to pervert justice. |

*The Ninth and Tenth Commandments* (Exodus 20:17) do not have any parallels in the laws of the Israelite people.

It is readily apparent that the Ten Commandments of the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant are the basis for the later developing Israelite laws—there is a rather fluid consistency between the stipulations of the covenants and the concrete laws used by the Israelites.

The underlying ideology behind these laws is best stated in Deuteronomy 22:22—“and you shall utterly remove the evil from Israel”—and again in Deuteronomy 22:24—“so you shall utterly remove the evil from your midst.” Moreover, it is essential here to note Exodus 21:23-25—“You shall give live for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, blow for blow.” In context, this
passage encompasses the whole philosophy of Israelite law: that the punishment or recompense cannot exceed the seriousness of the crime committed. To remove the evil, then, was to levy punishments that fit the crimes. To exact a greater punishment would only commit another evil and contribute to a continual circle of afflictions in Israel.

4. **Provisions for Deposit and Periodic Public Reading:**

In the period following the Exodus, the Israelite people did not have a temple in which to place the sacred text of the covenant. Deuteronomy 10:1-5 describes the solution to this problem:

> 1 At that time יִרְאוּ אֶל said to [Moses], “Hew out two tablets of stone ... and make an ark of wood. 2 And I will write upon the tablets ... and you shall keep them in the ark.”

> 3 So [Moses] make an ark of acacia wood and [he] cut two tablets of stone ... and [he] went up the mountain ... 4 And יִרְאוּ אֶל wrote upon the tablets ... the ten words which יִרְאוּ אֶל had spoken to [the people] on the mountain amongst the fire ... 5 And [Moses] put the tablets in the ark which [he] had made.

The stone tablets, holding the stipulations of the covenant, were placed within the Ark of the Covenant which was considered a place of divine presence, a place where God was enthroned as king over Israel. It “denoted and ritualized the presence of God in the midst of the people ... [and] contained the fundamental instruments of the people’s religious life.” The ark held Israel’s holy history, the tablets of the covenant, and served as an axis mundi, a point of contact, between God and Israel. As the portable sacred shrine of Israel, the Ark of the Covenant became the center of Israel’s religious life; in a sense, it became the “sign,” the reminder, of the covenant.

Although the specific provisions for periodic public reading are not explicitly defined in the traditions of the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant, they may be suggested in several

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surrounding passages. For example, Exodus 23:17 reads, "Three times in the year all of your males shall appear before יהוה," Exodus 24:7 says, "Then [Moses] took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people;" and Deuteronomy 31:11 states that "when all Israel comes to appear before יהוה your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing." Again, in consistency with a suzerainty treaty, these passages suggest that God and the Israelites were expected to read and be reminded of the covenant between them.

Stepping outside the bounds of the Torah, we cannot overlook an important passage in Nehemiah that gives an important clue to the periodic public reading. Nehemiah 8:1-2 reads that:

1All the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which יהוה had given to Israel. 2Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month.

This passage, if nothing else, gives testimony to the date of one of Israel's periodic public readings of the law: "the first day of the seventh month." The seventh month, according to the Jewish calendar, is Tishri (September - October), and is considered the time for the Festival of Booths. As Nehemiah 8 describes, this festival is a time in which to read, study, and rejoice in the words of the law.

5. **List of Witnesses:**

The list of witnesses in the Mosaic-Sinai covenant is missing because a list of divine witnesses is not in accord with a monotheistic society such as Israel's. To have an exhaustive list of divine witnesses would be contradictory to the stipulations (especially the first) of the covenant. Therefore, instead of divine witnesses, the members of the Israelite community became the witnesses of the covenant, and became the fundamental
instruments in implementing its provisions. In modern terms, they became a “safe­
watch” community enforcing the rules given to them by God. As shown above, the 
people expanded these stipulations into socially enforced laws with the purpose of 
preserving peace among themselves.

Once again, it is not entirely unimportant here to look beyond the books of the 
Torah for a better understanding of the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant tradition. The traditions 
in Joshua 22 and 24 give some clues as to how “witnesses” functioned in this suzerainty 
arrangement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joshua 22</th>
<th>Joshua 24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26Therefore we said, “Let us now build an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, 27but to be a witness between us and you, and between the generations after us, that we do perform the service of the LORD.</td>
<td>27Joshua said to all the people, “See, this stone shall be a witness against us; for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us; therefore it shall be a witness against you, if you deal falsely with your God.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The function of these nonsentient objects (the altar and stone) is to act as witnesses to 
the covenant between Israel and LORD. However, as “witnesses” I suggest that these 
objects are established as reminders to the people rather than as surveillance devices 
watching over the people as guards against immorality. The altar and the stone, like the 
Ark of the Covenant, serve as “signs” of the covenant, reminding the people that they 
have an important obligation to uphold before LORD, their God.

6. Blessings and Curses:

51, LORD your God, am a jealous God, appointing punishment for fathers’ 
inequity upon their sons, to the third and fourth generations of those who 
hate me, 6but showing steadfast love [ʼĕḇĕr] to the thousandth generation 
of those who love me and keep my commandments (Exodus 20).
Though the words blessings and curses do not occur anywhere in Exodus 20, their impact is felt in God’s statement that God punishes those who hate God, but shows steadfast love (רַחַם) to those who love God and keep God’s commandments. Further, we find the blessings and curses idea in Exodus 19:5-6—“you will be to me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” as long as “you obey my voice and keep my covenant.” Although the blessings and curses terminology is not found in this passage either, it is evident that God will bestow gracious gifts upon the people if they are faithful to the covenant. Specific curses are not defined here, but they are implied later in the events of the covenant ratification ceremony (Exodus 24:3-11), and even later in Joshua 24:19-20:

19Joshua said to the people, “You cannot serve הַלְוָיָה for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. 20If you forsake הַלְוָיָה and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good.”

7. Ratification Ceremony:

Moses came and recounted to the people all of the words of הַלְוָיָה and all the ordinances, and all the people answered in one voice. They said, “All the things which הַלְוָיָה has spoken we will do.”

4Moses wrote all of the words of הַלְוָיָה, and he rose early in the morning and built an altar at the base of the mountain, and twelve pillars (for the twelve tribes of Israel). 5He sent young men of the people of Israel who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to הַלְוָיָה. 6And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw on the altar ... 8[Then] Moses took the blood [in the basins] and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant which הַלְוָיָה has made with you ...”

9Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up [the mountain], and they saw the God of Israel ... 11They beheld God, and ate and drank (Exodus 24).
Chapter 2

The ratification ceremony actually involves three elements: a verbal assent, a blood ritual, and a meal ritual. The verbal assent in verse 3—“all the things which יְהוָה has spoken we will do”—is Israel’s verbal agreement to obey God and to keep God’s commandments. The blood ritual (verses 6-8), in which the blood of the sacrificed animals is thrown upon the altar and then upon the people, is a visible sign that identifies the covenant people with the sacrificed animal, thereby representing the fate (the curse) to be expected if they violated their promise. “To share the blood was to share the same life, to belong to the same family,”21 so the blood ritual was critical to the establishment of the relationship between God and the Israelites. Moreover, the sacrifice is an act that joins the people of Israel together, and, at the same time, separates them from everyone else as God’s chosen people.

The meal ritual (verse 11) contains two important motifs. First, sharing a meal also meant to share one life and belong to one family. So, the blood ritual together with the meal ritual represent a “relationship of life and peace between God and Israel,”22 and present the uniting of the two parties into one covenantal body. Second, when Moses and his fellows ascend the mountain to “eat and drink” they “see God” and live. This is a significant event because tradition holds that “no man shall see [God’s] face and live” (Exodus 33:20). Although, in Exodus 24:11, it does not explicitly say that Moses and his fellows saw God’s “face,” the fact that they even saw God is revealing God’s steadfast love for and trust in his holy community.

The context of the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant was that of a very trying period in Israelite history. Having been held in captivity for four hundred years by the Egyptians and then led into the wilderness by Moses for forty more, the wandering people yearned for a sense of home. “This situation furnished an extremely favorable climate for the

22Guinan. p. 906.
Chapter 2

introduction of different and better ways of structuring life\textsuperscript{23} in their community, namely, this covenant with God. The stipulations of the covenant, along with their elaborated policies, met the needs of the people, and served as the practical norm for the sustenance of the community.\textsuperscript{24} With these new policies in place, the peoples' confidence was boosted by God's promise of steadfast love.

The establishment of the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant is central to the establishment of Israel as a primarily religious community. Under the covenant, God and Israel become one life dedicated to righteousness, a path that serves as a common link between the Israelites and God (a vertical relationship), and among the Israelites themselves (a horizontal relationship).\textsuperscript{25} The vertical relationship defines the Israelite people as God's "valued possession" (Exodus 19:5) who "shall not have other gods before" (Exodus 20:3). The horizontal relationship defines Israel as a people of the covenant whose behavior amongst themselves would be a "sign of how seriously they were devoted to the Lord."\textsuperscript{26}

Quite clearly, the Mosaic covenant takes the form of a suzerainty treaty. All of the important elements are present, with God, for the most part, being left free and sovereign without being reduced to the status of an equal.\textsuperscript{27} Nevertheless, God's selection of Israel as his chosen people is an indication of his steadfast love—the fundamental promise in all covenants with God. This steadfast love is a characteristic that gives God a personal identity in which the people can find comfort, or the "home" for which they seek. It anchors the covenant firmly between the Lord and Israel, and serves to unite all the members of the community into God's holy nation.

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{23}Mendenhall. p. 1186.
\item\textsuperscript{24}Mendenhall. pp. 1186-1187.
\item\textsuperscript{25}Guinan. p. 907.
\item\textsuperscript{26}Guinan. p. 907.
\item\textsuperscript{27}Hillers. p. 65.
\end{itemize}
E.  Conclusion

The biblical traditions in the Torah surrounding the stories of Noah, Abraham, and Moses illustrate an evolution of the covenant idea from a most simple to a most complex form. In the Noah tradition, God's divine promise is in the simplest of terms—it contains (1) the promise and (2) the sign. The covenant is one of pure grace, and the promise is universal in scope, embracing not only Noah and his descendants, but all living creation.

The Abrahamic covenant is also a divine promise, but has added complexities in its form. The covenant contains both of the basic elements, but it has added a ritualistic ratification ceremony and two very simple stipulations. This covenant of promise is more specific than the first in the fact that it concerns only Abraham and his successive generations. With the added elements and the decreasing scope, not to mention the prophecy of the Egyptian exile, the Abrahamic covenant appears to foreshadow the coming of the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant.

The Mosaic-Sinai Covenant is a typical suzerainty-style treaty. All of the seven elements are present in one way or another in the traditions surrounding the covenant, and the relationship established between God and Israel is an exclusive one. This covenant identifies Israel as the "valued possession" of יהוה and thus, by implication, identifies the Israelites as the "seed" of the Abrahamic covenant. The specificity has narrowed again and left only one community as the recipients of God's steadfast love.

Throughout each of these traditions, it is evident that God's love is the axiom of the covenants. Without God's own covenantal faithfulness at the roots of the promises, the covenants become nothing more than paradoxical and enigmatic. With יהוה showing his steadfast love (רהב) to the thousandth generation of those who love יהוה, it would seem plausible that Israel would "love יהוה [their] God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). As we will see in the next chapter, though, human inclinations to do evil can persuade even the most loving God to execute great vengeance.
CHAPTER 3

"New Covenant" Motifs in the Prophets: 
Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, 
and Second Isaiah

A. Introduction
B. Covenant Language in the Prophets' Oracles of Judgment 
   Against Israel
C. "New Covenant" Language in the Prophets' Images of 
   Restoration
D. Conclusion

A. Introduction

How do we know what everybody knows?

What are the words to the Pledge of Allegiance? How many stars and stripes are 
on the American Flag? How do we know when to say “excuse me?” “please?” and "thank you?” By today’s standards, how do we know when, and which, courtesies are 
expected of us?

This knowledge is deeply seated in the structure of our culture. From the time we 
are born, we are subject to the basic “what’s” and “how’s” of our society. The media, 
our teachers, our parents, and our friends all carry with them a rudimentary knowledge 
that they pass on to us by the simple fact that we associate with them on a constant 
basis. What everybody knows, then, does not just include information, but behaviors and 
etiquette as well. Do we have to be reminded to “look before we cross” every time we
step into the street? No, because that behavior is commonly understood. Where did I learn it? Well, I don’t know. It’s something that everybody knows ...

My point is that although the word covenant (berith ... בְּרִית) was not abundantly used in the messages of the prophets Amos (745 B.C.E.), Hosea (745-734 B.C.E.), Jeremiah (626-580 B.C.E.), Ezekiel (593-571 B.C.E.), and Second Isaiah (540 B.C.E.),¹ the idea was so fundamental to Israel’s structure as a community that it needed no explanation—-it was presupposed. The prophets and their messages were “rooted in Israel’s tradition of covenant and covenant obligation.”² Just as today’s America universally understands the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, so ancient Israel universally understood the persuasions of the covenant.

As the foundation of Israel’s life, the themes of the covenant, as emphasized by the prophets, were understood to be “the sovereignty of יהוה, the saving deeds of יהוה, Israel’s unique position as the people of יהוה, and its own unique obligation to יהוה.”³ As the prophets spoke, their words called people to the faithful worship of יהוה, and to proper social behavior. For example, the following passage illustrates, to some degree, what was expected of the righteous:

5If a man is righteous and does what is right and just, 6if he does not eat upon the mountain or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, and does not defile his neighbor’s wife, and does not draw near to an impure [menstruating] woman, 7and does not oppress a man, restores the debt of his pledge, does not steal, gives his bread to the hungry, and covers the naked in a garment. 8[If he] does not give interest and does not take interest, withholds his hand from unrighteousness, executes true judgment between men, 9follows my statutes and keeps my ordinances to do truth. Righteous is he. He shall live (Ezekiel 18).

As we can see, covenantal faithfulness was far from a static idea. The people of Israel were expected to be dynamically involved in the reality of the covenant, and to

¹Number of times berith appears in Amos (1), Hosea (5), Jeremiah (25), Ezekiel (18), and Second Isaiah (4). Also, all dates B.C.E. are approximate and reflect the length of each prophet’s ministry (time B.C.E., of course, counts backwards as it moves towards the Common Era).
²Guinan. p. 908.
³Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, and Ronald E. Murphy, eds. 77:83.
maintain their faithfulness within the community. "When the Israelites agreed to the
terms of the covenant, they willingly bound themselves in a relationship with God that
required that they keep the commandments." To disobey the commandments would be
to disobey  множину, and, as a consequence, the threat of disaster, and especially exile, would
loom above the people.

B. Covenant Language in the Prophets' Oracles of
Judgment Against Israel

With the people of Israel understood to be in a covenantal relationship with God,
a major vehicle for the prophets' social criticism was the image of covenantal
unfaithfulness, stressing that the people were failing to be exclusively devoted to множину.

For example, during the 8th century B.C.E., Amos and Hosea accused the people of the
religious and social crimes surrounding them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amos 2:6-8</th>
<th>Hosea 4:1-2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6Thus says множину ... &quot;they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—7they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way; father and son go into the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; 8they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge; and in the house of their God they drink wine bought with fines they imposed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1Hear the word of множину, O people of Israel ... “There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. 2Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out. Bloodshed follows bloodshed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Later, during the 6th century B.C.E., Jeremiah and Ezekiel similarly announced the
distress of множину:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jeremiah 2:5-13</th>
<th>Ezekiel 23:36-39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5Thus says יִהוֹֹוא: &quot;What wrong did your forefathers find in me that they became distant from me, and went after vanity and became vain? They did not say, 'Where is יִהוֹוא who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land no one passes through and where no one lives?' I brought you to a garden-land to eat its fruit and its good things, but when you came you defiled my land and made my property an abomination. The priests did not say, 'Where is יִהוֹוא?' They that handle the law do not know me. The shepherds rebelled against me and the prophets prophesied by Baal [cf. Hosea 2:13—&quot;I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals ... offered incense to them and decked herself with ring and jewelry, and went after lovers &quot;]], and they went after things that do not profit. 9... I accuse you ... and your children's children I accuse ... My people have changed their honor for something that does not profit [i.e. other gods]. 12Be appalled, O heavens, at this. Be horrified. Be ruined ... because my people have done two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have hewn out cisterns for themselves—broken cisterns that cannot hold water.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36Then declare to them their abominable deeds. For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. With their idols they have committed adultery, and they have offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me. Moreover, this they have done to me: they have defiled my sanctuary on the same day and profaned my sabbaths. For when they had slaughtered their children for their idols, on the same day they came to my sanctuary to profane it. This is what they did to my house.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In these "actions that repeatedly nullified the covenant," as described above, it seemed that יִהוֹוא was a forgotten god in the eyes of Israel. Surrounded by such

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6Humphreys. p. 174.
debauchery and injustice, the prophets struggled to turn the people back towards a loving relationship with God, using covenantal unfaithfulness as a vehicle for their criticism.

In attempting to amend Israel’s wicked ways, the prophets called for an immediate response to the apostasy around them by appealing to the memory and idealization of the covenant\(^7\) \(i.e.\) “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” [Hosea 11:1], and “I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness” [Amos 2:10]). These memories of the covenantal relationship were “recalled and presented as the legitimizing basis for God’s strident words of condemnation.”\(^8\) The sense of guilt and fear imparted by these words depended, at least in part, on the idea that Israel was still bound by the oaths of the covenant. Therefore, it is important to realize that although the covenant had been violated and abused, it had not become completely dysfunctional within the community.

When the general appeals of the prophets had no effect on the peoples’ behavior, “the prophets warned that יִרְבּוּ was ready to judge Israel.”\(^9\) For example, through Jeremiah, יִרְבּוּ proclaimed:

\(^9\)Conspiracy has been found among the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. \(^{10}\)They have returned to the afflictions of their forefathers before them, who refused to hear my words. They have followed other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their forefathers.
\(^{11}\)Therefore ... I will bring evil upon them which they will not be able to escape. And though they cry out to me, I will not listen to them (Jeremiah 11).

In reading this passage, it is not implausible to assume that Jeremiah, at least in some capacity, had Psalm 78:37 in mind as he made this judgment against Israel—“Their heart was not steadfast toward [יִרְבּוּ]; they were not true to his covenant.” The echoes of inequities past (Psalm 78) can be subtly heard in the “afflictions of [the] forefathers” so

\(^7\)Guinan. p. 908.
\(^8\)Humphreys. p. 122.
emphasized by Jeremiah, making it not unlikely that Jeremiah drew upon the earlier tradition for his oracle of judgment.

With the prophets' accusation of the people in the name of יִּבְלֶל, only the announcement of Israel's imminent doom remained to be declared. In terms of the 8th-century prophets, Amos and Hosea were stern in their oracles, sentencing the people for their "betrayal of love and trust."¹⁰

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amos 2:13-16</th>
<th>Hosea 4:6-11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 So, I will press down in your place, just as a cart presses down when it is full of sheaves. 14 Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain their strength, nor shall the mighty save their lives. 15 Those who handle the bow shall not stand, and those who are swift of foot shall not save themselves, nor shall those who ride horses save their lives. 16 And those who are stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day.</td>
<td>6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children ... 9 I will punish them for their ways, and repay them for their deeds. 10 They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply; because they have forsaken יִּבְלֶל to devote themselves to יִּשְׂרָאֵל to devote themselves to יִּשְׂרָאֵל.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The oracles of Amos and Hosea were relentless in their language. For example, through a series of fateful images (e.g. "Flight shall perish from the swift ... the strong shall not retain their strength ... [and] those who handle the bow shall not stand"), Amos made Israel's impending doom a bitter reality. Furthermore, Amos drew from his earlier imagery of the people trampling the heads of the poor into the dust (2:7) to announce that the unjust, too, would be trampled "just as a cart presses down when it is full of sheaves."

Hosea's words were, likewise, severe. However, unlike Amos, Hosea drew directly from the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant language in announcing the fate of the people. "I reject you from being a priest to me," Hosea said in the name of יִּבְלֶל, directly negating

¹⁰Humphreys, p. 126.
the words of הַנֵּ֣בְיוֹן in Exodus 19:6—"you shall be for me a priestly kingdom." And just as the people had violated God’s law and the covenant between themselves and God, so God would forget them, and punish them severely.

In 732 [B.C.E.], Damascus, the Aramean city-state to the north of Israel, was ravished by the Assyrian army [the major threat to Israel at the time], and Israel itself was stripped of most of its land, and reduced to being the capital city of Samaria. When Samaria fell ten years later, the prophetic sentences [of Amos and Hosea] had been carried out.¹¹

In the 6th century B.C.E., Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s oracles were just as stern. However, to make their messages of doom more concrete and, therefore, more powerful, the fate of Israel was declared in metaphorical terms familiar to them from the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant tradition.¹² For example, compare these passages from Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deuteronomy 28:53</th>
<th>Jeremiah 19:9</th>
<th>Ezekiel 5:10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You will eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom I gave to you, the Lord your God, in the siege and in the distress which your enemies will press upon you.</td>
<td>I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they will eat the flesh of one another in the siege and in the distress which their enemies and those who seek their life press upon them.</td>
<td>Therefore, fathers will eat their sons in your midst, and sons will eat their fathers, and I will execute judgments on you. And all of you who remain [i.e. from “the siege”] I will press upon them and scatter to every wind.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Juxtaposed, it is evident that Jeremiah and Ezekiel called upon the familiar language of the covenant tradition in Deuteronomy to announce the ruin of the people. Compare the imagery of the earlier passage—“you will eat ... the flesh of your sons” (Deuteronomy)—to the later prophets’ words—“I will make them eat the flesh of their sons” (Jeremiah), and “fathers will eat their sons” (Ezekiel). The foreshadowing of

¹¹Humphreys. p. 129.
¹²Hillers. p. 133.
Israel's destruction by the Babylonians is clear in these oracles (e.g. Jeremiah's “in the siege and in the distress” and Ezekiel’s “all of you who remain” [after the siege]). It seems apparent that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel had Deuteronomy 28, or at least the common tradition and imagery, in mind at the time of these prophecies. If nothing more, this parallel attests to the fact that the messages of the prophets were intricately tied to the ideas, language, and imagery of the covenant.

As I described in Chapter 1, the penalties were severe for a breach of the solemn oath in a suzerainty treaty. In terms of the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant and the 6th-century prophets, to be unfaithful to ᵇ³⁷³˹inations carried with it extreme consequences, including disaster and exile. In 597 B.C.E., the Babylonians captured the city of Jerusalem, only to destroy it and the temple in 586 B.C.E. At that time, Judah (the southern region of Israel) became part of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, and in 582 B.C.E. the exile was made complete— the prophetic sentence had again been carried out. If the people were ever to reclaim their status in the eyes of God, it would have to be through God's own initiative, in a restoration of the covenant.

C. “New Covenant” Language in the Prophets’ Images of Restoration

As we turn to an examination of “New Covenant” and restoration motifs in the Prophets, it is necessary first to discuss the implications of New Covenant language. With something new, there is an immediate supposition of something old, something that has been replaced by the new. Interestingly, however, in the language of the prophets, there is never the language of both “old” and “new” in reference to the covenant—there is only the language of “new” (to the extent there is “old/new” language at all). With only the language of “new,” then, it is objectionable to argue strict replacement of the “old” Mosaic-Sinai Covenant. However, just as it is objectionable to argue strict discontinuity,

it is, likewise, objectionable to argue rigid continuity. Take Jeremiah 31:31-32, for
example:

31 Behold the days are coming ... when I will make a new covenant with
the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I
made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to bring them
out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was
their husband.

If the New Covenant is “not like the covenant which [הָעֲבָרָה] made with their forefathers,”
then there must be elements that account for this discontinuity, and we will examine them
in due course. In my judgment, what is not old, yet is not completely new either, must be
something restored or renovated, something that, at its core, has not only recognizable
elements of the old, but, also, fundamental elements of the new. Therefore, I prefer to
render “new” as “restored,” conceptualizing the New Covenant as a renovation of the old.

Focusing, first, on the 8th-century prophets Amos and Hosea, the language of
“New Covenant” did not appear at all in their oracles of restoration. In fact, the promises
for restoration in Amos 9:13-15 were most certainly later (at least 6th-century) additions
to the text, and will not be considered in this discussion (see Appendix C). In contrast,
Hosea’s promises of renewal probably come from himself:

14 Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the
wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. 15 And there I will give her her
vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she
shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out
of the land of Egypt.

16 And in that day,” says הָעֲבָרָה, “you will call me, ‘My husband,’
and no longer will you call me, ‘My Baal.’ 17 For I will remove the names
of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no
more. 18 And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of
the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I
will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make
you lie down in safety. 19 And I will betroth you to me forever; I will
betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love [ןַזָּדוֹן],
and in mercy. 20 I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall
know הָעֲבָרָה.
21 And in that day,” says יְהֹוָא, “I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth; 22 and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel; 23 and I will sow him for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Not Pitied, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say ‘You art my God.’ ”

Hosea’s perception of the renewal was three-fold. First, in verses 14-15, Hosea called upon the memory of the exodus, drawing upon the imagery of the covenant tradition, idealizing it as a faithful period in Israel’s history, in order to excite the possibility of a perfect covenantal relationship. The reference to the “wilderness” idealized Israel’s years after the exodus as faithful, and promised that “God would [soon] go into the wilderness again to rebuild that covenantal relationship.”14 In appealing to this common memory of the exodus, and idealizing it in history, I think that Hosea intended to link the past covenant tradition to the future restoration of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel.

Second, in verses 16-20, Hosea employed marriage to describe the relationship between יְהֹוָא and the people.15 Even today, especially in Jewish tradition, marriage is still an official form of covenant that traditionally holds within it the basic promises of steadfast love and peace. This imagery was very strong and very important in Hosea’s perception of the restoration.

“I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love [חברים], and in mercy,” prophesied Hosea, outlining a new relationship that would replace the days of “no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land” (4:1) with God’s desires of “steadfast love [חברים] and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (6:6). Moreover, the title-of-address change in verse 16—“you will call me ‘My husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal’ ”16—was significant in

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14McKeating. p. 86.
16“Baal” is generally used in reference to heathen deities. (Ironically, “Baal” is the modern Hebrew word for “husband.”)
its revelation of a new relationship, one moving away from a suzerainty arrangement. However, a new title for הַנָּהַג did not represent a change in God, but, rather, a change in the Israelite people and their relationship to God. The acceptance of הַנָּהַג as a covenental party, rather then as a heathen deity, was intended to show Israel’s sorrow for her sins and rejection of her evil ways.

Finally, verse 23 appropriately brought together the promise of renewal in its reaffirmation of the relationship in the familiar language of the covenant. Compare:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hosea 2:23</th>
<th>Exodus 6:7</th>
<th>Exodus 29:45</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will have pity on Not Pitied, and I will say to Not My People, “You are my people;” and he shall say, “You are my God.”</td>
<td>I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am יהוה your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians.</td>
<td>I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we will see in the 8th century, also, the re-affirmation of this relationship revealed God’s capacity for forgiveness, to be able to re-accept the people as his special possession. Of course, this idea is not unique or limited to the prophetic material, but the re-affirmation is significant to the prophets’ theme of restoration.

In summary, Hosea’s oracle drew upon the idealization of the Mosaic-Sinai tradition in its vision of restoration, unveiling an early, although not defined, New Covenant idea—an idea that would reach climax in the 6th-century prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Beginning with the idealization of the exodus into the “wilderness,” Hosea used the imagery of marriage to represent the renewal of the covenantal relationship where Israel would be forgiven, and, again, be God’s people. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the fact that Hosea’s oracle of restoration came within the larger context of his oracles of judgment against Israel (745-734 B.C.E.). It would be

17Andersen and Freedman. p. 281.
only after Israel served its punishment (made real by the Assyrian conquest of 732 B.C.E.) that hope for the restoration could begin.

The context of Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s oracles were vastly different from that of Hosea. Hosea’s oracles of restoration were to a not-yet defeated people whose major threat was the Assyrian Empire, and whose sanctuaries lay in the northern kingdom. Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s oracles of restoration (after 587 B.C.E.), on the other hand, were to a defeated people in Babylonian exile, whose sanctuary lay in the destroyed city of Jerusalem. Although the messages of these prophets were not rigidly divorced from one another, the different time periods of these oracles are pivotally important to our understanding of Israel’s historical context.

For the people in exile, without a radical change in their attitude and action, the restoration of the covenantal relationship was hopeless. Israel’s sin “was deeply ingrained” within the human heart, which Jeremiah perceived as impure and evil:

1The sin of Judah is written with an iron point. With a diamond point it is engraved upon the tablet of their hearts and the horns of their altars …

9The heart is deceitful above all else (Jeremiah 17).

If this was so, then the people of Israel did not have the ability to right the wrong in their relationship with God. (The heart was considered a Hebrew metaphor for what we commonly call the mind, and, therefore, if the heart [mind] was “deceitful above all else,” the body was hopelessly inclined to be the agent of that impurity.)

Nevertheless, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel saw a day, to come in the future, when a renewal of the covenantal relationship would be a reality:

Chapter 3

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Jeremiah 31:27-30</th>
<th>Ezekiel 34:11-14</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>27</strong>“Behold the days are coming,” says הָלַבְּלָה, “when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of animals. <strong>28</strong>And just like I watched over them to pluck up and to break down, and to overthrow, and to destroy, and to bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant ... <strong>29</strong>In those days they will no more say, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the sons’ teeth have been set on edge,’ <strong>30</strong>because each man shall die by his inequities. Everyone who eats sour grapes shall have his teeth set on edge.”</td>
<td><strong>11</strong>I will search for my sheep and seek them. <strong>12</strong>Like a shepherd seeks his flock when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will seek my sheep and rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and fog. <strong>13</strong>I will bring them out from the people [Babylonians] and gather them from the lands, and bring them to their own ground. <strong>14</strong>In good pasture I will tend them, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their meadow. There they will lie down in good meadows, and they will graze there in pasture, on the mountains of Israel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Jeremiah, like Hosea, the time of the restoration would reveal God’s capacity for forgiveness. It would be a time when הָלַבְּלָה would “watch over [Israel] to build and to plant” upon the land that had once been defiled by the abominations of unfaithfulness. Moreover, this day to come would be a day when הָלַבְּלָה would no longer appoint punishment to the third and fourth generations (see Exodus 20:5), but each individual would be held accountable for his/her own actions, and individually suffer the consequences—“each man shall die by his inequities.”

Ezekiel, likewise, alluded to God’s forgiveness in the restoration of the people. הָלַבְּלָה would soon “gather [the people] from the lands, and bring them [back] to their own ground,” to their home, where they would again live as God’s people. In his allusion to הָלַבְּלָה as a comforting shepherd in this oracle, Ezekiel likely called upon the imagery, or common tradition, of Psalm 23:
The similarities in language and imagery make it highly probable that Ezekiel used these familiar terms of Psalm 23 to make a powerful connection with the people of Israel.

In these hopeful oracles of restoration, the climax arrived in Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s announcements of the New Covenant between יְהֹוָה and the people. Let us look first at Jeremiah:

31“Behold the days are coming,” says יְהֹוָה, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32It will not be like the covenant which I made with their forefathers in the day that I took their hand to bring them out from the land of Egypt—a covenant which they broke though I was their husband …

33But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days … I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts. And I will be their God and they will be my people. 34No longer shall they teach one another or say to one another ‘know יְהֹוָה,’ because they shall all know me; from the smallest of them to the greatest of them … for I will forgive their inequities and remember their sins no more” (Jeremiah 31).

“The New Covenant passage [in Jeremiah] announced that God would graciously bring about the necessary change in the people’s inner nature so that their past failure to
obey [God's] law's would be replaced by both the will and the ability to do so."\textsuperscript{19} The newness of this covenant would lie not in a discontinuity from the "old" Mosaic-Sinai Covenant, but in two new dimensions of the covenant: internalization of the law,\textsuperscript{20} and the forgiveness of sins.

The internal aspect of the covenant was not necessarily a new idea. For example, with Hosea, in the 8th century B.C.E., an emphasis of the covenant was on "the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings" (6:6), and that knowledge constituted an internal element of the covenant. With the New Covenant, however, the law would be enfleshed upon the heart and "contain an interior principle of regeneration,"\textsuperscript{21} making external instruction of the law obsolete. It would be one of those things that everybody knew.

The forgiveness of sins would, further, be an added dimension to the New Covenant. This idea arose earlier in Hosea's 8th-century oracle of restoration, but was never explicitly defined as it was by Jeremiah—"I will forgive their inequities and remember their sins no more." This explicit promise for forgiveness, coupled with the internalization of the law, is what made the New Covenant new in Jeremiah's oracle. Moreover, as in Hosea, the reaffirmation of the fundamental relationship—"I will be their God and they will be my people"—was presented by Jeremiah, asserting that the privileged relationship would once again be real. In the covenant's restoration, then, the "old" would be taken up into the "new," placing the law, which was once external, upon the heart of Israel and its people.

What cannot be overlooked in Jeremiah's oracle of restoration is its close similarity, in language and imagery, to the oracle of Hosea:

\textsuperscript{20}The Hebrew word \textsuperscript{21}McKenzie. p. 156.
### Jeremiah 31:31-34

31 “Behold the days are coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant which I made with their forefathers in the day that I took their hand to bring them out from the land of Egypt—a covenant which they broke though I was their husband ...

33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days ... I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts. And I will be their God and they will be my people. 34 No longer shall they teach one another or say to one another ‘know the Lord,’ because they shall all know me; from the smallest of them to the greatest of them ... for I will forgive their inequities and remember their sins no more.”

### Hosea 2:14-23

14 “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. 15 And there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

16 And in that day,” says , “you will call me, ‘My husband,’ and no longer will you call me, ‘My Baal.’ 17 For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. 18 And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. 19 And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and injustice in steadfast love, and in mercy. 20 I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know .

21 And in that day,” says , “I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth; 22 and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel; 23 and I will sow him for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Not Pittied, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he will say ‘You art my God.’ ”

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As with Ezekiel 34:11-16 and its similarities to Psalm 23, it is highly probable that Jeremiah drew upon the memory of Hosea’s oracle of restoration, which came more than a century earlier, in forming his announcement of the New Covenant. The similarities in language and imagery make it almost certain that Jeremiah, at least in some
capacity, had Hosea in mind as he prophesied the restoration of the covenantal relationship to the people of Israel.

Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, expected new life for Israel:

22 Thus says יְהוָה יְבֵנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: 23 "I will sanctify my great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned among them. And the nations shall know that I am יְהוָה ... when I cause you to be sanctified before their eyes ... 26 And I will give you a new heart and I will put a new spirit within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put my spirit within you and I will make you follow my statutes, and you will keep my ordinances ... 31 And you shall remember your evil ways and your deeds which were not good, and loath yourselves upon your inequities and your abominations" (Ezekiel 36).

Although the words “New Covenant” were not employed by Ezekiel, they were implied in the restoration of the covenantal relationship that would give the people “a new heart ... and new spirit.” This inner change in the human heart would unite the people of Israel into one body that shared the same life in יְהוָה. The “heart of stone” (i.e. the “heart that is deceitful above all else”) would be replaced by a “heart of flesh” containing the “spirit” of יְהוָה. Note that the imagery of “heart of stone” and “heart of flesh” in no small way reflected the internalization of the law (once written on tablets of “stone”) within the “flesh” of the human heart. This internalization of a new heart and spirit, like in Jeremiah, would incorporate the law within the collective conscience of the people, assuring that Israel would now have the will to obey it.

Furthermore, in keeping with the themes of the restoration, Ezekiel’s oracles also promised the forgiveness of sins and a reaffirmation of the covenantal relationship. In 16:63, Ezekiel revealed that יְהוָה would forgive Israel for all that they had done. Again, it is not the idea of forgiveness that was new to Ezekiel and Jeremiah, but its explicit definition in the oracles of these prophets. Then, in 37:27, Ezekiel, as the others, put forth the qualifying affirmation of יְהוָה and the covenant: “And I will be their God and
they will be my people." Again, this idea is not unique or limited to the prophets, but its re-affirmation is significant in the restoration of Israel and the covenant.

It is clear that Ezekiel’s oracles of restoration and the New Covenant were not radically different from Jeremiah’s, nor should they have been. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied in the same context of the 6th century B.C.E. Their messages were directed to a nation in exile, a nation that had stumbled in its covenantal relationship with ה' . Their oracles promised a new covenant that would take within it the “old,” but with the added dimensions of an internal law and the forgiveness of sins. Moreover, consistent with the language of the covenant, the reaffirmation of the covenantal relationship (“I will be their God and they will be my people”) gave the people a future to look forward to, a future beyond their punishment in exile.

The prophecies of Second Isaiah, or Deutero-Isaiah, (chapters 40-55 in the book of Isaiah) were, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, addressed to the exiled people in Babylon, but came later in the 6th century B.C.E., around the year 540, near the end of the exile. Isaiah’s “soteriological [salvific] prophecy centered around redemption and salvation,”22 and he believed that a “new age was beginning with a soon-to-come purification of the people.”23

At the heart of Isaiah’s prophetic voice was the conviction that Israel had served its punishment. The task of his message was to “bring comfort, restore hope, and enliven frightened exiles in an alien land:”24

1Comfort, comfort my people ... 2speak unto the heart of Jerusalem and call to her that she has fulfilled her service, that her inequity is pardoned, that she has taken from the hand of the ה' double for all her sins (Isaiah 40).

23Lundbom. p. 1089.
24Humphreys. p. 208.
Consequently, Isaiah announced the coming of the restoration, linking Israel’s past history to its future hope:

16 Thus says יְהוָה, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, 17 who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:

18 “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. 19 I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. 20 The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, 21 the people whom I formed for myself, so that they might declare my praise” (Isaiah 43).

In his imagery, Isaiah drew upon the memory of the exodus, the “things of old” (i.e. “the sea” and the “path in the waters”), to announce a “new thing:” a new exodus. This new exodus would, again, proceed through the wilderness, but from Babylon to Jerusalem, under the veil of God’s protection, and the wild animals that Jeremiah had once predicted to “violently destroy” the people (5:6), would turn to honor יְהוָה, as the people safely journeyed back to the land of promise.25

Isaiah also reaffirmed the covenantal relationship in his oracle of the new exodus, although not in the familiar terms of “I will be their God and they will be my people.” Rather, Isaiah identified Israel as “the people whom [יְהוָה] formed for [יְהוָה].” In comparison to the traditional affirmation, the implication of Isaiah’s oracle was the same: that יְהוָה had forgiven Israel, and accepted her back into the covenantal relationship.

In summary, the oracle of Second Isaiah was most powerful in its ending of the peoples’ struggle in exile. יְהוָה, the comforting shepherd, was prepared to begin something “new,” a new exodus, not out of the land of Egypt, through the parted waters of the sea, but out of Babylon, across the highway of the wilderness. In this restoration, in this journey back to the land of Israel, the stability of the covenantal relationship would be reestablished between God and the people.

D. Conclusion

The language and imagery of the prophets consistently recalled the memories of the past. Images of the exodus, the wilderness, and כְּנֶסֶת as a shepherd and a husband served as platforms for the prophets’ messages. If the prophets could not appeal to these memories of the past, then what hope could there be for the future? Without Israel’s painful recognition of its abominations, its blindness would never be cured, and Israel would continue to walk in the darkness of its unfaithfulness.

Although given in different contexts, the hopeful oracles of Hosea (8th century B.C.E.), Jeremiah and Ezekiel (early 6th century B.C.E.), and Second Isaiah (later 6th century B.C.E.) were essentially similar. These prophets were situated between the past memories the covenant and the future hopes of its restoration, but the present called for an idealization of what the “new” should bring. Yes, Hosea prophesied to a not-yet defeated nation threatened by the Assyrian Empire, and Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah prophesied to the exiles in Babylon, but the future that these prophets pointed to (the restoration of the covenantal relationship) was, consistently, the same future. The only fundamental difference between Hosea and the 6th-century prophets was that Hosea addressed Israelites in the northern kingdom, whose sanctuary was not Jerusalem, as it was for the audiences of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah. Nevertheless, whether defeated by Assyria or Babylon, whether in the 6th century B.C.E. or the 8th, restoration would never be a reality until the people served their punishment and corrected their ways. Not until Second Isaiah’s “comfort my people” oracle in 40:1-2 was the promised future of all the prophets realized, and the restoration of the covenantal relationship begun.

The ideas of the New Covenant, although initially implying a discontinuity from the “old” Mosaic-Sinai covenant, are not ostensibly discontinuous. The Mosaic-Sinai
Covenant never actually disappeared from the lives of the people, making it possible for them to eventually realize their apostasies and turn back to יהוה. I think it is important to understand that the New Covenant did not replace the old, but rather dissolved its physical boundaries and enfleshed the law within the heart of the people, making the knowledge of יהוה a universal and non-discriminating attribute. As we have seen through Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah, the restoration of the covenantal relationship was really the universal theme—a theme that promised the return of steadfast love and peace in that covenantal relationship.

In the perception of all the prophets, I submit that the restoration of the covenant was recognized as a divine promise, given solely by God's own initiative. The promise of "new" was two-fold: the internalization of the law, and the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, the new heart and spirit of the community would be the sign of the promise, a sign that universalized the knowledge of God. It is in these attributes that the restoration of the covenant found its newness. The "old" covenant was not, by any means, invalidated. The New Covenant simply consumed the "old" and made it part of a more elaborate structure—a revitalized structure with, at its core, the reaffirmation of the special relationship: "I will be their God and they will be my people."
John 13:34

PART II

ἐντολὴν καὶνὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους, καθὼς ἦγάπησα ὑμᾶς ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους.

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, that you also should love one another.
CHAPTER 4

Jesus Christ and the Fulfillment of the New Covenant: *The Gospels*

A. Introduction

As Part II begins, our discussion turns from the Hebrew Bible to the Christian Scriptures, traditionally known as the New Testament. As the second half of the Christian Bible, the New Testament is an organization of twenty-seven books, including the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, twenty-one letters, and the book of Revelation.¹ With the Christian distinction made between the Old and New Testaments, the “old” versus “new” terminology arises once again. In Christian terms, the old versus new language suggests the successionist theology of a Christian community that believed Jesus of Nazareth was the long awaited Messiah (*christ ... χριστός*), descended from David and fulfilling the promise of the New Covenant given through the prophets. However, this successionist theology does not, *a fortiori*, establish a rigid separation from

¹See Appendix C for a detailed listing of books in the New Testament.
the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant tradition, but, more simply, recognizes a "new" and better life in Jesus Christ.

Because the Gospels, together, furnish a compound tradition of Jesus' life and works, it is difficult to paint even a minimalist portrait of Jesus without looking at the texts as a whole unit of tradition. Of course, there are several historical problems with this (i.e. conflicting traditions), but that is not my concern. The purpose of this chapter is to be a text-based discussion showing how the written traditions of the Gospels reflect "covenant" (διαθέκη ... διαθήκη) as a well-known theological metaphor.

It is my opinion that the covenant idea is deeply stowed within the framework of the Gospels, not being as clearly defined as the Duppi-Tessub treaty discussed in Chapter 1 (p. 8 ff) or the Mosaic-Sinai tradition in Chapter 2 (p. 25 ff). It may be that the covenant idea, by the time of the hellenized Roman world, had taken on a theological meaning of its own, and that the technicalities of covenant form (both the distinction between covenant forms and the formal content of covenantal agreements) might have been subtleties lost to the readers (and authors) of the Gospels. Nevertheless, it seems that the concept of a covenantal relationship, although veiled, is present in the conceptual framework of the Gospels, particularly in their traditions of beneficial action, obligations, and the Last Supper.

B. Echoes of Suzerainty Form in the Gospels

As we discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the function of the historical prologue in a suzerainty treaty is to identify the beneficial actions of the covenant giver in order to fix a sense of gratitude within the less powerful covenant party. For example, in Exodus 20:1, God (the covenant giver) says to Israel (the lesser party): "I am יהוה your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery." By recounting this
beneficial action, God establishes a deep sense of appreciation within the people who, in
return, promise that “All the things which ידוע has spoken we will do” (Exodus 24:3).

Comparably, the Gospel of John presents echoes of this covenantal element by
identifying, for Christianity, the most important beneficial action of God—“For God so
loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not
perish but have eternal life” (3:16). With such a generous act of love, “expressed in the
death of the Son,” we hear echoes of a historical prologue intended to fix a sense of
gratitude in “everyone who believes in him.” However, a clear connection between the
historical prologue and other covenantal elements (such as the stipulations) is absent.

As we have seen already, in the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant there is a clear connection
between the historical prologue and the stipulations, such as “ידוע has done these things
for you, therefore you shall or shall not ...” In the Gospels, however, such a connection
does not exist as we find the echoes of obligations falling in such a different place than the
beneficial actions. We find these stipulations in Matthew 5, where Jesus is obviously
paralleled with Moses as a mediator of the covenant. In Chapter 2, we described Moses
as the mediator between ידוע and the people: he was the middle-man who represented
God to the people and the people to God. In the New Testament, however, it is not
Moses, but Jesus who acts as a new mediator, leading his community of believers to
freedom “not from physical slavery, but from the inner slavery [i.e. sin] which prevents
us from becoming truly free inside.” Clearly there is a parallel between these figures, but
there is one fundamental difference: Moses was the messenger of God while Jesus,

through his being, was God’s message.

In Matthew 5:21-48 (the Sermon on the Mount), Jesus offers his reinterpretation
of the law, making an obvious parallel to the stipulations of the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant.

This reconceptualization is not the construction of a new law, but the “law of the old covenant with a new dimension.”

21 You have heard that it was said to those in ancient times, ‘You shall not murder;’ and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’

22 But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire ...

27 You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’

28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart ...

33 Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry the vows you have made to the LORD.’

34 But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King ...

38 You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’

39 But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also ...

43 You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven ...

48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Be certain: this is not the construction of a new moral code. Rather, Jesus casts the commandments and the laws of old into a new dimension, for a new age and a new understanding—“You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you.” Jesus’ purpose was not to impeach the authority of the law, but to teach it through the eyes of God:

17 Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless

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your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5).

This teaching recognizes that human authorities (i.e. scribes and Pharisees) are imperfect; therefore, unable to enforce the will of God no matter how hard they might try.

In response:

Jesus removes the religious obligation from the realm of social monitoring and enforcement ... [so that] the concept of obligation can no longer be indirectly linked to the perfect will of God through a verbal list of do's and do not's that can be managed ... by imperfect human authorities. 

Jesus hardly seems to be lifting the burden of the law, but, rather, affirming the prophetic idea of fulfilling what the law requires by linking the concept of obligation to the perfect will of God.

Attaining God's perfection, in fact, becomes the fundamental stipulation in Jesus' reinterpretation of the law—"Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." This stipulation, however, seems like a regurgitation of the earlier Deuteronomic passage "so you shall utterly remove the evil from your midst." Consequently, Jesus formulates a completely new commandment that, in its observance, fulfills the whole covenant tradition. As the Gospels present it:

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<th>Matthew 22:37-40</th>
<th>John 13:34</th>
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<td>37&quot;You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.&quot; 38This is the greatest and first commandment. 39And a second is like it: &quot;You shall love your neighbor as yourself.&quot; 40On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.</td>
<td>I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, that you should also love one another.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5Mendenhall. p. 1200.
This commandment certainly presents no separation between the old and new covenants, but, on the contrary, expresses that the whole covenant is fulfilled through the simple act of love. Jesus asked that love be blind, to spread from each individual to each neighbor, and, most importantly, to spread to God, whose divine love is the foundation of all covenants, whether new or old. Indeed, what Jesus demands is a more radical observance of the law than before, and, therefore, any "old covenant-New Covenant" contrast is not very plausible because there is evidence of continuity between the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant and the New Covenant.

However, if Jesus calls for a far more stringent observance of the law, what are we to make of Jesus' violating of the law by healing on the sabbath? When the Pharisees ask Jesus if it is lawful to cure on the sabbath, which is a clear dismissal of the law, Jesus answers that "it is lawful to do good on the sabbath" (Matthew 12:10-12). Therefore, although Jesus calls for an impossible observance of the law (in the literal sense of becoming "perfect"), he reveals that its strict observance is overruled by the practice of love because "to love is to set one's sincere affections on the covenant [and the law]." In other words, it is lawful to break one law for the greater good of the whole law.

In terms of the New Testament, "the most important context within which we encounter covenant ideas ... are the texts recounting the Last Supper Jesus had with his disciples." Indeed, it is only in these traditional texts of the Gospels that the Greek word διαθήκη (covenant) occurs. Consequently, this liturgy "clearly conveys the idea that Jesus' death, or the shedding of his blood, seals the New Covenant which God made with humans."
Matthew 26:26-29

26While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” 27Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; 28for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

Luke 22:14-20

14When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. 15He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” 17Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; 18for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” 19Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 20And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

The sacrificial terminology, especially the sealing of the covenant with Jesus’ blood, recalls Exodus 24, in which the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant is ceremoniously ratified:

6Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. 7Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.”

8Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, “See the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” 9Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, 10and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. 11God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank.

Like the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant, the New Covenant is sealed with a meal and blood ritual. The imagery of the bread and the cup (the meal ritual) are consistent with
the banquet imagery surrounding the sealing of a covenant. The identification of the bread and the cup with the body and blood of Jesus made it possible for the disciples to identify personally with the sacrificed victim (Jesus). Moreover, the pouring out of Jesus' blood (the blood ritual) ceremoniously inaugurates the New Covenant. Just as the blood of the old covenant united partners into one relationship, so the blood of Jesus was now the bond that united people into a now-central metaphor of the Christian Church—the Body of Christ: a metaphor that establishes the importance of communion into one body and one life.

As we discussed in Chapter 3, the forgiveness of sins played a significant role in the idealization of the New Covenant. That idealization becomes realized in Matthew 26:28, as Jesus' blood is "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"—a strong motif in the messages of the prophets. Moreover, the use of the word "remembrance" in Luke 22:19 is important because "it does not mean merely 'to call to mind,' it implies recalling some benefit received (in this case the atoning death of Jesus) as the basis for observance [of the New Covenant]."\(^9\) In this observance, there is the grateful recognition and response to the receipt of an undeserved favor,\(^10\) namely the voluntary sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

C. Conclusion

The Mosaic-Sinai Covenant was, in large part, shaped by the formal elements of covenant. By looking at its structure, we can see that the seven suzerainty elements (p. 8) are arranged in a coherent framework with logical links from one element to the next. Conversely, any attempt to find the details of covenant form in the Gospels is futile. The elements, although suzerainty-like, are so dissolved in the structure of the Gospels that

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\(^9\)Mendenhall. p. 1198.  
\(^10\)Mendenhall. p. 1198.
even if we could prove the formal structure of a covenant existed, the links among the elements are so disparate that no proof could be made.

I am confident that a reasonable assessment of the Gospels reveals that the concept of covenant is deeply embedded within the conceptual framework of the texts. Although the technicalities are lost, in part to the evolving culture of the hellenized Roman world, clear echoes remain that point to covenant as an important metaphor for the relationship between God and humanity. These echoes are heard particularly, but not only in, the ideas of beneficial action, obligations or stipulations, and the Last Supper.

It is important to see that the New Covenant was not of Jesus’ own making, he "was but an instrument and the vehicle of its inauguration through his blood—the covenant was God’s own making.”11 Through this covenant, God promises, to all, the forgiveness of sins and a life after death in unending happiness—a life centralized in the Kingdom of God. It is through Jesus’ death and resurrection that the New Covenant is initiated as a covenant not bound by legal matters, but by love for God and one another.

These new dimensions of the covenant, however, do not make the "old covenant-New Covenant" separation as strong as we might first assume. We cannot overlook the fact that Jesus’ reinterpretation of the law calls for a much more stringent observance of the laws of the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant, calling people to be perfect like God. Nevertheless, “the community thus envisioned is not one subject to human social control but one that can only be monitored and maintained by the deity himself.”12 Jesus’ fulfillment of the New Covenant, then, illustrates the complete internalization of the will of God, ideally envisioned, but, because of the monitoring of imperfect authorities, imperfectly realized in the Old Testament.13

11 Albright. p. 322.
12 Mendenhall. p. 1194.
13 Mendenhall. p. 1201.
CHAPTER 5

Jesus Christ and the Fulfillment of the New Covenant: Paul’s Letters to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans

A. Introduction

As we previously discussed in the introduction to Chapter 4, the New Testament contains twenty-one letters, or epistles. Of those twenty-one letters, the Pauline corpus contains fourteen letters that have traditionally been attributed to the hand of Paul. However, recent scholarship has changed that view, arguing that at least half of those letters are not authentic Pauline documents, leaving only seven letters (1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philemon, and Philippians) regarded as genuine Pauline epistles. The remaining seven letters of the Pauline corpus (2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Hebrews) are disputed as authentic, and
believed to be written in the “Hellenistic-Jewish practice of pseudonymity (writing in the name of an honored religious authority of the past [i.e. Paul]).”¹

The letters of Paul are unlike any of the material we have discussed so far. Paul was writing at a time, roughly twenty years after Jesus’ death (even before the composition of the Gospels), when the Christian Church was in its formative stage. Each letter was, therefore, written with a different purpose, at a different time, to a different group of people in different social settings. It is to be expected, then, that the substantive material of Paul would cover a vast array of social and theological concerns of the Church. Moreover, Paul’s letters are primarily theological, concerning the implications of the resurrected Christ and matters of the spirit versus the law, and deal less with the concrete reality of Jesus and his teachings.

It is my intention, through the use of Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans (which I feel are the most important for this discussion), to look at Paul’s developing theology as it applies to matters of the New Covenant. Importantly, it is Paul’s letters, not the Gospels, that establish a level of “old covenant-New Covenant” discontinuity, and develop the successionist theology of the Christian religion.

B. **Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians**

Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians includes, perhaps, his most important reference to the New Covenant. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, Paul recounts the tradition of the Last Supper (an oral tradition at that time), being sure to illustrate that “Christ instituted the New Covenant in his blood and made the people one:”²

²³For I received from the LORD what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is

¹Harris. p. 243.
for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 25In the same way he took the
cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the New Covenant in my
blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

In this recapitulation of the Last Supper tradition, Paul makes a vitally important
connection between the New Covenant and communion (the Eucharist). With the meal
ritual, the New Covenant is inaugurated, and Christ’s act of sharing his body and blood
symbolizes a union, a spiritual fellowship, of body and life. Through the New Covenant,
then, believers may share in the Body of Christ:

12For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members
of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13For in the
one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or
free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14Indeed, the body
does not consist of one member but of many (1 Corinthians 12).

The theology of this metaphor holds that through the sacrament of baptism everyone
(nonexclusively) becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit, and, through the sacrament of the
Eucharist (communion), shares in the Body of Christ, and, therefore, in the New
Covenant.

C. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians

Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians is his most important letter in light of the
discontinuity he marks between the old and new covenants. In calling people to faith in
Christ, Paul refers to himself and the Corinthians as “ministers of a New Covenant” (3:6),
a covenant in which Christ has replaced the fading glory of the Mosaic-Sinai tradition.
Paul says that the ministry of Moses (the old covenant) was a ministry of death,
belonging to the sphere of the flesh, not like the ministry of Christ, whose New Covenant
is eternal, belonging to the sphere of the spirit.
In Paul's theology, this flesh (σάρξ) versus spirit (πνεῦμα) argument is pivotal. The flesh, he says, represents the law because “while we are at home in the body [in the flesh], we are away from the LORD—for we walk by faith, not by sight [i.e. reading the law]” (5:6-7). Conversely, “we would rather be away from the body [i.e. the law] and at home with the LORD [in the spirit]” (5:8). More simply, in the flesh humanity is subject to the law and away from God, but, through Jesus Christ, all are made one with God according to the spirit, “so that the life of Jesus may … be made visible in our bodies” (4:10).

To draw his distinction between the old and new covenants, between the flesh and the spirit, Paul writes:

1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we?
2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; 3 and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.
4 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.
5 Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, 6 who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

7 Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, 8 how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? 9 For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! 10 Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; 11 for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!

12 Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, 13 not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. 14 But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. 15 Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; 16 but when one turns to the LORD, the veil is removed.

17 Now the LORD is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the LORD is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the
LORD as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the LORD, the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3).

It is at this point, in Paul’s theology, that such a rigid discontinuity is drawn between the old and new covenants, and the successionist theology of Christianity becomes apparent. It can be presented as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Covenant</th>
<th>New Covenant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>written on tablets of stone (3:3, 7)</td>
<td>written on the heart (3:2, 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the letter kills (3:6)</td>
<td>The spirit gives life (3:6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ministry of death (3:7)</td>
<td>ministry of the spirit (3:8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ministry of condemnation (3:9)</td>
<td>ministry of justification (3:9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fading (3:10)</td>
<td>permanent (3:11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>veiled glory (3:15)</td>
<td>unveiled glory (3:16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, it is the spirit (Christ), not the law, that sets people free and unveils the glory of God’s covenant. “For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal,” says Paul (4:18), suggesting that because the law can be seen (e.g. on tablets of stone) it is only temporary, and no match for the eternal spirit of Christ. Furthermore, “zealous fulfillment of the [law] is conduct according to the flesh because one is supposing he/she can achieve righteousness before God by his/her own strength.”

However, as we have already seen, it is by the self-giving sacrifice of Christ that people are justified and saved, not by feeble attempts to adhere to the law.

In sum, 2 Corinthians presents Paul’s most succinct distinction between the old and new covenants, calling the old covenant a fading ministry of death and condemnation.

3Bultmann. p. 240.
while calling the New Covenant a permanent ministry of the spirit and justification. As ministers of this New Covenant, the Corinthians belong to the sphere of the spirit, to God through Christ, and are no longer bound to the insufficiencies of the law that lead to inevitable penalties of sin.

D. Paul's Letter to the Galatians

Not long after Paul's conversion of the Galatians, Jewish Christians in Galatia began to question Paul's authority, claiming that Paul had never seen Jesus Christ and that he could not, therefore, legitimately identify himself as an Apostle. Moreover, those that stood against Paul's authority claimed that, in order to inherit God's covenant, one had to be linked to it at least by the ritual of circumcision. In response, Paul wrote this letter, and as an example of his faith, hoping to gain the trust of his audience, he identified himself with the sacrificed Christ—"It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (2:20)—and maintained that justification does not come through the law, but through Jesus Christ—"I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing" (2:21).

According to Paul, the law had only one function: "to provide a tutorship to which we were subject until Christ's execution of trust." He envisioned the law to be a paidagogos (παιδαγωγός), literally, a "child leader" whose duty it was to lead the boy in all matters of conduct. Paul says, "The law was our disciplinarian [παιδαγωγός] until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith" (3:24). When Christ did come, there was no longer any need for a paidagogos because those who have faith in Christ are mature in their faith.

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Paul frequently affirms that all believers are justified by this mature faith—"The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?" (3:2-3). In drawing this distinction between the spirit and the flesh, Paul is also striking a distinction between faith and the law.

Rudolf Bultmann, the great 20th-century theologian, explained it as:

The power of the flesh is manifested in the fact that it binds man to the transitory, to that which in reality is already past, binds him to death, [but] the power of the spirit is manifested in the fact that it gives the believer freedom, opens up the future, the eternal life.6

Paul’s essential point to the Galatians is that the law serves only as a temporary device to increase an awareness of human imperfection and teach human beings that they are unavoidably lawbreakers.7 It is only the redeeming death of Christ that can bring salvation, and all other means of salvation (i.e. circumcision) must be set aside—"does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?" (3:5).

Circumcision is a sign of status within God’s covenant community, but Paul argues that circumcision requires keeping the whole law—"every man who lets himself be circumcised ... is obliged to obey the entire law" (5:3)—a feat that is not nearly possible. Paul further explains that, "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love" (5:6). Therefore, although the Mosaic law taught that circumcision is necessary, it is, in Paul’s understanding, an unnecessary act for Christians because it binds one wholly to a law that cannot bring salvation.

7Harris. p. 265.
Furthermore, Paul’s argument expresses the idea that the New Covenant is a continuation of the original covenant made with Abraham, and has no connection to the law of the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant:

16Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, “And to offsprings,” as of many; but it says, “And to your offspring,” that is, to one person, who is Christ. 17My point is this: the law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise (Galatians 3).

In welcoming the promise made to Abraham, all those who have faith are, because of Christ, welcomed into the New Covenant without need for the law of Moses—the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant represents slavery, but the Abrahamic Covenant represents the freedom of the faithful:

21Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law? 22For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. 23One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise. 24Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. 25Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother.

Quite clearly, Paul draws a sharp distinction between the old covenant and the New Covenant, alluding to the old covenant, the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant, as a covenant of “slavery,” and the New Covenant, the continuation of the Abrahamic Covenant, as a covenant of freedom. “My point,” says Paul, “is this: the [Mosaic-Sinai Covenant], which came four hundred thirty years later [than the covenant with Abraham], does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise” (3:17). Therefore, the New Covenant (which Paul perceives as a continuation of the earlier

8McKenzie. p. 415.
covenant with Abraham) completely replaces the covenant established with Moses. Indeed, this is a radical claim on Paul’s part.

The way in which the Abrahamic covenant is transferred to Christ is similar to the fidei commissum of Roman law. The fidei commissum was the instrument by which property was transferred from a testator to an heir—the testator faithfully, without the use of written documents, left property to heir$_1$ who, in turn, left the property to heir$_2$. In terms of Paul’s theology, God can be understood as the testator who made a covenant with heir$_1$, namely, Abraham, who, in turn, left the covenant to “his offspring,” heir$_2$, Jesus Christ. The promises of God are then passed on to the believers through baptism, a ritual act that makes the faithful heirs as they unite with Christ. Consequently, “those who rely upon the law instead of having faith in God’s promise are to be excluded from the inheritance.”

To conclude, Paul’s letter to the Galatians emphasizes that humanity is not justified by works of the law, such as circumcision, but through, and only through, faith in the spirit of Christ. In other words, “man is saved by Christ’s work and Christ’s work alone, and circumcision or any other work of the law is theologically objectionable because it implies Christ’s work is insufficient and needs to be complemented.” For those who have faith then, “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (3:28).

Further, Paul understands the New Covenant to be a continuation of the Abrahamic covenant, passed on to Christ and his believers by mechanism similar to the fidei commissum of Roman law. Consequently, the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant and its laws become void, allowing all who have faith to be truly free in Christ.

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9Fidei commissum means “commission by faith.” The following discussion is based upon Greer M. Taylor’s work in “The Function of ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ in Galatians.”

10Lundbom. p. 1091.

11Taylor. p. 75.
E. **Paul’s Letter to the Romans**

Paul’s letter to the Romans was written to a Jewish-Christian community in an attempt to show that Christ, not the law, is central for salvation, and that the New Covenant, written by Christ’s life-giving spirit, surpasses all other covenants, and is eternal. Paul’s claim, and, in fact, his whole theology, rests on this presumption that Christ is the end of the law, and everyone who has faith in him is justified—“Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (10:4).

Romans seeks parity between the Jews and Gentiles by expressing that the Gentiles have the law written on their hearts, and, reminiscent of Jeremiah, have the inner motivation to do and know the law:

14 When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. 15 They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them (Romans 2).

It is Paul’s conviction that everybody may belong to the New Covenant, which was initiated by the saving death of Christ, because Christ’s covenantal sacrifice made people one, not according to the law, but in the spirit, which abides in the heart of all believers. To illustrate this point, Paul again uses the Body of Christ metaphor, explaining that all believers are one in the spirit of Christ—“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (12:4-5).

As members of one another, and of Christ, Paul states that all believers are justified by Christ’s blood, not by works of the law:

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12 Lundbom. p. 1091.  
13 Lundbom. p. 1091.  
14 Abbott. p. 25.
For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. 8But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. 9Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. 10For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. 11But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Romans 5).

Consequently, because of Christ’s saving death, the faithful are no longer under the law, but under the grace and truth of Jesus Christ—“For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (6:14).

Moreover, in Paul’s argument, it is the law that makes sin come alive in the human consciousness. 15 The law cannot save because, by defining sin, it only makes one conscious of sin—“through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (3:20). It would follow then, that the law creates the power of sin because there is no sin, no crime, unless there is a law to define it. Therefore, to follow the law is to be condemned to death and slavery because no person has the power to fulfill the law in its entirety. On the other hand, to live according to the spirit of Christ sets one free from “the law of sin and death.”

These ideas, although they do not deal explicitly with the idea of covenant, imply that the laws of the covenant, and the people who follow them, are theologically deficient. However, those people that have their roots in God’s covenants are still worthy of salvation because it is from them that the savior, Jesus Christ, comes:

4They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; 5to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen (Romans 9).
Even more, not only are these people worthy of salvation, but worthy of receiving the promises of the New Covenant, none smaller than the promise of the forgiveness of sins. As Paul describes this, he emphasizes that “the gifts [e.g. the promises] ... of God are irrevocable” (11:29), and recalls the prophet Isaiah in saying “this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins” (11:27, cf. Isaiah 59:21). The key, though, to receiving this New Covenant is welcoming faith in Christ, and turning from the law.

Certainly, this letter shows a distinct evolution in Paul’s thought from his earlier letter to the Galatians. In Galatians, Paul completely annulled the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant, skipping its entire history to link the Abrahamic covenant to Christ, and excluded all those who follow the law from the inheritance of God’s promises. Conversely, in Romans, Paul relaxes his position and asks “has God rejected his people? By no means! ... God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew” (11:1-2). It seems clear that, in seeking parity between Jews and Gentiles, Paul finds at least some continuity between the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant and the New Covenant, especially in saying that the Gentiles have the law written on their hearts (2:15), and that the New Covenant will include the forgiveness of sins (11:27). Moreover, we cannot overlook that Jesus, himself, entered into the flesh in the milieu of the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant tradition (9:4-5).

Romans, in sum, affirms that faith in Christ, alone, relieves all believers (from all covenant traditions) from the grasp of the law, and welcomes believers into the New Covenant. It is through this faith in Christ that all believers are justified before God, and free from the binds of the law. In this faith and freedom, all believers are united in the Body of Christ, and, through his blood, participants in the New Covenant. Accordingly, the faithful must believe in Christ alone, who, himself, was in the flesh, and set aside all other means of salvation (i.e. the law). “For ... the righteousness of God is revealed through faith [not the law] for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’ ”
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F. Conclusion

As I stated in the opening of this chapter, Paul’s letters are different from the other material we have discussed in this paper for the reason that his letters are addressed, with very specific agendas, to very specific audiences. By looking at what I feel are the most important letters in Paul’s theological agenda, I have attempted to focus on material that is most relevant to a discussion of covenant. Of course, there is not the establishment of a covenant in Paul’s letters, but, more plainly, an evolution of thought in the understanding of the New Covenant.

Through Chapters 3 and 4, we saw that an understanding of the New Covenant was not as radically discontinuous from the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant as we might first assume, especially with the language of “old” versus “new.” In Paul’s letters, however, we encounter the successionist theology of a Christian theologian intent on making a radical separation between the old and new covenants.

In 1 Corinthians, we find a fairly straightforward discussion that establishes a vital link between the New Covenant and communion. Through the sharing of Christ’s body and blood, the community of believers are united into one body, Christ’s body, so that they may share in the grace of the New Covenant. In 2 Corinthians and Galatians, however, Paul marks a strong division between the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant and the New Covenant: in 2 Corinthians, Paul goes to lengths to describe the contrasting elements of the old and New covenants; Galatians, by means of the fidei commissum, demonstrates that it is the Abrahamic Covenant, not the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant, that establishes Christians as heirs to God’s promises. In this radical stance, Paul establishes that “Christ’s total obedience to the Father and his selfless death on the cross, taking unto himself the [law’s] penalty for sin, liberates those persons accepting him ... from sin, death, and the [curses of the law].”

16Harris. p. 246.
Chapter 5

Romans, although taking the same fundamental stance that faith rules over the law, takes a less radical position against the law, and attempts to seek parity between Jews and Gentiles by recognizing that those living under that law are not exempt from the New Covenant (as they were in Galatians) as long as they turn away from the law and embrace a life in Jesus Christ. In conclusion, then, this letter ends an evolution of thought that ranges from a radical discontinuity between the covenants to an acceptance of the legitimacy of the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant, while still recognizing that it is faith and the New Covenant that bring eternal salvation.
CHAPTER 6
Covenant: An Evolution in Understanding

A. Introduction

The reality of covenant is one that extends throughout the entire framework of Biblical history. In its many forms, “covenant” functioned to establish a special relationship between two parties—most importantly, between God and humanity. The covenants that appear (or are present in allusion) in the Bible were the defining characteristics of communities who lived and died by a covenant’s existence. Whether it was by persuasion of the blessings or the fear of the curses, devotion to a covenant served to guard the peace and love established between God and the relative people. Nonobservance in such a valuable relationship seemed an unthinkable alternative to anything but the strictest obedience to God’s word. However, as our understanding of covenantal history goes, the human inclination to do evil (seen specifically in the era of the prophets) claimed a long period of darkness in the relationship between God and Israel. Nevertheless, even such pestilence was not enough to completely destroy God’s
love for the people, and certainly not enough to forever ban humanity from a covenantal relationship with the Creator.

B. Purview

In the traditions of the Torah, we have explored the establishment of three important covenants: God’s covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Moses. These covenants define three very specific relationships between God and humanity, with the promise of God’s steadfast love (םִשְׁחָר) the essential component. The covenant with Noah, a divine promise of pure grace, embraces the whole of creation, “all living creatures of all flesh which are upon the land.” The Abrahamic Covenant is much more specific in its language, and establishes Abraham and his descendants as the direct objects of God’s covenant of promise. Even more specific is the Mosaic-Sinai Covenant, a perfect suzerainty-form treaty, where God (now understood as הַרְאֵו) chooses Israel as God’s own “priestly kingdom and holy nation.” Such an elite status, however, comes with high costs of observance and obedience, costs that Israel could not ultimately afford.

The prophets Amos and Hosea (8th century B.C.E.) followed by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah (6th century B.C.E.) charged Israel with the crimes that led to the nation’s fall from God’s covenant. The idea of covenantal unfaithfulness became the prophets’ vehicle for social criticism. By idealizing the faithful period in Israel’s covenantal history, the prophets appealed to the memory of the covenant, using its familiar language and imagery as instruments to levy guilt upon the people.

In time, promises of restoration and a “new covenant” came through the prophets. Hosea’s oracle presents the earliest hints of restoration with its use of marriage imagery to represent the renewal of the covenantal relationship. Subsequently, Jeremiah prophesied the “new covenant … not like the covenant [of old],” a covenant that would (1) be written on the heart, and (2) implement the forgiveness of sins. Likewise, Ezekiel promised a new heart and spirit for the people of Israel, along with forgiveness of the
abominations of their past. However, not until Second Isaiah's "comfort my people" oracle was the hope of restoration made real to the people in exile. With this prophecy came God's preparation to lead Israel in a new exodus, and accept the people back into a covenantal relationship where "I will be their God and they will be my people."

Moving ahead, to the time of the hellenized Roman world in the 1st century C.E., it seems that the technicalities of covenant form were subtleties lost to the milieu of the Gospels. However, although the technicalities were lost, the literature suggests that they were not completely forgotten. The covenant idea had become a veiled theological metaphor that is reflected particularly in the Gospels' traditions of beneficial action, obligations, and the Last Supper—traditions that reflect Jesus as the fulfillment of the New Covenant.

As the author's of the Gospels portray Jesus, he did three things in his fulfillment of the New Covenant. First, Jesus established a new commandment that called for the execution of love in all human actions; second, Jesus called for an even stricter observance of the law than the Torah called for, an observance so strict that it called humanity to the perfection of God; and third, Jesus removed the enforcement of the law from the sphere of human authority. What Jesus did not do is make the "old covenant-New Covenant" divorce that we find so distinctly in the early theology of Paul's letters.

Indeed, it is Paul's letters that establish the successionist theology of the Christian Church. Paul proclaims the New Covenant as an instrument of communion between believers and Christ, uniting them into one body. Accordingly, it is through faith in Christ, not through works of the law, that believers are justified before God. Paul does relax his initial position that all followers of the law are excluded from the New Covenant, however, to be subject to salvation, all "according to the flesh" must accept a life "according to the spirit." It is only here, in Paul's theology, that we encounter these issues of discontinuity between the old covenant and the New Covenant traditions.
Chapter 6

C. Covenant = New Identity + New Destiny

Understood as covenantal history from Noah through Paul, I find that a common theme recurs time and again. This common theme's formula is:

\[\text{COVENANT} = \text{NEW IDENTITY} + \text{NEW DESTINY}\]

That is, with each evolution in the understanding of "covenant" between God and humanity, there is a new identity and new destiny understood for the people involved in the relationship. Played out, it can be presented as follows:

God's covenant with Noah:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Identity</th>
<th>New Destiny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All of creation is embraced in the divine promise that is established between “God and all living creatures of flesh which are upon the land.”</td>
<td>God promises that “All life will never more be cut from the waters of the flood, and never more will there be a flood to destroy the land.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

God's covenant with Abraham:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Identity</th>
<th>New Destiny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abraham is promised to “be a father to a multitude of nations.”</td>
<td>Abraham’s descendants are promised to be “exceedingly fruitful” and “all the land of Canaan” is promised as “an everlasting possession.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
God’s covenant with Moses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Identity</th>
<th>New Destiny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God identifies Israel as his “valued possession,” as God’s own “priestly kingdom and holy nation.”</td>
<td>“Steadfast love [ Relatives] to the thousandth generation of those who love [God] and keep [God’s] commandments.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The New Covenant has, within it, three stages of understanding. They are described below in the contexts of the Prophets, the Gospels, and Paul’s letters.

**The Prophets:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Identity</th>
<th>New Destiny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The restored nation of Israel.</td>
<td>A covenant grounded in the forgiveness of sins where the law is written within the human heart.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Gospels:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Identity</th>
<th>New Destiny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A community monitored by the authority of God, not imperfect human authorities.</td>
<td>The Kingdom of God.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Paul’s letters:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Identity</th>
<th>New Destiny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christians.</td>
<td>Eternal salvation through faith in Christ.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In conclusion, from the concrete distinction between covenant forms and the formal content of covenantal agreements to the subtleties of theological metaphors, it is clear that the understanding of the covenant idea evolved over the span of Biblical history. With these several different understandings, though, the function of “covenant” remained constant: it established a relationship between two parties—God and humanity. And in these relationships, a new identity and new destiny was forged for the people of God.
APPENDIX A

Order of Books in the Hebrew Bible (TaNaK)

1. THE LAW:
(Torah ... הָֽוָּרָה)

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

2. THE PROPHETS:
(Nevi'im ... נְבֵיִם)

- Joshua
- Judges
- 1 and 2 Samuel
- 1 and 2 Kings
- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Ezekiel
- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos
- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Micah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Zephaniah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi

3. THE WRITINGS:
(Kethuvim ... כְּתֻבִּים)

- Psalms
- Job
- Proverbs
- Ruth
- Song of Solomon
- Ecclesiastes
- Lamentations
- Esther
- Daniel
- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- 1 and 2 Chronicles
When faced with the evidence, it seems apparent that the closing verses of Amos 9 are later (at least 8th-century) additions to the text of Amos. Close similarities between Amos 9:13-15 and Jeremiah 31:27-29 lead me to believe that these additions came no earlier than the time of Jeremiah’s prophetic traditions in the early 8th century. A close examination of the texts reveals the similarities in language:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13“The time is surely coming,” says יהוה, “when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seeds; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. 14I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. 15I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given to them.”</td>
<td>27“Behold the days are coming,” says יהוה, “when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of animals. 28And just like I watched over them to pluck up and to break down, and to overthrow, and to destroy, and to bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,” says יהוה. 29“In those days they will no more say, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the sons’ teeth have been set on edge,’ because each man shall die by his inequities. Everyone who eats sour grapes shall have their teeth set on edge.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

Order of Books in the Christian Scriptures

1. THE GOSPELS:
   - Matthew
   - Mark
   - Luke
   - John


3. THE EPISTLES:
   - Romans
   - 1 Corinthians
   - 2 Corinthians
   - Galatians
   - Ephesians
   - Philippians
   - Colossians
   - 1 Thessalonians
   - 2 Thessalonians
   - 1 Timothy
   - 2 Timothy
   - Titus
   - Philemon
   - Hebrews
   - James
   - 1 Peter
   - 2 Peter
   - 1 John
   - 2 John
   - 3 John
   - Jude

4. The Book of Revelation


Bibliography


