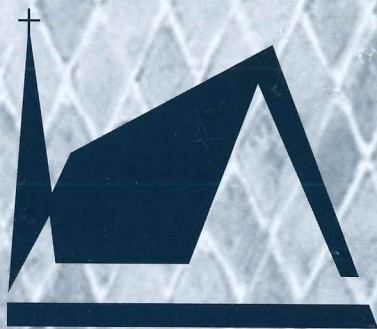


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“Preach the Word” in the Old Testament

Walter A. Maier III

The motto of Concordia Theological Seminary — κήρυξον τὸν λόγον — is taken from the New Testament (2 Timothy 4:2). This article will review selected Old Testament passages that are related to this motto. These passages shed light on the task of preaching the word, thus giving guidance today to ministers of that word.

Paul’s exhortation starts with the imperative “preach.” Old Testament counterparts are imperatives uttered by David on the occasion of the ark of the covenant being brought into Jerusalem. These words are recorded in 1 Chronicles 16:8-36. Parts of Psalms 96, 105, and 106 duplicate this portion of Chronicles.

In verse 8 of 1 Chronicles 16 David says, “Give thanks to Yahweh, call on His name, make known among the peoples His deeds.” The last phrase, “make known [verbal root עָרַךְ in the *hiphil*] among the peoples His deeds,” is an encouragement in part to proclaim, or preach, and not only among one people, the Israelites, but all over the earth, among the peoples. For two parallels of this phrase, in Psalm 105:1 [LXX 104] and Isaiah 12:4, the Septuagint renders the Hebrew verb with ἀναγγεῖλατε, from the root ἀναγγέλλω. This Greek verbal root in the New Testament can mean, according to context, “proclaim,” “announce,” “report,” or “preach.”

1 Chronicles 16:23 repeats this same theme: “Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.” The Hebrew verbal root rendered “proclaim” (the good news of), פָּשַׁר, could also be translated here “preach.” That verb פָּשַׁר, in the parallel verse of Psalm 96, is represented in the Septuagint with the Greek verb εὐαγγελίζω, used so frequently in the New Testament in contexts of proclaiming, or preaching, the gospel.

Verse 24 of 1 Chronicles 16 continues the proclamation theme: “declare [verbal root פָּרַס] among the nations His glory, among all the peoples His wonderful acts.” For the parallel verse in Psalm 96 the Septuagint translates the Hebrew verb with the Greek verbal root already noted, ἀναγγέλλω. Again David urges that preaching, certainly included in his directive to “declare,” be carried out not only in Israel, but in all the nations.

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David, in Psalm 9:11 [Hebrews, verse 12] writes, "Sing praises to Yahweh, who dwells in Zion, proclaim among the peoples His deeds." The root of the Hebrew verb translated as "proclaim" this time is נָגַד. The Septuagint renders נָגַד, of Psalm 9:11, also with the verbal root ἀναγγέλλω.

Thus three Hebrew verbs — בָּשַׂר, קִפַּר, and נָגַד — have semantic overlap. In the passages cited, these three, together with the closely related Hebrew verb יָדַע in the *hiphil* stem, in part denote preaching. As imperatives they are equivalents, so to speak, to the Greek κήρυξον, "preach."

The full motto of the seminary, however, is κήρυξον τὸν λόγον, "preach the word." While the Old Testament passages cited are not exact parallels (none have הַדְבָר, "the word"), they say essentially the same thing as the 2 Timothy passage. Instead of "the word," the objects of the Hebrew imperatives "make known," "proclaim," and "declare" are: Yahweh's deeds, His salvation, His glory, and His wonderful acts. All four are components of one reality, of one truth. Yahweh's deeds are wonderful acts; certain of His deeds result in salvation; and His acts, some of which bring about salvation, reveal Yahweh's glory, which may be defined as the sum total of God's attributes as they shine forth for people to behold, or any number of them as people perceive them. Yahweh's attributes are seen in how He acts, in what His deeds accomplish.

The contexts where we have observed the phrases "His [Yahweh's] deeds," "His salvation," "His glory," and "His wonderful acts" determine what the phrases signify. These contexts are, again, Psalm 9; Psalms 96, 105, and 106, portions of which comprise the whole psalm of David in 1 Chronicles 16 (8-36); and Isaiah 12. In Psalm 9, the deeds of Yahweh include His having rebuked the wicked (5) and dealt in righteousness with David's enemies (3-4); Yahweh's being a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble (9); His reigning forever (7), which means that Yahweh in the future will judge the world in righteousness, and govern the peoples with justice (8). As a result, David will be glad and rejoice in Yahweh (2).

In Psalm 96, David, speaking about Yahweh's salvation and wonderful acts, confesses that "Yahweh reigns [10]," and He will judge the peoples with equity and the world in righteousness (10, 13). Therefore, let the heavens rejoice, and the earth be glad (11).

In Psalm 105 David reviews the history of Israel from Abraham until the entrance into Canaan under Joshua. God showed Israel tremendous

mercy and favor, preserving the family of Jacob from starvation through His servant Joseph, and later delivering Israel from Egyptian bondage, providing for the nation in the wilderness, and leading Israel to the Promised Land. Thus, David writes, "Give thanks to Yahweh . . . make known among the peoples His deeds . . . tell of all His wonderful acts . . . let the hearts of those who seek Yahweh rejoice" (1-3).

In the psalm David gives the reason why God showed such grace to Israel: because of His covenant with Abraham, which was renewed with Isaac and Jacob (8-10). The Abrahamic covenant not only included the promise that Abraham's descendants would inherit Canaan (emphasized in Psalm 105), but also that in Abraham (and Isaac and Jacob) all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. This latter promise, of course, is connected with Genesis 3:15, where God first announces the coming Savior. God decided that the Messiah, according to His human nature, would descend from Abraham and his family, later known as Israel. Thus David, in verse 6 of Psalm 105, refers to the descendants of Abraham, the sons of Jacob, as Yahweh's "chosen ones." God showed wonderful favor to Israel, showering the nation with blessings, because from Israel would come the Savior. Yahweh was a gracious God, displaying undeserved kindness to sinful people.

Psalm 106 emphasizes that the Israelites were sinners. David reviews, in a negative light, the history of the nation from the sojourn in Egypt through the period of the judges. Despite all of Yahweh's acts of mercy and favor, the Israelites repeatedly forgot what Yahweh had done for them, rebelled against the Lord, and were spiritually unfaithful. As a result, Yahweh inflicted various punishments on the people. Yet David, toward the end of the Psalm, after describing God in His anger handing over wicked Israelites to their enemies during the period of the judges, states, "But He [Yahweh] saw their distress when He heard their cry; for their sake He remembered His covenant and according to the abundance of His grace He relented" (44-45). After reviewing the sins of His ancestors, and having confessed concerning himself and his contemporaries, "We have sinned, along with our fathers" (6), David prays, "Save us, Yahweh our God" (47).

When Isaiah in chapter 12 of his book writes, "Make known among the peoples His [Yahweh's] deeds" (4), the preceding verses of the chapter shed light on what those deeds are. Isaiah instructs the believers of his day, and of all future centuries, to say, "I will praise you, Yahweh.

Though You were angry with me, Your anger has turned away and You have comforted me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid" (1-2). The salvation Isaiah refers to is much more than mere physical deliverance from human enemies; the emphasis here is on spiritual salvation. Chapter 12 closes the first section of the book, which has Isaiah's portrayal in vivid terms of the sins of Israel, but also the powerful Messianic prophecies of chapters 7, 9, and 11. Throughout his book Isaiah announces this salvation in the coming Savior; for example, chapter 40, and the Servant Songs (which climax in the fourth, chapter 52:13-53:12).

In review, the verses examined in the first part of this article speak about proclaiming or making known, which in part implies preaching. That which is to be preached – Yahweh's deeds, His salvation, His glory, His wonderful acts – can be summarized in two words, law and gospel. Those two words summarize the entire Old Testament. This two-part message involved historical reality: the reality of Yahweh, the one true God, who is holy and righteous, but also gracious, merciful, and loving; the reality of sinful humanity, unable to save itself, and experiencing judgments of God; the reality of salvation by God's grace, because of the coming Messiah, and the blessedness of being in fellowship with Yahweh. For the believing Israelite this law-gospel message was rooted in and exemplified by the past; it had meaning for the present; and it dealt with the future, with Yahweh's sending the Messiah and judging the peoples.

This law-gospel message, namely, Yahweh's wonderful acts, which revealed His glory (His attributes), some of which resulted in negative judgment, some in salvation, was recorded in Scripture, the word of God. For the believing Israelite that meant the Torah of Moses and any other portion of the Old Testament that had been completed by the believer's lifetime. Thus one can see the verses cited in 1 Chronicles 16, the Psalms, and Isaiah as counterparts to 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the word."

Verses 9 and 10 (Hebrew 10 and 11) of Psalm 40 indicate, at least in part, proclamation, or preaching, of the word by David. He writes, "I proclaim [verbal root *בָּרַךְ*] righteousness in the great assembly . . . I speak of Your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal Your grace and truth from the great assembly." The term "great assembly" probably refers to

those who congregated in Jerusalem for public worship.¹ David delivered a law-gospel message to this assembly. The terms "faithfulness," "salvation," and "grace" denote a gospel message. Concerning the word "righteousness" in verse 9, H. C. Leupold explains: ". . . God's righteousness is that marvelous attribute of His which leads Him both to deal graciously with those who faithfully serve Him and seek His countenance as well as to punish the evildoer."² Franz Delitzsch comments concerning these verses, "He [David] has proclaimed to all Israel the evangel of Jahve's justifying and gracious rule, which only changes into retribution towards those who despise His love . . ."³

Various Old Testament verses depict the efficaciousness of this proclaimed word. For example, God tells the prophet Jeremiah with regard to the wicked of Judah, that because of their speaking untrue words, "I am making My words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and it will consume them" (5:14). Speaking in general about the power of His word that He revealed to His spokesmen, the prophets, God asks Jeremiah this rhetorical question: "Is not My word like fire . . . and like a hammer that shatters a crag?" (23:29) Joel Drinkard correctly observes that these similes portray the power of God's word. He writes:

Fire bears the image of destruction, but also of refining. Likewise, the hammer may shatter, break in pieces, or may be used to cut that which is being forged, therefore being sharp, incisive. The hammer may also be used in refining to beat out the base material. Alternatively, hammer may refer to the stone-mason's craft and depict the cutting of blocks, or the final shaping of blocks.⁴

¹See Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, translated by Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986), 67-70; H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959), 326; and Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," in volume 5 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 321. Peter C. Craigie, in his *Psalms 1-50*, thinks the term "great congregation/assembly" could refer to the people of the entire nation of Israel (volume 19 of *Word Biblical Commentary* [Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983], 315 and 317).

²Leupold, *Psalms*, 326.

³Franz Delitzsch, *Psalms*, translated by Francis Bolton, volume V of *Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, n. d.; original date 1871), 41.

⁴Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25*, volume 26 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1991), 350.

Drinkard concludes: "Both images (fire and hammer) show the relationship between destruction and refining . . . While Yahweh's word does refine, it burns away the straw, it shatters and removes the common rock while leaving the ore, it cuts and shapes the stone into a useful architectural unit."⁵

Carl Keil sees the image of a hammer smashing rock as illustrating "the power of God, which overcomes all that is earthly, even what is firmest and hardest," and cites Hebrews 4:12 as a comparison verse: ". . . the Word of God . . . sharper than any double-edged sword . . . piercing even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow . . ."⁶

The well-known Old Testament passage concerning the efficaciousness of the proclaimed word of God is Isaiah 55:10-11. Verses 8 and 9 also will be included:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares Yahweh. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bring forth and sprout, so that it gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so will be My word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish that which I desire and be successful in that for which I sent it."

This word from Yahweh's mouth is that which was proclaimed by the prophets and written down by them. They received the word directly from Yahweh's mouth. Other preachers had it mediately, from the prophetic Scripture (the Old Testament), but what they declared still was the word from Yahweh's mouth.

As the divine word, it produces the results God wants, His purposes, as did God's word at creation, as recorded in Genesis 1. This word is effective, dynamic, "alive with . . . [God's] power," to use the phrase of August Pieper.⁷ As God performs His will in the rain and snow, so He

⁵Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah*, 350.

⁶Carl F. Keil, *Jeremiah. Lamentations*, translated by David Patrick and James Kennedy, volume VII of *Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, no date; original date 1880), 364.

⁷August Pieper, *Isaiah II*, translated by Erwin E. Kowalke (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1979), 489.

does, too, in His word. Edward Young comments, "If in matters so transitory [for example, the rain and snow] God's power is efficacious, what will it not be with respect to the word that proceeds from His mouth?"⁸

The context of Isaiah 55 emphasizes God's word as creative and enabling, watering the soil of the human heart, softening it, and rendering it productive. In literal terms, the word leads sinners to repentance, faith, and the blessings of salvation, including everlasting life, and empowers them for godly living. Alec Motyer points out:

On the one hand, repentance is the way to enter the great, free feast [described in Isaiah 55]; on the other hand, the call to repent [contained in Isaiah 55] is a word of God bringing with it its own power of accomplishment. As the rain furnishes both seed and bread, so the word of God plants the seed of repentance in the heart and feeds the returning sinner with the blessed consequences repentance produces.⁹

A related observation comes from Martin Luther:

This . . . [passage in Isaiah 55] is spoken in part . . . for the consolation of the weak. For consolation, because the Word seems so weak and foolish that there appears to be no strength in it. How can it be believed that all the power, victory, and triumph of God are in the word of a feeble human mouth? . . . It is therefore a consolation for the purpose of lifting up the weak, lest they be offended at the lowliness of God, who has every victory in His Word. . . . So our building and promotion of the church is not the result of our works but of the Word of God which we preach, . . . Here you see that everything is produced by the Word.¹⁰

While Isaiah 55 deals mainly with the repentance of sinners, the verses quoted from this chapter are not limited in their meaning to that particular subject. Though verses 8 and 9, concerning God's thoughts and

⁸Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, volume 3 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1972), 383.

⁹J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 458.

¹⁰*Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 volumes, edited by J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1955-1986), 17:257-258.

ways not being our thoughts and ways, refer in the context of chapter 55 to God's plan of salvation by grace and not human effort, what these verses teach holds true for other thoughts and ways of God. Likewise, though verses 10 and 11, speaking of the effectiveness of God's word, emphasize salutary results, the full meaning of these verses does not exclude the judicial. As Young explains: "In this particular context the element of blessing seems to predominate . . . but the thought is not thus limited. Just as the word is efficacious for the salvation of believers, so also is it abundantly efficacious for condemning the wicked [for instance, those who are not brought to faith]." ¹¹ Young cites Christ's words in John 12:48: "The one who rejects Me and does not receive My words has a judge; that word which I spoke will judge him at the last day." Isaiah 6 also shows the judicial effects of the word, where God, according to His secondary will with regard to the unrepentant, commands Isaiah through the preaching of God's word to "make fat [unreceptive] the heart of this people; make their ears heavy [unresponsive] and blind their eyes" (10).

Preaching the efficacious word, though, involves more than simply reading it out loud. Preaching means using a text from Scripture and explaining, expounding, interpreting, and applying it for the hearers. The phrases examined earlier — "make known among the peoples Yahweh's deeds," "proclaim His salvation from day to day," "declare among the nations His glory, among all the peoples His wonderful acts" — imply an exposition of Scripture. Even the prophets, it can be assumed, who proclaimed the word recorded in their books, would also at times add explanations for the hearers which are not included in their writings. ¹²

Leviticus 10:9 and 11 bring out the importance and necessity of not only reading God's word to the people but also properly interpreting Scripture. In this verse God spells out one of the main duties of the priests. There were provisions for the priests to read the Torah publicly to the people (Deuteronomy 31:11), but here God says to Aaron, "You and your sons . . . must *teach* [verbal root יָרָה] the Israelites all the decrees

¹¹Young, *Book of Isaiah*, 384.

¹²One may also see J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), who holds, concerning the prophetic speeches, that "we have frequently only brief accounts or summaries . . ." (154; see also 159). Lindblom also refers to the "disciples" ("taught ones") in Isaiah 8:16, and thinks this is evidence that there were, generally speaking, disciples of the prophets (162). He writes: "The occupation of the disciples consisted in the first place in receiving instruction from their prophetic leaders concerning the religious and moral principles of their preaching" (162).

which Yahweh spoke to them through Moses." The priests were to help the people understand and learn the Torah. Similarly, Moses says concerning the members of the tribe of Levi in Deuteronomy 33:10, "They shall teach [verbal root יָדַע] Your precepts to Jacob, and Your Torah to Israel." Moreover, this teaching activity may have included the priests preaching to the people, both at the tabernacle or temple and in the towns of Israel. 2 Chronicles 17:7-9 reports how priests and Levites sent by King Jehoshaphat "taught [verbal root לָמַד] in Judah, having with them the Book of the law of Yahweh; they went about in all the towns of Judah and taught among the people." This writer agrees with the opinion of Joyce Baldwin, who thinks that these priests and Levites "fulfilled an itinerant preaching programme . . ." ¹³

Toward the end of Old Testament history God, through His prophet Malachi, describes the kind of godly priest who existed previously in Israel, and who was a contrast to the wicked priests of Malachi's day. God says, "True instruction" – whether instructing an individual or many people – "was in his mouth and no wrong was found on his lips" (2:6). This meant the priest knew the word and expounded it correctly and appropriately for the people as their teacher and/or preacher. The Malachi passage continues: "For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge [this implies studying], and from his mouth men should seek instruction - because he is the messenger of Yahweh Sabaoth" (2:7). Both priests and prophets, who spoke God's word to the people and interpreted it, were messengers of Yahweh. However, the prophets were special, extraordinary spokesmen of Yahweh; the priests were ordinary messengers.

Proclamation of God's word, then, can take place in a private or public setting, in a teaching or preaching format (and there is, of course, overlap). This proclamation involves using Scripture and having proper interpretation and application of the biblical text. Nehemiah 8 reports an interesting example of public proclamation. In the day of Ezra and Nehemiah many of the people of Judah assembled at Jerusalem. From a high platform Ezra read aloud to them from the Book of the Torah. Verse 7 states that at the same time the Levites "helped the people to understand the Torah" while the people were standing there. As H. G. M. Williamson has explained, probably Ezra paused after a certain amount

¹³Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, volume 24 of The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 236.

of reading, and the Levites moved among the people, explaining the word to them.¹⁴ Verse 8 goes on to say that the Levites were "giving the sense" to the people, so that they "understood the reading."

In summary, there are passages in the Old Testament equivalent to the New Testament's "Preach the word." What was to be preached, or proclaimed, was the word of God, law and gospel. This word showed people their sin, the way of salvation, and God's will for their lives. The word preached, God's word, was powerful, effective. Nevertheless, true proclamation involved more than simply reading or quoting from Scripture.

Appropriate at this point is a brief review of the blessed results of proper preaching of the word during the Old Testament history. We are all familiar with the stories of people who, because of their hearing proclamation, repent, confess their faith in Yahweh, and lead lives pleasing to the Lord. One representative passage is Joshua 24, which recounts how Joshua, in a covenant renewal ceremony after the conquest of Canaan, preaches to the Israelites who have assembled at Shechem. He urges them, "Now fear Yahweh and serve Him in integrity and truth," and the people respond, "We . . . will serve Yahweh, because He is our God" (14, 18). We think of the periods of such godly kings as David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah, during whose reigns edifying declaration of the word was the norm. As a result, the majority of the people were faithful to Yahweh, and the nation experienced God's blessing. We think of God, through the preaching of the prophet Haggai in the post-exilic community, bringing those in Judah to repentance and the God-glorifying response of rebuilding the temple.

Nehemiah 8 relates how the people, because of the proclamation carried out by Ezra and the Levites (and Nehemiah, also), wept because of the law portions of the Torah, but rejoiced because of the gospel sections. Malachi 2 says that the God-fearing priest, who was Yahweh's faithful messenger, "turned many from iniquity" (6). The Lord used the proper handling of the word by godly priests to change people in such a blessed way.¹⁵

¹⁴H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, volume 16 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1985), 290.

¹⁵One may also see the opposite picture in Micah 3:11-12.

Another result of preaching the word was that the true preacher at times had the love and respect of those who heard him and benefited from his proclamation. This is strongly implied in the description of the godly priest in Malachi 2:4-7. Verse 9 presents the opposite situation: the corrupt priests of Malachi's day, who with their corrupt handling of the Torah caused many to stumble, being despised and humiliated by all the people.

The language of Isaiah 52:7 applies to preachers of the gospel: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings good news of happiness, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" The Hebrew verbal root *בָּשַׂר* occurs twice in this verse, and the phrase "Your God reigns!" echoes Psalm 96:10, "Say among the nations, 'Yahweh reigns.'" Isaiah employs the imagery of a messenger in the ancient Near East running and bringing good tidings to a community. Crossing mountains, he finally enters the village and delivers the news to the people who have been waiting for him. Delighted, overjoyed with his message, they have sincere gratitude for the messenger, viewing even his dirty, dusty feet as beautiful. No doubt many gospel preachers during the Old Testament era had the great appreciation of those who were spiritually refreshed and encouraged through their proclamation.

Again, these sample passages report or indicate blessed results of proclamation of the word, and of a happy relationship between the preacher and those hearing him. But what about those cases when the faithful declaration of God's word had negative results and the godly messengers experienced persecution, which led some of them to complain to the Lord? One recalls especially certain chapters in the lives of Elijah and Jeremiah. 1 Kings 19 relates that Elijah, threatened by Jezebel with death, runs for his life, and prays, "It is enough! Now, Yahweh, take my life, because I am no better than my ancestors" (4). Later, on Mount Sinai, he complains to the Lord, "I have been very zealous for Yahweh, God of Hosts. For the Israelites have abandoned Your covenant, broken down Your altars, and put Your prophets to death with the sword, and I, I alone, am left, and they seek my life, to take it" (14).

In chapter 20 of his book, verses 7-18, Jeremiah records a most bitter complaint to Yahweh due to the miseries, opposition, and ridicule he encountered as His messenger. Theodore Laetsch describes the angry,

despondent prophet: "... he breaks down completely. . . . His office appeared to him as an intolerable burden. . . . He is disgusted with his office, dissatisfied with his God, who had called him into this office. He charges God with having deceived him."¹⁶ Concerning verses 14-18, when Jeremiah curses the day of his birth and wishes that he had been aborted, Laetsch writes: "Jeremiah breaks forth in one of the most violent outbursts of dissatisfaction and denunciation of the ways of the Lord ever uttered by human tongue."¹⁷

The following are four observations about the situations of these prophets. First, both men, despite their bitterness, still communicated with the Lord in prayer. Though at a spiritual lowpoint, they have not cut themselves off completely from Yahweh.

Second, the reason for their complaining was that they were disappointed and angry with the results of their proclaiming the word of God. Their countrymen did not repent *en masse* and return to Yahweh in genuine faith. The reality was the opposite of what they had hoped and worked for: their countrymen kept on violating the covenant and persecuting or killing God's prophets. Elijah and Jeremiah themselves had to endure fierce hostility and opposition. What had been the point of their ministry? Why should they continue to preach the word?

Third, both men were wrong to complain. Laetsch comments with regard to Jeremiah:

Forgotten was that great honor bestowed upon him to be an ambassador of the Most High, a spokesman of the Lord of Lords. . . . Forgotten was God's word that He [sic] was also called to build and to plant (ch. 1: 10) . . . [his charge that God deceived him] is without foundation, for God had very definitely foretold trials against which it would be necessary to stand like an iron pillar . . . and had promised to be with him.¹⁸

As Laetsch points out, it was Jeremiah's sinful flesh speaking here.¹⁹

Elijah, too, complained because he was not fully trusting in the Lord. Simon DeVries explains that

¹⁶Theodore Laetsch, *Jeremiah* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952), 176.

¹⁷Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, 178.

¹⁸Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, 176.

¹⁹Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, 176.

there can be little doubt but that the Elijah of our narrative is so weak and filled with despair because he has suddenly cut himself off [that is, distanced himself] from the fountain of his strength, the God of Israel, who is also the God of heaven and earth. All that he can remember that is positive is his own prophetic authority and authenticity: "I have been furiously zealous for Yahweh, God of Hosts." Any prophet who sees things going badly in his ministry and as a result wants to abandon it and perhaps surrender his very life must assuredly have forgotten from whom his real strength comes.²⁰

But these prophets were wrong to complain also because they were judging the results of their preaching according to their viewpoint, plans, purposes, wishes. They simply had the wrong evaluation of their ministry. God undoubtedly startled Elijah with His response to the prophet: "Yet I cause to remain seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him" (18). The Book of Jeremiah, and other Old Testament literature, give evidence that there was similarly a faithful minority in Judah during the time of Jeremiah's prophetic activity. Both men may have been blind to, or they overlooked, the facts, but their proclamation had positive results. God used their preaching for the benefit of a remnant of believing Israelites. Their number did not match that of the prophets' hopes, but it corresponded exactly to God's plan.

As discussed above, in Isaiah 55:8-9 God says that His thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are higher than our ways. God promises in Isaiah 55:11 that His word would accomplish what *He* desires and achieve the purpose for which *He* sent it. God's purpose may not be identical to that of His messengers, and vice versa. Elijah and Jeremiah had one definition of success, God another. God evaluated their ministries as successful, because *His* goals were met. Luther has this pertinent observation with regard to Isaiah 55:11: "Therefore He [God] consoles us that although our word is persecuted and resisted, it will nevertheless achieve results, because it is the word of the mouth of God. . . . Thus you see here how He speaks against the offense that causes

²⁰Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, volume 12 of Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1985), 236-237.

us to fear that the word of God will be without fruit, as seems to be the case."²¹

This understanding of God's purposes helps us to have a proper perspective concerning the proclamation of the word and Old Testament history. Despite the ministry of prophets and other preachers the Northern Kingdom and Judah proved to be unfaithful to Yahweh, with the result that the Northern Kingdom came to an end, and Judah continued in a much-reduced condition after the exile. One could judge the proclamation of the word a failure, yet that judgment would be incorrect.

Concerning the New Testament era, Scripture informs us that, despite the preaching of the word, in the future the church will decrease in size, undergo severe persecution, and be hammered down by the unbelieving world. Nevertheless, one should not consider the declaration of God's word during the New Testament period as, ultimately, unsuccessful. For God has used, from the beginning of world history, and He will use, to the end of world history, faithful proclamation to accomplish His will. God's blessing has attended and will attend all true messengers, from Enoch (Jude 14-15) and Noah (2 Peter 2:5) to those preaching when Christ returns on the Last Day.

The fourth observation is that God helped both Elijah and Jeremiah; He delivered them from their crises. Through the word God spoke to Elijah on Mount Sinai, and through the gospel that Jeremiah records in the middle of his complaint and elsewhere in his book, God renewed them spiritually, encouraged them, and empowered them for further service. Despite the fact that both men wanted to give up, God had more work for the prophets, which He enabled them to accomplish.

In conclusion, David's exhortation, "Proclaim Yahweh's deeds," remains relevant for us today. Our message is about Yahweh's deeds, and the Old Testament shows us why we are to deliver that message with joy and confidence. Therefore we heed these words of David, "Proclaim Yahweh's salvation from day to day"; or, "Declare among the nations His glory, among all the peoples His wonderful acts." Or, to put David's exhortation into New Testament terminology, κήρυξον τὸν λόγον, "Preach the word!"

²¹Luther's Works, 17:258.

Eschatological Events in New Testament Perspective

Walter A. Maier

Many concerns and speculations were expressed during the year preceding the supposed advent of the third millennium on January 1, 2000. These fueled widespread interest in what the Bible says about the world's end and events leading up thereto. The *Newsweek* of November 1, 1999 had a cover headlined "Prophecy." The issue featured an article by John Leland titled "Millennial Madness" and another by Kenneth Woodward entitled "The Way the World Ends," both describing popular beliefs about the end times. Leland reported that "thousands of Christians, many of them American, . . . have lately flocked to the city [Jerusalem] to be on hand for the prophesied return of Christ." He further stated:

For millions of Americans the prophecies found in Revelation . . . are a blueprint of the events to come — if not in 2000, then soon enough. According to a *Newsweek* poll about 18 percent of Americans expect the endtimes to come within their lifetime. This translates to roughly 36 million people — not just fringe extremists but your office mate, mail carrier, or soccer coach. Or your U.S. representative: House Majority Whip Tom Delay has a wood carving in his office that reads "This could be the Day," a phrase widely used to refer to the Rapture.¹

Kenneth Woodward similarly observed:

Millennial dreams and apocalyptic nightmares are never far below the surface of the American psyche — especially now, as the third millennium approaches The . . . interesting phenomenon is the enormous role prophecy has played in Western religions and popular culture. A *Newsweek* poll found that 40 percent of American adults do believe that the world will one day end, as Revelation describes, in the Battle of Armageddon In the 1970's the best selling book of the decade was Hal Lindsey's apocalyptic *The Late Great Planet Earth*, with 28 million copies sold by 1990. More

¹John Leland, "Millennial Madness," *Newsweek*, November 1, 1999, 70.

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recently, a series of *Left Behind* novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins based on Christian prophecies, including two published this year, have sold more than 9 million copies. Among academics, studies of the apocalyptic traditions have produced dozens of new books. "Over the past 30 years," says Bernard McGinn, a medieval specialist at the University of Chicago Divinity School, "more scholarship has been devoted to apocalypticism than in the last 300."²

Christians in our country, while seeking answers in the Bible for questions concerning the last times and the second coming of Christ, differ in their understanding of what the Scriptures, especially the book of Revelation, teach regarding these matters. Many interpret the Bible as teaching millennialism—a literal thousand years of peace, prosperity, growth, and blessing for the church on earth, before the end of human history. In the belief of some, the so-called premillennialists, Christ will return visibly and in great glory prior to the thousand-year period and reign throughout this time with His saints on earth; according to others, the so-called postmillennialists, the thousand-year golden age will come first, and Christ will return at the end of this period. Still others, like most Lutherans, hold that the Bible teaches nothing at all about a golden age at the beginning of which, or after which, Christ will visibly reign with the church on the present earth. Those of this belief have been called amillennialists; they hold that the world will worsen until Christ returns for a final judgment of all mankind.

Against the background of the welter of notions voiced in our society today regarding the terminus of human history, and in view of the confusion in the Christian church itself concerning the end times, it is the purpose of this essay to note the principal and clear teachings of the New Testament pertaining to the end and then, in particular, to focus upon, examine, and refute various ideas enunciated by leading Christian teachers representative of differing millennialistic persuasions. The extravagant notions of sectarian groups and other extremists will not be treated.

²Kenneth Woodward, "The Way the World Ends," *Newsweek* (November 1, 1999): 68.

I. Biblical Eschatology

Missouri Synod Lutherans hold, on the basis of Scripture, the following to be valid and clear teaching of the New Testament pertaining to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and events presaging, accompanying, and following that coming:

1. Jesus Christ Himself foretold various signs that would point to His second coming — some occurring in every generation of history (Matthew 24:3-14) and some appearing at the very end of time (Matthew 24:29-31). The signs occurring in every age — the upheavals in society such as the constant warring among nations, the cataclysms of nature, the rise of false teachers, and so on — are also treated in the symbolism of the book of Revelation. This is seen, for example, in the book's descriptions of the opening of the seven seals and the sounding of the seven trumpets, and of the destructive results of these acts. One bright sign is prophesied by Jesus, who says that gospel preaching will continue until the world's end, until its testimony has reached the entire inhabited world (Matthew 24:14).

2. Opposition to Christ and His church will continue and increase in the world until Christ returns in glory, and puts a summary end to the enemies of Him and His people on judgment day (1 Corinthians 15:24-26; Revelation 20:7-12; Matthew 24:3-13; 25:31-33; Jude 13-15).

3. At Christ's return all the dead will be resurrected (John 5:28-29; Mark 12:18-27; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). The last generation of persons living at Christ's return will not die, but be summoned alive before His judgment throne. The believers among them, gloriously transformed (1 Corinthians 15:51-52), will, together with believers resurrected from the dead, be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) on the way to judgment.

4. The final judgment of all of humanity will take place in accord with the description given in Matthew 25:31-46 (see also Romans 2:5-16). This judgment will do nothing to change the eternal destiny of those who had been believers or who had been unbelievers on earth. It is required by God in order to reveal to all men and angels His righteousness (Romans 2:5) in dealing with men as He had throughout their lifetimes on earth and now on the day of judgment, saving some and condemning others. Every mouth will acclaim Him righteous and every tongue confess that

Jesus Christ is Lord (compare Philippians 2:9-11). For this reason the judgment is according to works of men.

5. Meanwhile, the first heavens and earth will be destroyed by fire, preparatory to their reconstitution (2 Peter 3:10-14; Romans 8:19-23; Revelation 21:1).

6. After the final judgment, the unbelieving wicked will be remanded to eternal damnation in hell and Christ will lead the saints to eternal life in heaven (Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10). The heaven of God and a newly-created heaven and earth will actually be joined and become one. The heaven of God and His saints, descending to become one with the new heaven and earth, is called in Revelation 21:2 "the Holy City" and the "New Jerusalem." The union and communion of God with His people, as envisioned and prepared for by Him, will be consummated and last forever.

Before addressing various millennialistic views, it will be useful to 1) say a few words about the organization of the material in the book of Revelation, and 2) provide a translation of the Greek text of Revelation 20:1-6, in which a period of a thousand years is mentioned, and with reference to which numerous millennialistic notions are formulated.

The book of Revelation is comprised of seven visions concerning events contemporary with the apostle John, to whom the exalted Christ gave these visions while His disciple was exiled on Patmos, and events taking place in the future. Beginning with the second vision, the apostle is given information as to what shall transpire in the world and with reference to the church during the New Testament period, until the end of time—each vision bringing additional information and concluding with a reference to the world's end. Thus, the visions are easily demarcated and distinguished. The overriding theme of Revelation is "The Present Rule and Ultimate, Absolute Triumph of God and His Saints over All the Forces of Evil in the World."

The following is this author's translation of the Greek text of Revelation 20:1-6:

(1.) And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the abyss and a great chain on his hand. (2.) And he laid hold of the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is [the] devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, (3.) and threw him into the abyss

and locked and sealed [it] over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, till the thousand years were finished. After these things it is necessary that he be released for a little time.

(4.) And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And [I saw] the souls of those who had been beheaded on account of the testimony of Jesus and on account of the word of God, and [I saw the souls of] such as did not worship the beast or his image and did not receive [his] mark on their forehead and on their hand. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (5.) The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were finished. This [is] the first resurrection. (6.) Blessed and holy [is] the one having part in the first resurrection! Over these persons the second death does not have authority; on the contrary, they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with Him for the thousand years.³

A compressed summary of chief teachings of the several groups of millennialists follows, along with the present writer's short commentary on the various views.⁴ Premillennialist doctrines fall into one of two

³The Greek text translated is that of the 27th edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece*, edited by Barbara and Kurt Aland, and others (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

⁴This author's information on the various millennial systems presented in this paper has been gleaned in large measure from *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, edited by Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977). Clouse gathered essays from leading proponents of the four major millennial views. Each author sets forth the millennial position that he espouses. At the conclusion of each article, the other contributors respond from their particular viewpoints. George Eldon Ladd of Fuller Theological Seminary presents Historic Premillennialism, Herman A. Hoyt of Grace Theological Seminary writes about Dispensational Premillennialism, Loraine Boettner discusses Postmillennialism, and Anthony A. Hoekema of Calvin Theological Seminary explains the amillennial position.

At the end of his book, Clouse adds a selected bibliography of millennialist literature; in the introduction he indicates the ages of the Christian era in which each millennial outlook has predominated. In the progression of his work Clouse mentions by name other leading biblical scholars who are exponents of the respective millennial positions.

Other works consulted include George E. Ladd, *The Last Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978); Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1957); Herman A. Hoyt, *The End Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969); and William E. Cox, *An*

categories, those that characterize "Historic Premillennialism" and those that characterize "Dispensational Premillennialism."

II. Historic Premillennialism

A. *A Delineation of Historic Premillennialism*

In a summary of distinctive Historic Premillennialist doctrines, George Eldon Ladd writes:

Revelation 19:11-16 pictures the Second Coming of Christ as a conqueror coming to destroy his enemies: the Antichrist, Satan and Death. Revelation 19:17-21 pictures first the destruction of Antichrist and the hosts which have supported him in opposition to the kingdom of God. Revelation 20 then relates the destruction of the evil power behind the Antichrist—"the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan" (Revelation 20:2). This occurs in two stages. First, Satan is bound and incarcerated in "the bottomless pit" (Revelation 20:1) for a thousand years "that he should deceive the nations no more" (Revelation 20:3) as he had done through Antichrist. At this time occurs the "first resurrection" (Revelation 20:5) of saints who share Christ's rule over the earth for the thousand years. After this Satan is loosed from his bonds, and in spite of the fact that Christ has reigned over the earth for a thousand years, he finds the hearts of unregenerated men still ready to rebel against God. The final eschatological war follows when the devil is thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone. Then occurs a second resurrection of those who had not been raised before the millennium. They appear before the judgment throne of God to be judged according to their works. "If any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). Then Death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire.

Thus Christ wins his victory over his three enemies: Antichrist, Satan and Death. Only then, when all hostile powers have been subdued,

is the scene ready for the eternal state—the coming of the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:1-4).⁵

Referring to Romans 11:26, “And so all Israel will be saved,” Ladd declares that “the New Testament clearly affirms the salvation of literal Israel,” but “does not give any details about the day of salvation It may well be that Israel’s conversion will take place in connection with the millennium. It may be that in the millennium, for the first time in human history, we will witness a truly Christian nation.”⁶

On the basis of his translation and interpretation of Revelation 20:4-5, Ladd holds to two physical resurrections from the dead—one occurring at the beginning of the thousand years, and this of believers who had died before the millenium’s inception, and thereafter reigned with Christ on earth during the millennium; and one of the rest of believers, later converted, and of unbelievers, occurring at the end of the thousand years. He translates, “they [the persons mentioned earlier in verse 4] *came to life*, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead *did not come to life* until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.”⁷

B. A Response to Historic Premillennialism

1. In assuming a literal thousand years of Christ’s supposed millennial reign on earth, Ladd, like other premillennialists, does not reckon with the symbolism in the numbers used in Revelation, as well as in other apocalyptic literature. Just as the “chain” mentioned in Revelation 20:1 has a symbolic significance, for in reality the devil, who is a spirit, cannot be bound with a material chain, so the number 1000 must be conceived of as symbolic. The number 10 is regarded as the number of minor completeness in Revelation; when 10 is multiplied by itself, and this product by 10 again to produce 1000, a period of major completeness is connoted, here an entire, prolonged period of time, whatever the exact number of years within it. To what period do the thousand years of Revelation 20 refer? We must consider when the thousand years begin. They begin with the binding of Satan (20:1-3), and that occurs at the time of Christ’s ascension and His enthroning at the right hand of the Father,

⁵Clouse, *Meaning*, 17-18.

⁶Clouse, *Meaning*, 28.

⁷Clouse, *Meaning*, 35 (Ladd’s brackets; emphasis added).

when the devil and his minions lose the war fought with Michael and his angels, as described in Revelation 12. When do the thousand years end? They end after the devil's release from his bonds, just before the Lord's return and the battle of Armageddon (the final judgment), which takes place at the world's end. Thus, "the thousand years" is the symbolic designation for the entire New Testament era.

2. Ladd refers to "Antichrist" in the citation above. The name "Antichrist" appears nowhere in the book of Revelation. The antichrist (the "man of sin" of 2 Thessalonians 2:3 and following) is only one of the forces opposing Christ and His church in the New Testament era, the totality of the antagonistic power (including the antichrist) being symbolized by the first wild beast in Revelation (13:1).

3. Ladd does not recognize the cyclical arrangement of the visions in Revelation, when he regards Vision Seven, beginning with chapter 20, as following historically upon the last chapter (19) of Vision Six. Thus he derives his doctrine of *premillennialism*; he sees the thousand years of chapter 20 beginning after Christ's Second Coming as reported in chapter 19. In reality chapter 20 takes us back again to the beginning of Christ's rule at the Father's right hand following His ascension, and its consequences, the defeat of Satan reported already in chapter 12, which also results in his (Satan's) binding as Revelation 20:1-3 indicates.

4. Ladd erroneously sees Christ reigning with His resurrected saints on earth for the thousand years, whereas Revelation 20 says that His reign is conducted in and from heaven, with the participation of the souls of believers in heaven who had died on earth.

5. In holding to his position that Revelation 20:4-6 teaches two physical resurrections from the dead, Ladd does not adhere to fundamental hermeneutical principles. One of these is that any passage of God's word must be interpreted according to the analogy of Scripture, that is, in agreement with what the Scriptures teach elsewhere on the same subject; the Bible cannot contradict itself. Thus any exposition of a passage that does not agree with all its parallels is untenable. A companion principle is that the less clear passages of Scripture (like those containing figurative speech and symbolic expressions) must always be interpreted in the light of the clearer passages (the literal teachings), which method of procedure must never be reversed. Scripture interprets Scripture. Now the New Testament knows of only one resurrection of the dead and reveals that

this will occur for *all* men on judgment day (John 5:28-29; Hebrews 9:27). Therefore, another meaning for "the first resurrection" of Revelation 20:5-6 must be found, as well as for an implied second resurrection.

6. Contributing to his misunderstanding of Revelation 20 is Ladd's translation of the two occurrences of ἐζήσαν in verses 4 and 5. While his translations "come to life" and "did not come to life" are possible as far as the lexicon and New Testament usage elsewhere are concerned, the context requires that these aorist verbs here be rendered "lived" and "did not live." The souls of the departed martyrs and other saints lived and reigned with Christ in heaven throughout the New Testament era, the apostle John states (verses 4-6), and denominates this "the first resurrection." In the symbolism of Revelation the first resurrection is the blessed passage of the souls of believers from earth to heaven at the time of physical death, to join Jesus in heavenly life and jointly rule with Him there. The implied second resurrection would be the passage of the body, too, to heavenly glory after the final resurrection on judgment day. Parenthetically, the apostle adds that the rest of the dead, unbelievers who had died, did not live throughout the millennium as did the souls of the saints in heaven (verse 5a). The implication is that the souls of unbelievers who had died were remanded in the intermediate state to hell, later referred to in chapter 20 as "the second death," "the lake of fire," into which the damned, in body and soul, will be cast after the final judgment. The implied first death of unbelievers (in Revelation) would be their physical death on earth.

7. As for Ladd's belief in a national Jewish conversion, perhaps during the millennium, it should be noted that in the whole of Revelation 20:1-7 (the only passage in the entire Scripture that mentions a thousand years) there is no reference at all to the Jews, much less to their conversion. This idea is, in fact, simply taught nowhere in Revelation or anywhere else in the Bible. In Romans 11:26, to which Ladd refers, the "Israel" there is spiritual or believing Israel, the whole number of elect among the Jews; and the context shows how a remnant of Jews will still be saved in every New Testament generation.

From all the preceding considerations, then, we see clearly that the New Testament teaches none of the distinctive doctrines of Historic Premillennialism.

III. Dispensational Premillennialism

A. A Delineation of Dispensational Premillennialism

Herman A. Hoyt sees the subject of the millennial kingdom presented in the Scriptures as one aspect of the larger theme of the kingdom of God. Whereas Historic Premillennialism derives its teaching concerning the millennium exclusively from the New Testament, Dispensational Premillennialism (hereafter referred to by the shortened term "Dispensationalism," its adherents being "dispensationalists") bases most of its teaching relating to the millennium on the Old Testament, the prophetic portions in particular. A cardinal hermeneutical principle of Dispensationalism is that all of the Old Testament, including its prophecies, must always be interpreted literally.⁸

According to Hoyt, Dispensationalism is centrally concerned with the teaching of Scripture regarding the kingdom of God, which, Hoyt says, may be broadly defined as the rule of God over His creatures. There are two aspects of this rule, one universal, describing the extent of the divine rule, the other "mediatorial," describing the method of God's rule. The universal aspect may be termed God's universal kingdom, which is everlasting, encompasses all creation, and is almost wholly providential, operating irrespective of the attitudes of the subjects. From the point of view of the Testament, whereas the universal kingdom always had been and always would be present, the full flourishing of the mediatorial was promised in the future. When God will have accomplished His purpose in the mediatorial kingdom, it will be merged with the universal kingdom, and there will be one throne.

The sphere of operation of the mediatorial kingdom was to be within the larger sphere of the universal. The former kingdom is denominated mediatorial, because God would conduct His rule in and over His people through a mediator, a chosen representative who would speak and act for God with the people on the one hand and, on the other, represent the people to God. Preparation for the inauguration of the mediatorial kingdom in history began at creation. God created man, endowed him

⁸Paraphrases and cursorily gathered citations of Hoyt's explanations without the use of quotation marks are interspersed in what follows, so as to communicate as clearly and accurately as possible Hoyt's digest of dispensational teaching (pages 64 and following in Clouse, *Meaning*).

with the potentialities for dominion, and commanded him to exercise this derived function in accordance with the divine will. But Adam and subsequent humanity sinned and introduced chaos and disorder on the earth. This brought about abandonment by God and the universal catastrophe of the flood.

Thereafter God turned in a new direction to accomplish His will. He sought to rule His people through the mediation of patriarchs. He called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees; through this man there were to come godly men who would serve in the capacity of mediators, exercising authority derived from God. Following Abraham in the line of succession were Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, the judges, Samuel, and then the kings, all discharging the responsibility of mediatorial control. Because of the wickedness of kings succeeding Solomon during the period of the divided kingdom, there was a gradual decline in the mediatorial function of the kings, so that the rule of God became more indirect. God brought prophets upon the scene, through whose proclamation He got His message to the people. But continuing apostasy and degeneration in Israel inevitably brought the disapproval of the Lord and the departure of His blessing from the nation. Since the people had forsaken God, God now forsook the people. Beginning with the Babylonian exile and for the centuries immediately following, there was an interruption of the mediatorial kingdom.

God was not utterly through with His people, however. Through His prophets He had promised them a deliverer, the Messiah, a perfect mediatorial king, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would discharge a saving ministry toward His subjects and be able to carry God's program for mankind through to complete success. The message of the Old Testament prophets centered upon this mediatorial king and the kingdom in which He would rule. What the prophets predicted must be understood literally. Thus, the coming mediatorial kingdom would be manifested in the establishment of an earthly kingdom, as real as the historical kingdom of Israel. That coming material kingdom, said the prophets, will have its central location in Jerusalem, with a real king sitting on a material throne from which He will govern the world. Nations of mankind will participate in the ministry of welfare and deliverance of this kingdom. The wicked kingdoms of this world will be brought to a sudden and catastrophic end at the second coming of Christ, and His kingdom will supplant them forever. The Lord will delegate the multiplied

responsibilities of government to a spiritual nobility of resurrected saints. The redeemed, living nation of Israel, regenerated and permanently regathered to her land, will be head over all the nations of the earth, exalted over the saved Gentile nations.

In this new state of affairs there will be a restoration of perfect social relations. War will be completely eliminated. Religious purification will take place: a central sanctuary will be established in Jerusalem for the use of the people of all nations, and the Shekinah Glory will again take up its rightful place in the temple. The original intention of God for Israel will be accomplished by this people becoming the leaders and teachers of religious truths. People in all nations will be under the complete influence of the Holy Spirit; they will all experience forgiveness and the full knowledge of God; they will be righteous and live righteously. Of benefit to men will be the fact that the earth will undergo physical transformation: geological and climatic changes, increased fertility of the soil, and changes in animal nature. There will be healing of physical ills and the blessing of eternal life.

All the conditions just described will prevail, according to dispensational thought, in the millennium, inaugurated by the second coming of Christ. Dispensationalism simply pontificates that Revelation 20:1-6 teaches a literal millennium. However, what leads up to this period, and what follows it?

When Christ was born and conducted His ministry in Palestine, He offered this coming millennial kingdom to His Jewish countrymen. Despite the powerful teaching and preaching of Jesus, the King, they wanted nothing to do with Him, and the mediatorial kingdom in its (then) present stage was rejected. Knowing of this outcome ahead of time, Christ prophesied the tragic Jewish rejection and made plans with His apostles to found the church, a new society of believers that would now include many Gentile Christians. He began to instruct His disciples more clearly concerning the necessity of His death and resurrection, but assured them that He would return in glory to establish His mediatorial kingdom in its final grand phase (for the millennium). The mediatorial kingdom, Hoyt avers, was placed in a position of "abeyance" or "suspension" during the period extending from Pentecost to Christ's return. But converts would steadily be brought into the kingdom.

Prior to the second coming of Christ, there will be a period of seven years, or slightly more, according to Hoyt, which will be marked by

tribulation for end-time converts to Christianity, but also by providential judgments that will expel the wicked from the earth. Then Christ will return to earth with His "church saints," whom He had caught away into heaven (raptured) before this awful period began. His millennial rule will begin. At the conclusion of the tribulation, the great company of tribulation martyrs will be raised in close proximity with the Old Testament saints, and the long-awaited mediatorial kingdom will then be realized in the fulness of all its predicted aspects and millennial magnificence. The mediatorial kingdom will be merged with the universal kingdom, and this will usher in the eternal state. Then there will be one throne forever.

B. A Response to Dispensational Premillennialism

1. Since this Dispensationalism is Premillennial, it is subject to the same strictures directed against Historic Premillennialism above, and these will not be repeated here.

2. The fundamental hermeneutical principle of Dispensationalism, that all of the Old Testament (as well as the New), including its prophecies, must always be interpreted literally, is patently erroneous. The New Testament itself rejects this principle. The prophet Amos records these words in which God speaks of the New Testament era (9:11-12): "On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name" (NKJV; the verses cited below are also from this version). At the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem, the account of which is given in Acts 15, James, after hearing from Peter of Gentile conversions he had witnessed, and from Paul and Barnabas their reports of genuine Gentile conversions on their first missionary journey, commented (verses 14-19): "Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins, and will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord.'" James adds: "Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God." The fulfillment of Amos' words obviously consists not in a literal reconstruction of a material tabernacle, but in the entrance of believing Gentiles into the one church, the rising spiritual temple of

God. We may also compare Isaiah 9:1-2 and Matthew 4:12-17, Malachi 4:5 and Matthew 11:11-14, and numerous other passages.

3. Purporting to find his information in the Old Testament and its prophecies, Hoyt makes much of a future centrality of a converted physical Israelite nation. He speaks of the restoration of land and prosperity to the Jewish people, and the reintroduction of ancient religious rites and usages among them. Neither the Old nor the New Testament makes such predictions. We may consider these points:

- a. In His Old Testament covenant with the nation of Israel God made certain promises concerning her possession of her land, or her restoration to it. But, it must be remembered, He always made these pledges contingent on obedience to the Lord; He warned the people of the revocation of the promises if they proved disobedient. One may consult, for example, Deuteronomy 28:15, 63-65, 68; Jeremiah 18:9-12. Because of Israel's disobedience to the Lord, she lost her land.⁹ When Christ came, and the majority with the leadership rejected Him, He told the chief priests, elders, and Pharisees in the temple: "The kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matthew 21:43). In crucifying their Messiah and persistently opposing His church thereafter, the Jews brought upon themselves the condition in which, as Paul says, "wrath has come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thessalonians 2:16). This assertion leaves no room for a future national conversion or

⁹Commenting on this matter, Loraine Boettner writes in his response to Hoyt's Dispensationalist views: "Numerous . . . warnings might be cited . . . to show that no promise will be fulfilled to a disobedient and rebellious people. . . . [All] of the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament either were fulfilled or they have been forfeited through disobedience." He goes on to observe: "Incidentally, regarding what is generally considered the most important promise that God made to Israel, namely, that they should possess all the land of Palestine, that promise was fulfilled once. It was given to Israel through Joshua's conquests. They lost it only because of their disobedience. Hence there is no reason why it should be given to them a second time. In Joshua 21:43, 45 we read, 'Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land which he swore to give to their fathers; and having taken possession of it, they settled . . . there. Not one of all the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.' And again we are told, 'Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life' (1 Kings 4:21). Actually God did mercifully give them a second chance, when the captives came back from Babylon. But again they lost it through disobedience." Clouse, *Meaning*, 100-101.

land possession. The new relationship (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-13) established with His church and supplanting the old made with the Jews, has no promise of this kind in it.

b. With the establishment of the New Testament as the instrument by which God deals with His people, the ceremonial law was abrogated. No central sanctuary, like the temple in Jerusalem, and no sacrificial system were necessary (John 4:20-24; Hebrews 8:1-10:18). No Scripture predicts that these features of Israelite worship will be inaugurated again at the second coming of Christ or that they will obtain during a supposed visible millennial reign of the Savior.

c. As for a distinction between a supposedly restored Israelite nation and the church, and a presumed superiority in position and functioning of Israel during the millennium, again the Scriptures know nothing. Amillennialist Anthony Hoekema, commenting on this dispensational idea, says:

There is [in Dispensational thought] a sharp separation between Israel and the church in God's redemptive program, so that Israel is said to have a future quite distinct from the future of the church. But the New Testament clearly shows that the middle wall of partition between believing Gentiles and believing Jews has been broken down (Eph. 2:14), that God has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles unto himself "in one body" (Eph. 2:16), and that therefore believing Gentiles now belong to the same household of God to which believing Jews belong (Eph. 2:19). Similarly in Romans 11, where Paul describes incorporation into the fellowship of God's people in terms of being grafted into a tree, that fellowship is pictured not in terms of two trees (one Jewish and one Gentile) but of one olive tree (Rom. 11:17-24). And Peter, in words which are an obvious echo of Exodus 19:5-6, applies words to the New Testament church (consisting of both Jews and Gentiles) which were originally spoken to Israel: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Pet. 2:9). This indicates that the New Testament church is now indeed the spiritual Israel, the people of God's possession. If the church is now indeed God's

holy nation, what room is left for the emergence of another holy nation, distinct from the church?¹⁰

d. Numerous passages of the Old Testament (such as Isaiah 2:2-4, 11:6-9; Joel 2:23-26, 3:18; Micah 4:1-4; and Zechariah 9:9-10) figuratively describe the glory of the New Testament church in its earthly state or in eternity in material terms. Francis Pieper helpfully comments on this matter in his *Christian Dogmatics*:

Chiliasm [another name for millennialism] has no basis in Scripture, for Scripture itself explains passages to which chiliasm appeals as speaking of the spiritual glory of the New Testament Church

Is. 2:2-3 indeed clearly teaches that all nations will come to Mount Zion: "All nations shall flow unto it, and many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us His ways." This prophecy of the congregating of the nations on Mount Zion, at Jerusalem, etc., runs through the entire Old Testament. Scripture, however, does not place the *fulfillment* of this prophecy in a future millennial kingdom, but says of all believers who, without leaving home, have come to faith in the Gospel during the New Testament era (Heb. 12:22): "But ye are come . . . unto Mount Sion and unto the city of the living God."

Again, Is. 2:4 definitely prophesies that on Mount Zion abundance of peace will reign: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb," etc. . . .

Do not forget that the *Gloria in Excelsis* of the angels sounds forth its glad message, "Peace on earth," not in some future millennial kingdom, but at the birth of Christ and the preaching of the Gospel at that event, and that Christ says not of the citizens of a future millennial kingdom, but of all who believe the Gospel: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you" (John 14:27) . . . "These things I have spoke unto you that in Me

¹⁰Clouse, *Meaning*, 109.

ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33) . . . In other words, what these Old Testament texts prophesy of a future peace in the world is realized in its "full, actual value" not in a still future millennium, but in the appearance of the Son of God in the flesh, in the reconciliation of the world to God, in the proclamation of this news in the world, and in the sending of the Holy Spirit, who through this message works faith in people's hearts, thus creating children of peace in the whole world and among all nations. By faith in the Gospel the Christian Church on earth possesses a peerless state of peace.¹¹

e. A comment on the meaning of "the kingdom of God" about which Jesus chiefly preached and taught is provided below.¹²

¹¹Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:520-521. These additional words of this Lutheran scholar may be considered (522): "Scripture expressly forbids us to refer these Old Testament passages to a worldly or external peace. Matt. 20:34: 'Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword.' Thus the New Testament interprets these texts. But even the Old Testament texts themselves connect the peace they predict with the coming of Christ in the flesh and with the New Testament preaching of the Gospel; they represent it as an immediate consequence and effect of these events. The declaration of peace in Is. 9:2-5 has as its cause: 'For unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given,' etc. The state of peace described in Is. 11:6-9 ('The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,' etc.) is immediately preceded by its *causa efficiens*: 'And there shall come forth a Rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.'"

¹²The Kingdom of God about which Jesus preached and taught (as did John the Baptist before Him, and the apostles after Him) is, broadly stated, the specialized rule of God in His church. In the New Testament, the "kingdom" does not signify a geographical territory, covering so many square miles. Nor, in first instance, does it refer to the populace of a kingdom, or to the church. Jesus illumines the concept when He says, "The Kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21 NKJV). The Kingdom of God is the rule or reign of God in the believer's being. This reign begins the moment that he is brought to faith by the Holy Spirit, brought to obedience to the first "command" issued by the King to every person, namely that he repent and believe the gospel. When a person is enabled by the Holy Spirit to say, "Yes Lord, I believe in You," then he has entered into the sphere of God's rule; he has entered into the Kingdom of God. It may also be said that the rule of God has entered the believer; the Kingdom of God is within him. Both expressions convey the same blessed reality.

The Kingdom of God and the coming of the Messiah belong together, for He is the King who rules, and where He is, there is His Kingdom. Thus John the Baptist,

From all the preceding points, then, we see clearly that the New Testament teaches none of the distinctive doctrines of Dispensational Premillennialism.

IV. Postmillennialism

A. A Delineation of Postmillennialism

The distinctive eschatological teachings of Postmillennialism are concisely summarized by Loraine Boettner as follows:

Postmillennialism is that view of the last things which holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, that the world eventually is to be Christianized and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the millennium. It should be added that on postmillennial principles the Second Coming of Christ will be followed immediately by the general resurrection, the general judgment, and the introduction of heaven and hell in their fullness.¹³

The millennium to which the postmillennialist looks forward is thus a golden age of spiritual prosperity during this present era, the age of the church. The golden age is to be brought about through forces now active in the world. It is to last an indefinite period of time, perhaps much longer than a thousand years. The changed character of individuals will

referring to Christ, preached, "The Kingdom of God is at hand." John's requirements for entry were the same as Christ's: repentance, forgiveness of sins, and baptism.

Lutheran doctrine speaks of a threefold Kingdom of God — the kingdom of power, the kingdom of grace, and the kingdom of glory. The bulk of the discussion so far has been about the kingdom of grace, God's gracious rule in believers, begun and preserved through the means of grace, the gospel and the sacraments. The kingdom of power refers to God's irresistible rule in the realm of nature, and over men and nations in the course of history. God exercises His rule in the kingdom of power in the interest of the church in every generation, so that its purposes and divinely prescribed programs may be carried out. He sets the boundaries beyond which the devil may not pass and insures that the gates of hell never prevail against the church. One may consult Ephesians 1:18-23, and many other passages. The kingdom of glory may be viewed as God's Kingdom in heavenly glory, in which He will exercise His rule in and over the glorified saints forever and ever.

¹³Clouse, *Meaning*, 117.

be reflected in an uplifted social, economic, political, and cultural life of mankind. The world at large will then enjoy a state of righteousness which, up until now, has been seen only in relatively small and isolated groups: for example, some families, and some local ecclesiastical groups and kindred organizations. Boettner continues:

This does not mean that there will be a time on this earth when every person will be a Christian or that all sin will be abolished. But it does mean that evil in all its many forms eventually will be reduced to negligible proportions, that Christian principles will be the rule, not the exception, and that Christ will return to a truly Christianized world.

Postmillennialism further holds that the universal proclamation of the gospel and the ultimate conversion of the large majority of men in all nations during the present dispensation was the express command, meaning and promise of the Great Commission given by Christ himself when he said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt. 28:18-20).

We believe that the Great Commission includes not merely the formal and external announcement of the gospel preached as a "witness" to the nations, as the premillennialists and amillennialists hold, but the true and effectual evangelization of all the nations so that the hearts and lives of the people are transformed by it.¹⁴

Boettner acknowledges that the Christian church in past centuries has been greatly negligent in her duty; he cites J. Marcellus Kik: "That there is still a remnant of paganism and papalism in the world is chiefly the fault of the Church."¹⁵ The need in our day, Boettner goes on to explain, is that the church take its task of world evangelization seriously and enter upon a campaign of world conquest with the gospel, as, he holds, occurred in the early history of the church and at the time of the Reformation. This effort God will surely bless, and the great majority of

¹⁴Clouse, *Meaning*, 117-118.

¹⁵Clouse, *Meaning*, 119.

mankind will be converted to the faith. The saved will far outnumber the lost, as judgment day will reveal, claims Boettner.

In his version of history, however, Boettner sees real progress toward millennial goals as already made in the past, though the process has been a slow one. He devotes many pages to discussing the "spiritual advances" of humanity in the centuries since the first coming of Christ. He mentions as among such advances: Christian principles accepted as standards in many nations; the practical disappearance of slavery and polygamy; the improvement of the status of women and children; evidences of international good will (settlement of disputes by arbitration, not war and billions appropriated in foreign aid); more wealth consecrated to the service of the church; heightened evangelistic and missionary activity; the availability of the Bible in whole or in part in the native language of ninety-eight percent of the people of the world; the broadcast of the Christian message by radio in all of the principal languages of the world; evangelical radio programs with nationwide or worldwide coverage, the number of theological seminaries and institutes and Christian colleges growing faster than the population; numerous Christian magazines and books having a wide circulation; growing general material prosperity; proper management of the earth; the revolution in transportation and communication; and other marvels of the present age. All these developments are harbingers of even greater wonders in the millennial period to come. In answer to the question as to when the millennium will arrive, Boettner replies: "Trying to pinpoint the date on which the millennium begins is like trying to distinguish the day or year when medieval history ended and modern history began . . . [As] one . . . age blends into another so slowly and imperceptibly that no change is recognizable at the time . . . [so] it is with the coming of the millennium."¹⁶ The passage of history in the future will, presumably, make the dawn of the millennial age clear.

B. A Response to Postmillennialism

In response to Boettner's exposition of Postmillennialism, the following points are worthy of consideration.

1. Boettner does not endeavor to derive his position from biblical passages. He does not adduce any Scripture supporting the view that

¹⁶Clouse, *Meaning*, 133.

there will be an earthly millennium at the end of time, a golden age preceding Christ's second coming. He gives no exegesis of Revelation 20:1-6, the only Scripture that speaks of a thousand-year period. This passage, of course, does not speak of an *earthly* reign of Christ, but rather of a heavenly reign. Whence, then, does Boettner derive his information of a future millennium? It is pure conjecture. As indicated previously, the Bible nowhere predicts an earthly reign of Christ at some time in history.

2. Boettner's claim that the world is getting better can be countered with an abundance of evidence that the world is getting worse. That author notes only the favorable aspects of world history while ignoring unfavorable aspects; the latter could be listed at great length. Boettner, furthermore, when he comments favorably on modern inventions of all sorts, and speaks of their benefits to the church and society, ought also note that those same things have been used for purposes that are evil. As the kingdom of God advances, so correspondingly does the kingdom of evil.

3. As for the teaching of Postmillennialism that the world will be Christianized and that things will become better on earth as time goes by, the Scriptures teach the reverse. We may consider the parable of the ever-present tares among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). Widespread apostasy was to eventuate in the coming of "the man of sin" or "lawless one" (the antichrist) predicted in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12. The opposition of the world to believers is to continue until the end of time, according to our Lord in Matthew 24. A variety of judgments on the wicked "dwellers upon the earth" are depicted in Revelation—particularly with the opening of the seals, the blasting of the trumpets, the overturning of the bowls, and the gathering together at Armageddon of all the enemies of Christ and His people—as coming just before His return. Jesus asks the question in Luke 18:8: "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"—such faith, in the context, as would importune Him with persistent prayer. With regard to Boettner's contention that the saved will greatly outnumber the lost on judgment day, it disagrees with the Savior's words in Matthew 7:13-14: "Enter by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

4. The only passage to which Boettner points as supporting his view that the whole world will be Christianized is the Great Commission, in which Jesus asks His followers to make disciples of all nations. His argument that the all-powerful Lord who issued this assignment would surely enable His people to carry it out fully is a non-sequitur. In Mark's version of the Great Commission (assuming the long ending of the gospel) Jesus speaks of negative, as well as positive, reactions to the future discipling activity of His church: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." The reality in every age, as Jesus puts it elsewhere, is this:

God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. (John 3:17-19)

The Bible nowhere teaches universalism, and we know that only God's elect will be saved out of the total human populace in every generation of the New Testament, including the last.¹⁷

On the basis of the preceding observations, we see definitely that the New Testament teaches none of the distinctive doctrines of Postmillennialism.

¹⁷Who, specifically, are the "all nations" referred to in the Great Commission? The Savior certainly cannot be regarded as expecting His followers to serve as His instruments in the conversion and discipling of every person in every nation on earth. If such were the case, the eternal salvation of all members of the human race since that time would result. Such an occurrence is neither the teaching of Scripture, nor has it happened, nor could it happen. Many, indeed the majority, in each generation, rather than becoming disciples, follow the broad path of wickedness that leads to destruction, and die in the unbelief that leads to damnation.

Jesus is here employing synecdoche, the figure of speech in which (in this case) the whole is mentioned for the part. The Lord asks His disciples to proceed with making disciples of the persons in every nation whom He will give them to disciple successfully under the blessing of His Spirit. The point of synecdoche is to emphasize that the followers are to forge forth into the whole world with the gospel and diligently endeavor to proclaim it to all persons in all nations of every age.

V. Conclusion

Millennial beliefs, such as those discussed above, will, no doubt, be proclaimed and accepted by many far into the third millennium. This state of affairs is regrettable, since millennialism perverts the teaching of Scripture regarding the last times. It centers Christian hope on a worldly happiness in an earthly millennial period that will feature external peace. It diverts the hope of believers from the rest and glory in heaven actually promised by God. This diversion can only affect the people of God adversely. To the question, "What is the effect of chiliasm on the spiritual life of Christians?" Pieper answers

Chiliasm's misdirection of the Christian hope is extremely harmful and dangerous. Where chiliasm is taken seriously, that is, where it controls the heart, it turns heart and mind away from the invisible spiritual glory of the Christian life, which consists in the assurance of the remission of sins and of the future heavenly heritage, and supplants it with the expectation of an outward and mundane greatness. It depreciates such mighty and glorious words as these: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27). . . . Chiliasm is not content with "Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), but would have the Kingdom of God come with outward display so that one might say: "Lo, there it is!" In short, Scripture does not teach chiliasm, but warns against it.¹⁸

Millennialism, therefore, is an unscriptural belief to be shunned and resisted by the people of God. They are instead to set their minds on things above. The fervent hope of believers is entrance into heaven, first according to the spirit at the moment of physical death and, finally, also according to the glorified body, as word of God promises.

¹⁸Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:526-527.

The Concept of διαθήκη in the Letter to the Hebrews

Scott R. Murray

Introduction

The meaning of the biblical terms ברית and διαθήκη and their cognates is a crux of interpretation for exegetes.¹ In the broadest terms, students of the Bible must deal with the division of Scripture into Old and New Testaments.² Interpreters of the letter to the Hebrews face the more difficult task of determining how the author of the letter actually used the biblical term διαθήκη. The problem is to analyze how the writer to the Hebrews uses the terms διαθήκη and διατίθεται based on a study of the covenant idea in the Old Testament; the use of the terms (διαθήκη and διατίθεται) in Hellenistic sources; and the context of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews. The terms ברית and διαθήκη in Old Testament literature will be analyzed with an emphasis on the religious use of the terms and will develop an understanding of the author's use of the idea based on Old Testament sources, which includes both the Masoretic text and the Septuagint texts. The Hellenistic use of the terms διαθήκη and διατίθεται will be examined to learn how Hellenistic usage modified the Old Testament concept of ברית. The use of διαθήκη in the New Testament letter to the Hebrews will be analyzed.³ Further, it will analyze how the letter to the Hebrews uses διαθήκη. Emphasis will be placed on determining the use of the terms in Hebrews 9:15-18.

¹Gottfried Quell ("διαθήκη," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel, translated by G. W. Bromiley, volume 2 [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1964], 107-108), points out the anomalies in the Old Testament usage of ברית. First, the etymology of the word is by no means clear. Second, the cultic activity attendant upon the making of a covenant is itself obscure in meaning.

²See, for example, B. W. Anderson, "The New Covenant and the Old," in *The Old Testament and Christian Faith*, edited by B. W. Anderson (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 225-242.

³No attempt will be made to link the views of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews with the rest of the New Testament.

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The Use of ברית in the Hebrew Old Testament

The Hebrew word ברית has an uncertain etymology.⁴ Terms normally connected with ברית⁵ provide little insight into the meaning of the term, except that they give evidence of the fixed validity of the promises given in a ברית.⁶ Thus the word itself and the words associated with it give only a vague outline of its meaning. The context in which the word was employed better determines the meaning of the word.

Gottfried Quell was cautious about assigning a single word to translate ברית. He suggested that the translation "covenant" is more a paraphrase than a translation. The Jewish scholar Martin Buber said that ברית was translated "covenant" (*Bund*) only "for want of anything better."⁷ The difficulty in finding an adequate translation for the word ברית is compounded when the interpreter moves to the letter to the Hebrews.

Old Testament covenants were of two kinds, those between God and people and those between persons. The sacred covenants established by God provide a legal form for the fellowship between God and His people. The fellowship that God initiated with people was the essential issue in the establishment of a sacred covenant in the Old Testament. The Old Testament did not focus on the "cutting" [כרת] of the covenant, that is, the sacred action surrounding the solemnization of the covenant. The sacral event was not central to the establishment of the covenant. Instead, the

⁴Quell ("διαθήκη," 107) attempts to prove its derivation from the Hebrew verb, ברה, "to eat," have proven fruitless. There is no certain evidence to link ברית to this verb. Quell thinks it more likely that ברית is related to the Akkadian *baru* which means "to bind." In this sense the ברית is a binding agreement or relationship between two parties.

⁵Such as כרת "to cut," which can mean "to cut off," or "to cut in two." Already in Deuteronomy 29:11 the word is used in the sense of "confirm with an oath": אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה: אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּרַת עִמָּךְ הַיּוֹם. Thus the cultic context of the covenant is not made any clearer by this most common of the verbs used with ברית (eighty-six times in the Old Testament). The other verbs used with ברית provide even less help for the interpretation of the word. These verbs, בוא "to enter into," עמד "to be in," עבר "to transgress," הפך "to break," are too colourless to bring out the local sense and thus to help to a reconstruction of the sacral scene." Quell ("διαθήκη," 109) based this opinion on the work of Paul Karge, *Geschichte der Bundesgedankens im Alten Testaments*, volume 1 (Münster in Westphalen: Aschendorff, 1910), 227.

⁶Such as הקים "to establish," נתן "to institute," שמר "to maintain."

⁷Martin Buber, *Königtum Gottes* (Berlin: Schochen Verlag, 1932), 113, quoted in Quell, "διαθήκη," 108.

resulting relationship established between God and people by God was the central meaning and purpose of the Old Testament use of covenant.⁸ A covenant initiates the relationship of fellowship between God and people. The focus was on relationship.

The two kinds of Old Testament covenants might tempt the interpreter to effect an artificial distinction between two types of covenant, for example, sacred and secular. However, covenants between people still retained sacral elements. Sacrificial rituals were performed and solemn oaths were spoken. More importantly, for the purposes of this study, the putatively secular transaction implied by the establishment of a legal covenant between God and people leads to the conclusion that "it is plainly not a normal legal procedure."⁹ God used a legal relationship with specific conditions to declare a fellowship relationship with people. God bound himself to the fulfillment of the promises given in a covenant by solemn oaths and ritual acts. This act of God was made possible because God revealed himself as "a legal personage with a clearly declared goal."¹⁰ Furthermore, the ancients did not make a sharp distinction between the sacred and the secular. So Quell contended,

The concept of the covenant is thus designed to serve a purpose of conceptual clarification. It leads to theological reflection along legal lines. For this reason we prefer to describe this as the theological concept of the covenant in distinction from the purely legal concept that applies to the human covenant with no theological implications. The advantage of this terminology is that it does not dispute but fully recognizes the fact that the theological covenant is itself legal in structure, so that a covenant between God and man implies no more, if no less, than the formal concept of a rightly ordered relationship. To the legal understanding, however, a religious addition is made in the form of a statement about God which is strictly conceptual and therefore theological.¹¹

⁸The concept is used several times in a metaphorical fashion to denote a relationship between either God or people with things or animals, where the sacral action is of no significance; Isaiah 28:15, 18; Job 5:23; 31:1.

⁹Quell, "διαθήκη," 110.

¹⁰Quell, "διαθήκη," 110.

¹¹Quell, "διαθήκη," 110.

In other words, Quell sees the divine covenant with people primarily as a theological construct formalized by a legal relationship. The legal aspect introduced certainty and reliability into the religious relationship between God and people. The essential aspect was still the religious relationship formalized by the covenant. For, as Quell pointed out, the covenant, despite its legal trappings, still "strongly demands religious feeling" on the part of the human participants.¹²

The covenant relationship between God and people stands at the center of the Old Testament view of religion. The Old Testament, like the New, is absorbed by the question of a person's standing before God.¹³ The covenant theme was a deeply embedded aspect of the Old Testament religious scene, so much so that F. Baumgärtel suggested "even where the term covenant is not present, the intention behind it may be expressed."¹⁴ The shadow cast across the whole Old Testament by the covenant concept is attributable to both the appearance of the covenant at pivotal moments in biblical history and the simplicity of the concept itself.¹⁵

The Legal Aspect of the Old Testament Covenant

The covenant established between Jacob and Laban provides all the characteristic legal elements of the covenant in a single account.¹⁶ Quell summarized these elements.

- a. כרת "to cut" is used in summary description of the whole transaction recorded;
- b. there is a record of the divine attestation and the unalterable validity of the compact;
- c. more precise details are given of the mutual agreement;
- d. there is an oath in acknowledgment of the divine guaranteeing of correct intention; e.

¹²Quell, "διαθήκη," 110. Quell is overly critical of the usefulness of legal concepts to convey the divine gifts from God to people. The Bible consistently places God in relationship with people on the basis of legal constructs. This is no less valid than the descriptions of God's relationships with humans based on other concepts, such as loving kindness, or the tenderness of a human mother toward her child. Though a legal concept, the divine covenant is no less an act of mercy.

¹³The New Testament writers employed the δίκαιος word group to describe the standing of the person *coram Deo*.

¹⁴F. Baumgärtel, *Die Eigenart der alt. lichen Frömmigkeit* (1932), 76, quoted in Quell, "διαθήκη," 111.

¹⁵Quell, "διαθήκη," 111.

¹⁶Genesis 31:44-55.

a sacrifice is offered; and f. the covenant brethren share a common meal.¹⁷

In this instance Moses emphasized the legally binding and valid nature of the covenant made by Jacob with Laban. Therefore, the legal details are brought to the forefront in the narrative. Whether this narrative employed every detail used in every covenant ritual is uncertain. It is doubtful that all the details were always followed, especially in the cases of a covenant between God and people, where the conceptual relationship is most important.

The blood sacrifice that took place in Genesis 31:44-55, while not necessarily enacted at every covenant, pointed toward an important source of the covenant relationship. Quell argues that blood relationship was the identifying characteristic of the nomadic and conquest periods of the life of Israel. Persons were bound together by blood relationships in families, septs, clans, and tribes. Any extension of those relationships beyond genuine blood ties demanded the sharing of blood, accomplished in the covenant by a blood sacrifice. This blood sacrifice, carried over into the period of the monarchy, provided the bond between persons, and established fellowship between them. The covenant expanded the application of blood brotherhood beyond its familiar role by means of legal extension. The substance of this legal extension was the written covenant. The written covenant codified a fictional blood relationship that made participants brothers. The importance of blood is firmly entrenched in Israelite thinking as early as in Exodus 24:8, where it is specifically called "the blood of the covenant."¹⁸ In this text the people are sprinkled by Moses with the blood of the covenant.

This action takes place after the sacrifice, and it is to be understood in the light of the explanatory words: "This is the blood of the covenant." That is to say, the blood itself is declared to be symbolically or magically the ברית. Both participants are linked with the same blood, and therefore the one is as the other. In this case the rite is a cultic act, for we have here a theological covenant.¹⁹

¹⁷Quell, "διαθήκη," 113.

¹⁸ברית-הברית. See also Zechariah 9:11, in which Yahweh specifically refers to the blood of his covenant, במד-בריתך.

¹⁹Quell, "διαθήκη," 115.

The Sinaitic covenant was sealed with blood, joining the people to Yahweh, with the inviolable permanence of human covenants made more permanent by Yahweh. While Quell's view of the history of the blood sacrifice may be criticized for being speculative, he has not underestimated the importance of the blood itself to the meaning of the covenant nor the resulting certainty of the relationship. The covenant joining brothers is "unalterable, permanent (ברית עולם) and inviolable, and thus makes supreme demands on the legal sense and responsibility of the participants."²⁰

The Theological Aspect of the Old Testament Covenant

The theological aspect of the Old Testament covenant was the involvement of God in the covenant, not merely as a guarantor of fidelity,²¹ but as an active participant pledging himself to uphold the terms of the covenant. God promised to fulfill the covenant.

The idea that God was bound to the people by covenant arose early in the history of Israel. Quell, despite his higher critical presuppositions, suggested "that from the time of the redemption from Egypt the confederation which arose under Moses' leadership cherished the idea of a theological covenant with Yahweh and indeed found in the implied sense legal obligations which enabled them to fulfill their very difficult task."²² The tenacity of a loosely organized group of semi-nomads attempting to conquer Canaan was explainable based on the covenant promise of Yahweh.

Quell believed the Mosaic account of the Sinaitic covenant was a fiction engineered to give cultic certainty to the people. He based this hypothesis on the presupposition that Moses could not be the author of the Pentateuch. However, the people of Israel held the founding of the Sinaitic covenant to be historical fact, not myth. This was essential to the legal certainty of the covenant.

[A]ppeal had to be made to the history of the reality of the divine commitment asserted. Consequently the Moses stories, the whole tradition of Israel and Judah to the latest periods, and the very structure of the legal concept all presuppose a historical event that

²⁰Quell, "διαθήκη," 114-15.

²¹As in Genesis 31:44-55.

²²Quell, "διαθήκη," 119-20.

established the divine covenant. Indeed, the concept could hardly have attained the significance it did if cherished recollections of the past had not enforced its recognition. The concept implies with the utmost clarity that we are not dealing with a mere idea of God but with an act of God in the remote past.²³

The legal, and therefore earthly, nature of the covenant transaction reinforced the immanence of the rescue provided to the people of Israel by the covenant God.

The Sinaitic covenant recorded in Exodus 24 brought the people into a fuller realization of the intimacy of the relationship between themselves and Yahweh. The account of the giving of the covenant reached its climax when "Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel." The theophany recorded there received scant description out of reverence for God. Most significantly, "God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank." This account strengthened for Israel the complete participation of God in the covenant. The relationship established by God in the covenant obligated God to protect the *shalom* between Himself and His people. So, although they saw God, "God did not raise his hand against them."²⁴ Quell rightly warned, "the basic thought in the message of salvation contained in the covenant theory, namely, that God is willing to set His covenant partner in a *shalom* status, can never be completely forgotten even when it is in danger of being overwhelmed by legal considerations."²⁵ The covenant idea became the framework for a tender depiction of God who comes into relationship with His people. Even the simple detail that the elders ate and drank with God depicted Yahweh as the God who condescended to be in fellowship with His people. Quell opined that this event served to show that

God's dealings are not incalculable. They have a goal which is firmly delineated and can be comprehended by man. All unwholesome terror, all fear of God in the sense of apprehension before His commanding power, all trembling at unknown forces and events is

²³Quell, "διαθήκη," 120.

²⁴References to Scripture in this paragraph are from Exodus 24:9-11 (NIV).

²⁵Quell, "διαθήκη," 122. The testimony of the prophets against the people revealed that Israel had come to presume upon the legal aspects of the covenant. Jeremiah especially protested against this abuse in Jeremiah 31.

now banished from religion, and the basis is thus laid for the Gospel, as we might make bold to say.²⁶

Quell is right to be bold. By the establishment of a covenant with the people, God now revealed Himself as the God of the gospel, the good news of peace and salvation. The Old Testament covenant with God was a gospel relationship that powerfully foreshadowed its repetition in the New Testament.

The Progress of the Covenant in the Old Testament

The Old Testament presented a progressive restatement of the covenant to the people of God. The most important covenants were the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Sinaitic covenant, and the Davidic covenant.²⁷ Each of these implied a progressive unfolding of the covenant provisions that ultimately culminated in the promised new testament.²⁸ These covenant statements show a great deal of similarity. They were given by God Himself, were universal in scope, offered unconditionally, emphasized divine monergism, and were perpetual.²⁹

The covenant that does not seem to fit the above definition is the Sinaitic covenant. It appears to remain effective only if the people did "everything the Lord has said."³⁰ However, according to J. Murray, this is a legalistic misconstrual of the Sinaitic covenant. "The feature that has influenced interpreters to construe the Mosaic covenant in legalistic terms is the fact that the necessity of keeping the covenant is given such prominence in connection with the dispensing of the covenant and that the people entered a solemn engagement to be obedient."³¹ The obedience of the people was not the condition upon which the Lord remains faithful to the covenant. The holiness of life elicited by the covenant relationship

²⁶Quell, "διαθήκη," 123.

²⁷Noahic, Genesis 6:18-21 and 9:9-17; Abrahamic and Sinaitic, Genesis 15 and 17; Davidic, Psalms 89:3, 4, 26-37; 132:11-18 and also 2 Samuel 7:12-17 (even though it does not use the term ברית).

²⁸Jeremiah 31:31-34.

²⁹J. Murray, "Covenant," *The New Bible Dictionary*, edited by J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1975).

³⁰Exodus 24:3

³¹Murray, "Covenant."

was a joyous sacrifice of thanksgiving.³² Obedience was to be the natural result of the covenant rather than its cause.

The Sinaitic covenant represented an embellished restatement of the Abrahamic covenant.³³

The Mosaic covenant is not to be construed in a way that would place it in sharp contrast with the Abrahamic and indicate that the same concept of sovereign administration of grace rules in this case as in the earlier covenants. . . . the demand for obedience and the keeping of the covenant does not place the Mosaic in a different category and does not make it a conditional covenant of works . . .³⁴

The unilateral and gracious nature of the covenant remained at the forefront even here.

The Use of διαθήκη in the LXX

The translators of the LXX consistently translated the Hebrew term ברית with the Greek word διαθήκη. This translation has been troubling for some modern commentators. For example, D. J. McCarthy argued that ברית was such a complex term that the Septuagint translators had problems translating it.³⁵ The term is complex. However, despite this complexity, the translators of the Septuagint emphatically chose διαθήκη to translate ברית. Behm pointed out that "the sparse use of the real Greek word for 'treaty' (συμβήκη), which is never used for ברית except in 4 Βασ.

³²See Deuteronomy 6:4-15; Leviticus 11:44, 45; 20:7, 26; 21:8.

³³The same could be said of every succeeding restatement of the covenant: each was an embellishment or improvement of the previous. When the covenant was renewed the documents were brought up to date with a revision of the provisions of the previous covenant (for example in Deuteronomy 5:6-21). See John Fischer, "Covenant, Fulfilment and Judaism in Hebrews" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 13 (April 1989): 178. The process of restatement came to its ultimate conclusion in the διαθήκη καινή, which is the "covenant" κατ' ἐξοχήν.

³⁴Murray, "Covenant." This misconception is rooted in the covenant theory of Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575). His *De Testamento seu fœdere Dei unico et aeterno* (Zurich: C. Frosch, 1534) set the tone of discussion of the covenant of the Bible until the present. Bullinger emphasized the reciprocal elements of the covenant, so that its conditionality came to the forefront of his treatment. See Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 20.

³⁵D. J. McCarthy, "Covenant in the Old Testament: The Present State of Inquiry," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1965): 217.

17:15 A, shows that διαθήκη was regarded as the equivalent in LXX, though Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion later substituted what seemed to them to be the more literal συνθήκη.³⁶ So while Greek had a specific word for "treaty" the LXX consistently used διαθήκη. This choice showed that the LXX translators did not conceive of the covenant as a treaty between two partners.³⁷ The parallelisms used in the poetry of the LXX support this view.³⁸

If the translators of the LXX used the term διαθήκη in a specific and intentional fashion, it would remain to be determined what the specific complex of meaning would be. The word διαθήκη is not a univocal term in the LXX. According to Behm, that the term "hovers between the senses of 'covenant' and 'disposition,' is not based solely on the fact that the Greek term embraces both possibilities; it is to be explained finally in terms of the complex content of the word ברית which the translators were seeking to grasp."³⁹ Jacobus De Vuyst recommended that "the fundamental methodological principal [*sic*] for determining the precise meaning of διαθήκη in the Septuagint should be 'verba valent usu', i.e., the way διαθήκη is used in the Septuagint itself should be the norm, not the meaning of the Hebrew *b'rît* or of the extra-biblical διαθήκη."⁴⁰ John J. Hughes concurred that the *usus loquendi* was the source for a proper understanding of the term in the LXX.⁴¹

Some interpreters have taken this position too far. For example, Hughes wrote: "In short διαθήκη in the LXX must be understood and interpreted in the light of its usage *in the LXX* and not in the light of its

³⁶J. Behm, "διαθήκη," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, volume 2, 126.

³⁷ברית is used for political treaties (Hosea 12:1), Quell, "διαθήκη," 117-18.

³⁸Such as: νόμος, πρόσταγμα, ἐντολαί, δικαιώματα, κρίματα, κ. τ. λ.

³⁹Behm, "διαθήκη," 126-127.

⁴⁰Jacobus De Vuyst, "Oud en Nieuw Verbond" in *der Briefaan de Hebreëen* (Campen: J. H. Kok, 1964). De Vuyst's views are being summarized here by James Swetnam, S. J., "Diatheke in the Septuagint Account of Sinai: A Suggestion," *Biblica* 47 (1966): 440.

⁴¹John J. Hughes, "Hebrews 9:15ff. and Galatians 3:15ff.: a Study in Covenant Practice and Procedure," *Novum Testamentum* 21 (January 1979): 29. Hughes claimed that he was following the Septuagint's own meaning in his understanding of διαθήκη. A careful study of Hughes's article cannot sustain this contention. Hughes argued from a presupposed meaning of ברית, contending that the translators of the Septuagint could not possibly have construed this to mean a διαθήκη in the Hellenistic sense of the word. Hughes has simply ignored the nuances of the target language (Greek).

usage in the papyri and classical sources."⁴² Rejecting the influence of the papyri and classical sources is incorrect, both of which give insight into the Hellenistic use of διαθήκη. The interpretive process is not advanced by this false either/or.⁴³ The issue is how much each of these influences affected the use of the word in the LXX. By contrast, several other scholars defended the significance of the extra-biblical sources. De Vuyst studied the extra-biblical sources in his work. Swetnam claimed that the extra-biblical uses of διαθήκη must be studied, "if the reason for the choice of *diathēkē* by the translators is to be fully understood."⁴⁴ Behm began his study of διαθήκη with an extensive survey of the word in Greek sources.⁴⁵

Behm favored the view that the LXX translators were attempting to express the thought that "the originally legal term ברית had come to convey stronger and specifically religious thoughts that went far beyond the idea of a contract between God and man and suggested the idea of free declaration of the divine will to man's salvation." This may have been the case, since by this time the legalistic view that the covenant was a binding contract from God may have been the prevailing view of the Jewish community. Such a view could not be sustained even based on the Hebrew text.⁴⁶ The translators of the LXX provided a legal term that featured more powerfully relational overtones. The legal character of διαθήκη highlighted "the exclusively determinative will of the divine author."⁴⁷ In this way the Seventy were making a theologically nuanced translation of ברית by διαθήκη, one that was compatible with the Hebrew text. So, for example Swetnam commented: "Although the *b'rît* is bilateral, with both parties having rights and duties, it takes on the aspect of a unilateral agreement when used for the arrangement between God

⁴²Hughes, "Hebrews 9:15ff. and Galatians 3:15ff.," 31.

⁴³Hughes claimed ("Hebrews 9:15ff. and Galatians 3:15ff." 31) that the use of Greek sources for interpreting the meaning of διαθήκη was to "confuse the meaning of διαθήκη in the LXX with its meaning in the papyri and the classical sources."

⁴⁴Swetnam, "Diatheke," 440.

⁴⁵Behm, "διαθήκη," 124-126.

⁴⁶"Rabbinic Judaism maintains the legal side of the ברית conception. . . . When reference is made to Jer. 31:31ff., which is only infrequently, emphasis is laid on the future Torah written on the heart as distinct from the ineffective Torah of the world which one learns and forgets, . . ." Behm, "διαθήκη," 128-129.

⁴⁷Behm, "διαθήκη," 127.

and man."⁴⁸ Behm, others of the "Begriff" school,⁴⁹ and Swetnam have consistently held that the translators of the LXX chose διαθήκη to translate בְּרִית for good and informed reasons, although they diverged on the precise meaning implied by διαθήκη.

Swetnam, influenced by a work of Lienhard Delekat, thought that διαθήκη was a term that may have applied to adoption.⁵⁰ Delekat outlined a second-century B. C. institution in which "a person seems to be seeking protection of a god and is 'adopted' by the god who offers him protection in exchange for guarantees of service."⁵¹ Swetnam thought this concept relevant to the Sinaitic covenant. Exodus portrayed the children of Israel as victims of oppression, who called for help, who were heard by God, and who were considered by God to be His sons, released to serve him.⁵² Further, Swetnam argued that "if, at the time the Septuagint was being written, the basic meaning of *diathēkē* was 'an agreement concerning adoption', the use of *diathēkē* becomes intelligible on the supposition that the translators were thinking of some sort of analogy with an institution in which liberation from servitude was effected by means of adoption."⁵³ The use of adoption as a means of release from slavery was well known in Egypt from as early as the twelfth century B. C.⁵⁴ However, the big "if" is whether or not "the basic meaning" of διαθήκη was "an agreement concerning adoption." It seems more likely that this was a subsidiary use of the term διαθήκη. The *usus generalis* of the word would have been a legal instrument most commonly used as a last will and testament.⁵⁵ The *usus speciales* would have included other usages such as adoption or what was called a *donatio inter vivos*.⁵⁶ Even if διαθήκη was used of the Sinaitic covenant to denote a kind of adoption of the people by Yahweh, this would not account for the sense of διαθήκη in the Old

⁴⁸Swetnam, "Diatheke," 440.

⁴⁹E. Riggenbach and E. Lohmeyer.

⁵⁰L. Delekat, *Katōche, Heirdulie und Adoptionsfreilassung* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1964).

⁵¹Swetnam, "Diatheke," 441.

⁵²Exodus 1:13, 6:7, 2:23, 3:7, and 4:23.

⁵³Swetnam, "Diatheke," 442.

⁵⁴Swetnam, "Diatheke," 442.

⁵⁵See Behm, "διαθήκη," 124 and below.

⁵⁶See Hughes, "Hebrews 9:15ff. and Galatians 3:15ff.," 62.

Testament's other covenants. Thus, while Swetnam's suggestion is thought provoking, it stretches the data and the imagination.⁵⁷

Based on Jeremiah 31, Behm took διαθήκη to mean "disposition," "declaration of the divine will," "the divine will self-revealed in history and establishing religion."⁵⁸ The word διαθήκη "represents a significant development of the Hebrew term even while preserving its essential content."⁵⁹ Thus Behm opted to abandon both "testament" and "covenant." John Hughes chose to translate διαθήκη as "covenant" in such a way as to rule out all other possible interpretations.⁶⁰ By contrast, J. Barton Payne maintained that ברית always meant "testament," opting for an understanding heavily influenced by the Hellenistic usage.⁶¹ Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich (BAG) also elected a stricter approach, in which "last will and testament" is the preferred translation. Secondly, BAG permits "a declaration of his will," or "compact, contract." "Covenant" is only an acceptable translation when nothing else seems to fit or where it is kept in mind that "it was God alone who set the conditions."⁶² J. C. Hindley, after surveying the literature, simply despairs of finding an adequate translation: "For probably in no modern language is there any word to convey the required meaning. English is fortunate in that the word *covenant* has virtually passed out of everyday use. It is therefore available to be filled with whatever meaning the Bible (or Biblical theologians!) wish to put into it."⁶³

This despair does not solve the problem. The word διαθήκη still demands to be translated and interpreted, especially if Hebrews is to be understood.

⁵⁷To his credit Swetnam admits (*"Diatheke,"* 442) that "a considerable amount of work would be needed to establish enough grounds for calling [his suggestions] a hypothesis."

⁵⁸Behm, "διαθήκη," 127.

⁵⁹Behm, "διαθήκη," 127.

⁶⁰Hughes, "Hebrews 9:15ff. and Galatians 3:15ff.," 27-33.

⁶¹J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 83-86. Hughes ("Hebrews 9:15ff. and Galatians 3:15ff.," 30) ridicules this position.

⁶²Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), under "διαθήκη." See also Murray above.

⁶³J. C. Hindley, "The Translation of Words for 'Covenant,'" *The Indian Journal of Theology* 10 (January-March 1961):23.

The Hellenistic Usage of διαθήκη

Swetnam's claim that the use of διαθήκη in Hebrews cannot be understood apart from extra-biblical sources is essentially correct.⁶⁴ The Septuagint translators were familiar with the culture of Hellenistic Egypt, as can be seen by the paraphrases of certain anthropomorphisms offensive to the ears of Alexandrian Jews.⁶⁵ The Hellenistic usage of διαθήκη does have an impact on the meaning of διαθήκη in the LXX. Liddell and Scott's *Intermediate Greek Lexicon* lists the primary meaning of διαθήκη as "a disposition of property by will, a will, testament."⁶⁶ The secondary meaning, which the dictionary attributes to the New Testament, is "an arrangement between two parties, covenant." Liddell and Scott are hindered by a lack of evidence from the papyri.

According to Behm, διαθήκη "is most commonly used for 'last will and testament,' a tech.[nical] term in G[ree]k jurisprudence in every age."⁶⁷ Only Aristophanes (c. 486-385 B. C.) used it to refer to a "treaty" in *Aves*.⁶⁸ Yet even here the treaty is "binding only on the one [party] according to the terms fixed by the other."⁶⁹ The word διαθήκη was also used in the "general sense of 'ordinance' or 'disposition.' But most of the uses in this more general sense are early, for example, in Plato."⁷⁰ Behm concluded: "Since there is nothing to suggest that the Jews themselves gave a new sense to the term, one can only conclude that they were adopting a common Greek sense."⁷¹ In this he was supported by J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan: "διαθήκη is properly *dispositio*, an 'arrangement' made by one party with plenary power, which the other party may accept or reject, but cannot alter. A 'will' is simply the most conspicuous example of such an instrument, which ultimately monopolized the word just because it suited its differentia so completely."⁷² The sense of "last will and

⁶⁴Swetnam, "Diatheke," 440.

⁶⁵For more on the history of the Septuagint see D. W. Gooding, "Texts and Versions," *New Bible Dictionary*, 1258.

⁶⁶H. G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek Lexicon*, seventh edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), under "διαθήκη."

⁶⁷Behm, "διαθήκη," 124.

⁶⁸Aristophanes, 439.3.

⁶⁹Aristophanes, 125.

⁷⁰Aristophanes, 125.

⁷¹Aristophanes, 125.

⁷²J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (1915), 148, quoted in Behm, "διαθήκη," 125.

testament" was the primary and most prevalent meaning of the word διαθήκη in Hellenistic Greek.

The Word διαθήκη in Hebrews

The root of the problem in Hebrews is how to understand διαθήκη in Hebrews 9:15-18. διαθήκη was used by the author of Hebrews seventeen times and the verb form, διατίθεμαι, which appears only in the middle voice, four times.⁷³ Lexically the noun means primarily "last will and testament."⁷⁴ Hughes argues that διαθήκη in Hebrews should be taken as "covenant" throughout, although he has no lexical basis for this translation.⁷⁵ Only Riggensbach and Adolf Deissmann committed themselves to the position that διαθήκη should be taken as "testament" throughout the letter.⁷⁶ While Riggensbach took this bold position, he also concluded that the writer to the Hebrews had misunderstood the meaning of the LXX word διαθήκη, interpreting it in the light of its Hellenistic meaning.⁷⁷ The majority of modern commentators take διαθήκη in 9:15, 18 as "covenant" and in 9:16-17 as "testament."⁷⁸ Hughes conceded that "the 'testament' interpretation has ubiquitously dominated the field in this century."⁷⁹

⁷³Seventeen is just over half of the uses of διαθήκη in the New Testament. The verb form is used only three other times in the rest of the New Testament.

⁷⁴BAG, under "διαθήκη."

⁷⁵Hughes, "Hebrews 9:15ff. and Galatians 3:15ff.," 35.

⁷⁶E. Riggensbach, "Der Begriff der διαθήκη im Hebräerbrief" *Theologische Studien*, edited by T. Zahn (Leipzig: Dietrich, 1908), 300-310, cited in William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13, Word Biblical Commentary*, volume 47b (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1991), 230; Adolf Deissmann, *Paul*, second edition, translated by Lionel R. M. Strachan (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926), 175, cited in F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, edited by F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970), 211. Deissmann stated flatly: "There is ample material to back me in the statement that no one in the Mediterranean world in the first century A.D. would have thought of finding in the word διαθήκη the idea of 'covenant.' St. Paul would not, and in fact did not." Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient Near East*, translated by Lionel R. M. Strachan (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927), 337-338.

⁷⁷Riggensbach, cited in Hughes, "Hebrews 9:15ff. and Galatians 3:15ff.," 32.

⁷⁸In Hebrews 9:18 διαθήκη is an ellipsis.

⁷⁹Hughes, "Hebrews 9:15ff. and Galatians 3:15ff.," 38. In 1979 Hughes lamented that of the eleven twentieth-century authors who had at any time held the consistent "covenant" interpretation, only four with impeccable scholarly reputations had continued to maintain this position, namely, B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*:

The "Testament" Interpretation

Swetnam has argued cogently for taking all four instances as "testament."⁸⁰ To begin with, Swetnam presumed that the author of Hebrews had sufficient rhetorical facility that he would have avoided what has been termed an "awkward construction." The awkward construction would be where the first and last uses of διαθήκη are taken as "covenant" and the second and third as "testament."⁸¹ Attributing to the author of the letter to the Hebrews this kind of clumsiness is hardly credible.

The epistle as a whole is widely regarded as one of the best examples of Greek style in the entire NT. The author was clearly a skilled writer. Instead of adopting a view which questions the writer's proficiency, would it not seem more advisable to seek for one in which he would appear here as he appears elsewhere in the epistle — a writer and theologian of considerable ability?⁸²

Hughes also sought to defend the literary consistency of the writer to the Hebrews by choosing to take all four instances of διαθήκη as "covenant." On this point alone Hughes and Swetnam agree.

The Cultic Context

Swetnam emphasized the importance of the cultic context of 9:15-18. The author of Hebrews considered the two διαθήκαι to be "parallel in matters of cult."⁸³ According to Swetnam each had a mediator, although in the case of the old dispensation it was implicit.⁸⁴ Moses was the mediator of the Old Testament and, due to his office, he sprinkled Israel

The Greek Text with Notes and Essays (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970); Alexander Nairne, *The Epistle of Priesthood* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913), 364-365; E. Hatch, *Essays in Biblical Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 48; and Frederic Gardiner, "On διαθήκη in Hebrews ix 16, 17," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 5 (1885): 8-19. It is interesting to note that the most recent of these works is Nairne's, completed in 1913. The three exegetes who have abandoned the "covenant" interpretation for the "testament" interpretation are J. H. Moulton, G. Milligan, and F. F. Bruce (207-211).

⁸⁰James Swetnam, "A Suggested Interpretation of Hebrews 9, 15-18," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (October 1965): 373-390.

⁸¹As in Behm, "διαθήκη," 131-132.

⁸²Swetnam, *A Suggested Interpretation*, 375.

⁸³Swetnam, *A Suggested Interpretation*, 375. See also Behm, "διαθήκη," 132.

⁸⁴Hebrews 8:6; 9:15.

with blood at the giving of the Sinaitic בְּרִית.⁸⁵ Each διαθήκη had a victim or victims.⁸⁶ The writer to the Hebrews makes explicit only the once and for all victim for sin, clearly implying by that the deficiency of all other victims.⁸⁷ Each διαθήκη involved a death. The death of the New Testament was explicit.⁸⁸ The death of the Sinaitic בְּרִית was implied only.⁸⁹ Each διαθήκη involved blood,⁹⁰ and a purificatory purpose.⁹¹

The Disposition of the Testament by Death

The deaths in the two διαθήκαι were related, each attesting to the validity of the respective διαθήκη. The problem here is the difference between the Sinaitic διαθήκη and the new διαθήκη. In the new dispensation, Christ dies to validate the διαθήκη.⁹² In the Sinaitic διαθήκη, God, who is the one giving the covenant, did not die, but rather the animal victim whose blood was sprinkled.⁹³ This is resolved by the writer to the Hebrews in such a way that God was not the one "disposing" the covenant of Sinai. The author alters the LXX text at this point. The LXX reads: "Behold, the blood of the διαθήκη which the Lord disposed (διέθετο) for you." Hebrews reads: "This is the blood of the covenant, which God commanded (ἐντείλατο) you to keep."⁹⁴ However the verb, διατίθεμαι, is retained in every quotation of Jeremiah 31 in Hebrews; implying that God did not "dispose" the Sinaitic covenant, but did dispose the new testament.⁹⁵ The writer of Hebrews has attempted to walk a fine line in comparing and contrasting the two διαθήκαι. On the one hand, the two are both put into effect by death, both are testamentary

⁸⁵Exodus 24:8.

⁸⁶Hebrews 9:13-14.

⁸⁷Swetnam, *A Suggested Interpretation*, 375.

⁸⁸Hebrews 9:15, 17.

⁸⁹Swetnam (*A Suggested Interpretation*, 375) argues that "death for the author to Hebrews implies a testament in the full sense of the word, and the Sinai *diatheke* was not a testament in the full sense of the word."

⁹⁰Hebrews 9:19-20. Here the writer has altered the words of Exodus changing the original ἰδοὺ τὸ αἷμα to the eucharistic words, τοῦτο τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης. "The Eucharistic aspects of the Epistle to the Hebrews have yet to receive the study they deserve." Swetnam, *A Suggested Interpretation*, 375. More recently see the work of Lehne, 112-117.

⁹¹Hebrews 9:13-14; 22-23.

⁹²Hebrews 9:15-17.

⁹³Exodus 24:8.

⁹⁴Hebrews 9:20 (NIV).

⁹⁵Swetnam, *A Suggested Interpretation*, 376.

in character. On the other hand, the later testament is superior to the first as seen by the contrast between the blood of the victim and the death of the testator. Swetnam pointed out "the indirect way in which the statement in 9,18 is phrased . . . expresses the passivity of the animal victims of the Sinai *diathēkē*."⁹⁶ The new διαθήκη is superior because the Savior willingly lays down his life.

The two διαθήκαι had attributes of both a covenant and a testament. L. Turrado stated, "when the view is adopted (based on evidence in the text itself) that the new *diathēkē* was for the author of Hebrews both a cultic covenant with God and a legal testament, the problem about the harsh transition from the use of *diathēkē* in 9,15 to the use of *diathēkē* in 9,16-17 vanishes."⁹⁷ Modern proponents of the "covenant" interpretation present the situation as an either/or choice that does not account for the subtlety of the writer to the Hebrews. This subtlety is hinted at in the use of καινή. Bishop Trench said: "So, too, the Covenant of which Christ is the Mediator is a διαθήκη νέα, as compared with the Mosaic, confirmed nearly two thousand years before (Heb. xii. 24); it is a διαθήκη καινή, as compared with the same, effete with age, and with all vigour, energy, and quickening power gone from it (Heb. viii. 13 . . .)."⁹⁸ By its very arrival, the new διαθήκη made the first antique.

Hughes made a great deal of the vagueness of the phrase, ἐπὶ νεκροῖς. Hughes argued that the phrase gave more problems to the testamentary interpretation than it solved. First, in a Hellenistic διαθήκη, and especially in an Egyptian one, a death would not have been necessary, and certainly not the death of the testator. A διαθήκη became valid and operative after it was duly written, witnessed, and notarized.⁹⁹ Second, an acceptable translation of the phrase in Hebrews 9:17 would read, "For a covenant is confirmed over the dead."¹⁰⁰ It is unclear what this "dead" would be in Hughes's scheme. In what sense would any kind of death be necessary to a Hellenistic διαθήκη of the type described by Hughes? If Hughes is merely talking about the *donatio inter vivos*, no death would have been

⁹⁶Swetnam, *A Suggested Interpretation*, 377.

⁹⁷L. Turrado, *Hechos de los Apostoles y Epístolas paulinas* (Madrid, 1965), 669-670, quoted in Swetnam, *A Suggested Interpretation*, 377.

⁹⁸Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 224-225.

⁹⁹Hughes, "Hebrews 9:15ff. and Galatians 3:15ff.," 44.

¹⁰⁰Hughes, "Hebrews 9:15ff. and Galatians 3:15ff.," 45.

involved.¹⁰¹ Hughes goes to risible lengths to rationalize this interpretation when he takes the phrase, ὅτε ζῇ ὁ διαθέμενος to mean: "a covenant is confirmed over the dead since it is never valid while the one who ratifies (it) is living (in the sense of not having slain representative animals)."¹⁰² Further, what could this principle mean for the new διαθήκη? Was it ratified by an animal sacrifice, "over a death," rather than by the death of Jesus?¹⁰³ The New Testament places the death of Jesus in a central position. It could not be "a death" in Hughes' sense, it had to be the central event of the better testament.

A διαθήκη without a death is incomplete. As we have seen lexically, a deathless διαθήκη is a διαθήκη only in a secondary sense.¹⁰⁴ "This, then, is the reason the author exploits the comparison with the testament in 9,16-17: a testament in the full sense of the word is a *diathēkē* in which there *has* to be a death. If Christ's *diathēkē* is to be a new *diathēkē*, remedying the defects of the first, it *must* be a testament in the full sense of the word."¹⁰⁵ There must be substantive differences between the old and the new. Those differences are obscured by the "covenant" interpretation.

Conclusion

The interpreter of Hebrews cannot afford to ignore evidence from both biblical and extra-biblical sources. Study of the word ברית in the Old Testament shows that it has a very broad meaning that included both covenantal and testamentary tones. It is beyond the capacity of a single word to translate ברית. The legal aspect of the covenant gave Israel certainty of God's care for them. The covenant also reinforced the personal nature of the God to people relationship. The theological aspect placed people in a שלום fellowship with God. The Old Testament portrayed a progressive unfolding of the covenant to Israel, but brought it a perfect culmination in the New Testament about which the author of Hebrews wrote. That Old Testament covenant was a gospel word from God, a unilaterally gracious speech.

¹⁰¹Hughes, "Hebrews 9:15ff. and Galatians 3:15ff.," 62.

¹⁰²Hughes, "Hebrews 9:15ff. and Galatians 3:15ff.," 62.

¹⁰³See also Hebrews 9:15-17.

¹⁰⁴See Hebrews 9:15-17.

¹⁰⁵Swetnam, *A Suggested Interpretation*, 380.

The translators of the Septuagint deliberately chose the word διαθήκη to translate ברית, because it best conveyed the rich content of the concept in the Old Testament. They made this choice based on their knowledge of the Hellenistic use of the word διαθήκη.

Modern commentators almost all hold to a mixed interpretation of Hebrews 9:15-18, taking διαθήκη as "covenant" in 9:15, 18 and as "testament" in 9:16-17. Both Hughes and Swetnam were swimming against the prevailing current by taking a unified interpretation of the four usages in Hebrews 9:15-18. Both made a cogent argument for their interpretation.

Swetnam approached the pericope from a cultic viewpoint, seeing many significant parallels between the cultic aspects of the Sinaitic διαθήκη and the new διαθήκη. Old Testament scholars have helped to reinforce the cultic aspects of the διαθήκη, by discovering the rituals connected with the enactment of Old Testament covenants. Thus the death of the sacrificial victims of the Old Testament only foreshadowed the once and for all death of the Son of God for the sins of the world. Consistency in the interpretation of διαθήκη in this pericope is laudable, especially if it highlights the testamentary nature of the New Testament.

Eucharistic Overtones Created by Sacrificial Concepts in the Epistle to the Hebrews

Daniel J. Brege

The Book of Concord declares: "The Old Testament had pictures or shadows of what was to come; thus this depicted Christ and the whole worship of the New Testament." Exegetes are then directed: "Therefore, as we discern the shadow in the Old Testament, so in the New we should look for what it represents. . . ."¹ In the epistle to the Hebrews, eucharistic overtones are found especially in the Old Testament "shadows" of the peace and sin offerings, since Christ as priest and sacrifice is particularly represented in Hebrews by these sacrifices.²

"In the peace-offering the sacrificial meal was the point of main importance."³ Both priests and laity ate of the peace offering.⁴ Such eating was usually accompanied with celebration and joy.⁵ Thus peace offerings have been recognized to be the most natural sacrifices used to explain the Lord's Supper. Andrew Jukes states succinctly, "The Peace-offering remains our food until the resurrection."⁶

¹Theodore G. Tappert, translator and editor, in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, Arthur C. Piepkorn, *The Book of Concord: the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 257, Apology, article 24.

²There are likely many other references to the eucharist in the epistle to the Hebrews, but the peace and sin offerings seem to shine with the most intense light.

³Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 99.

⁴See, for example, Leviticus 7:11-34.

⁵F. C. N. Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice* (London: S.P.C.K., 1956), 93: "That it [peace offering] remained the most joyful of the sacrifices is beyond doubt, if only from the constant expression of this in Deuteronomy; and it is probable that, not only the actual phrase 'sacrifices of thanksgiving' but all outbursts of rejoicing and thankfulness in Psalms that have anything to do with the Temple should be referred to it."

⁶Andrew Jukes, *The Law of the Offerings in Leviticus I-VII, Considered as the Appointed Figure of the Various Aspects of the Offering of the Body of Jesus Christ* (London: James Nisbet, 1883), 109. John E. Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Rivingtons, 1882), 41-42, says that the Lord's Supper "is, in fact, the continuance of the ceremonial of the Mosaic peace-offering." In 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 Paul clearly connects the Lord's Supper to the Jewish (and pagan) peace offering.

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The covenant sacrifice was one "type" of peace offering.⁷ Covenants (or "testaments") were often sealed with blood and ratified by a meal drawn from a peace offering.⁸ A primary example of this is recorded in Exodus 24. Verse 5 explains that after Moses built an altar, he and the elders "offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord." Of these peace offerings, verse 11 naturally relates that "they beheld God, and *they ate and drank*."⁹ Verse 8 relates how Moses "took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.'"

Hebrews 9:20 changes Moses' words to, "*This* is the blood of the covenant." Many, noting this change, have correctly observed that when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, He used exactly these words, "*This* is the blood of the covenant."¹⁰ Lane, who appears to approach the Lord's Supper from a reformed viewpoint, recognizes the common understanding: "It is widely held that the substitution [of "*This*" for "*Behold*"] shows that the quotation [in Hebrews 9:20] has been brought into conformity with the eucharistic words of Christ, perhaps under the influence of a local liturgical tradition."¹¹

⁷William L. Lane, *Hebrews, A Call to Commitment* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985), 139: "Covenant ratification necessarily involves a peace offering to signify the acceptance of the covenant by the participants [. . .] The fellowship meal, which was the characteristic feature of the peace offering, displayed the peaceful relationship of the participants." See also Robert Daly, *Christian Sacrifice* (Washington, District of Columbia: The Catholic University of America Press, 1978), 89-93.

⁸Roland De Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifices* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1964), 38: "The 'selamim' [peace offering] might then be called a covenant sacrifice. In support of this one might point to the part played by the meal (Gen. xxvi.30, xxxi.54; Joshua ix.14) and by the blood (Exod. xxiv.8) in sealing of covenants."

⁹Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (New York: Scribner, 1966), 235: "Concerning Exodus 24:11 ['the elders ate and drank']: In these last words the thought is of a covenant meal: the fact that God grants to the envoys the fellowship of his table is the pledge of the covenant."

¹⁰See also Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 236. Also James Swetnam, "'The Greater and More Perfect Tent': A Contribution to the Discussion of Hebrews 9,11," *Biblica* 47 (1966): 98: "This at once evokes the scene of the institution of the Eucharist by Christ at the Last Supper; the change in wording of Ex. 24,8 to conform to the Eucharistic formula can then hardly be a matter of chance."

¹¹William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, volume 47b (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 245. Lane, however, does not believe this conclusion is necessarily the right one.

As the covenant was inaugurated by the sprinkling of blood, so the sprinkling of sacrificial blood continued as the sign of the priestly mediation of the old covenant.¹² Hebrews 9:1 describes such priestly mediation of the "first covenant": "Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary." Priestly "divine worship" primarily prescribed the sacred sprinkling (or other application) of blood and the eating of the sacred meals. Leviticus 7:14b, 15 gives an example of such sprinkling and eating of a peace offering: ". . . It shall belong to the priest who sprinkles the blood of the peace offerings. Now as for the flesh of the sacrifice of his thanksgiving peace offerings, it shall be eaten on the day of his offering . . ." As peace offerings were eaten by both the laity and the priests, the "old covenant" was continuously mediated.

Christ then comes as the "great high priest." Hebrews 8:6 describes the divine worship led by Christ: "But now He [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent *ministry* [than the Levitical priests], by as much as He is also the *mediator* of a better covenant . . ." Not only does this verse reflect Christ's priestly work as "mediator," wherein He replaces the Aaronic priesthood, but the word used here for "ministry" (λειτουργεῖν) was a technical worship-word among the Jews.¹³ Jesus is now the priestly liturgist (minister) in the New Testament era, and His sacramental gifts are distributed by His "liturgizing" the "better covenant." The "better covenant" is a eucharistic term, identifying with the only place where Christ declared the "new covenant" in His blood to be found.

¹²Brooke Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 288: "It follows from the general idea of the Jewish sacrifices that they were ruled by the conception of the Covenant." Daly (*Christian Sacrifice*, 90, 93) concludes that "selamim," the word for peace offering, should really be understood as "covenant-sacrifice."

¹³Hermann Strathmann, "λειτουργεῖω," in volume IV, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1968), 220: "Apart from the two pagan [biblical] instances, . . . the [LXX] reference is always to the worship of Yahweh performed by the priests and Levites either in the tabernacle or in the temple." Field (*The Apostolic Liturgy*, 211-224) claims that the early church (for example, Clement) uses the word "liturgus" to describe the work of the Pastor, whereas "Priest" is applied to all believers. All participate in the liturgy, but one who leads it is the "liturgus."

As Christ now performs the liturgy, He takes the concepts of the old covenant, keeps the continuity recognizable, yet incorporates radical changes into the rites. Christ could not take new wine and put it into old wineskins. For instance, the blood of the old covenant, which was never to be eaten, was mediated by sprinkling, daubing, or pouring.¹⁴ Christ now directs us to the blood of the new covenant, but it is mediated by drinking. John Field is convinced that the references to blood-sprinkling in Hebrews are really references to the blood of the eucharist that we now drink: "The thought conveyed by the sprinkling no doubt is that the reception of the Eucharistic cup is a spiritual sprinkling of the heart with the Blood of Christ to fit it for the worship of God, just as the old ritual sprinklings removed the various kinds of legal defilement."¹⁵

The writer of Hebrews ultimately unites in Christ the liturgical concepts of priestly mediation, covenant, and sprinkled blood: "[You have come] to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood . . ." (Hebrews 12:24). Not only is it likely that such sprinkled blood refers to the eucharistic drinking, but the covenantal reference in this verse would again stir the minds of Christians to recall Christ's Supper.

Lending support to this eucharistic argument is the context of Hebrews 12:24. The preceding verses describe the Christian approach to God:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect (Hebrews 12:22,23).

¹⁴Usually such blood was applied upon the sacred altars in the tabernacle. When Moses inaugurated the covenant, and also on special occasions such as the ordination of the priests, blood would be sprinkled or daubed upon a human being.

¹⁵Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 380. Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice*, 237: "His [Christ's] blood itself, the very Life of the sacrifice, too holy in the old days ever to be received, and never imparted to any offerer, priest, or layman, more closely than by an external sprinkling, is given to every Christian worshipper to drink," 245: "They [Christians] will realise their corporate unity alike with all the children of God and with their Father; and still more the blood, which is the Life of mankind, and will be theirs, not in a mere outward sprinkling, but in themselves by the act of drinking."

Ancient Christian liturgies explicitly link these verses to Holy Communion. The Liturgy of Saint James, which perhaps precedes the completion of the New Testament documents, connects Hebrews 12:22, 23 to the celebration of the eucharist.¹⁶ Shortly before the consecration of the bread and wine, certain ancient liturgies had a common introduction called, "The Prayer of the Veil." This "Prayer of the Veil" in the Liturgy of Saint James prefaces Holy Communion with these words: "It is very meet . . . to give thanks unto Thee . . . whom the heavens are hymning, . . . *the heavenly Jerusalem, the general assembly and church of the firstborn written in heaven, spirits of righteous men and prophets, souls of martyrs and Apostles, angels and archangels.* . . ."¹⁷

Clearly, the Liturgy of Saint James uses the same wording as Hebrews 12:22, 23 to introduce the Holy Eucharist. Thus the verse that follows these verses (12:24), which speaks of our approach to "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood," was no doubt understood in the early church eucharistically.

Summarizing this portion, the priestly work of Jesus as administrator of the covenant peace offering is clearly a concept prevalent in Hebrews. Christ is observed to be performing this priestly work toward us as He inaugurates His covenant meal, sheds His blood to seal the covenant, then mediates the covenant in His blood and flesh by His peace offering meal, the Holy Eucharist. As Christ's priestly work relative to the sin offering is presented, the peace offering concepts will again surface because the two offerings are blended together in the Sacrament of the Altar.

Hebrews 10:18 speaks of Christ by using the Jewish technical term for sin offering: "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin [literally, "sin offering"]." Other passages in Hebrews also describe Christ as sin offering.¹⁸ Christians realize this to be the central tenet of Christ's death, that He is the sin/guilt offering.

¹⁶Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*. Throughout his book, Field argues that the Liturgy of Saint James preceded the New Testament documents. In his preface, iii, Field states that his secondary purpose is to "examine the important subject of alleged quotations from the Greek Liturgy of S. James in the New Testament."

¹⁷Field, *The Ancient Liturgy*, 376. Italics show the connection to Hebrews 12:22, 23.

¹⁸Hebrews 10:18 uses the technical terminology for sin offering, *περὶ ἁμαρτίας*. See also 9:26; 10:12.

Unlike the Old Testament sin offerings, which had to be repeated, Christ's sacrifice is final, never needing repetition.¹⁹

Part of the rubric for the "common" sin offering that relates it to the Lord's Supper is, as with the peace offering, that it was eaten. In such offerings, brought by the laity, it was the obligation of the Priest to eat the flesh, and by this eating he was pronouncing an "absolution" on the offerer.²⁰

Such eating by the priests was their privilege alone. The laity were never to eat of the sin offering. As Christians have been given the priestly privilege of eating Christ's sin offering as they consume the eucharist, the "Priesthood of Believers" surfaces as a doctrine in the book of Hebrews.²¹

Isaiah 53, with its peculiar use of the word "many," is perceived by some to have a direct link to the Lord's Supper.²² Isaiah 53:10 is a prediction of Christ as guilt offering (sin offering in the LXX). The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews makes the connection with Isaiah 53 by stating in Hebrews 9:28 that Christ "was offered to *bear the sins of many*."²³ This verse of Hebrews has nearly identical wording with the Septuagint

¹⁹S. C. Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, second edition (London: Methuen, 1953), 55: "Note some significant limitations in the scope and purpose of the Jewish Sacrifices. First, that none of those Sacrifices had any grace-giving power. . . . No Sacrifice looked forward to the future, far less contained any promise of grace to meet future temptations. In this respect they stand in strong contrast with the Christian Sacrifice."

²⁰W. W. Washburn, *The Import of Sacrifice in the Ancient Jewish Service* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1883), 74-75: "The expression, 'to bear the iniquity of the congregation,' clearly indicates that the priests here filled a mediatorial office; they took the sins of the people, to bear them away by the divinely appointed method [of eating the sin offering]." See also Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 236.

²¹Swetnam ("The Greater and More Perfect Tent," 103) summarizes this priestly inference: "The whole passage [Hebrews 10:19 and following] uses Old Testament terminology to imply that the Christians are priests . . . The Christian is priestly through baptism and should draw near to the worship of the Christian economy, the Eucharist. . . . Those who are urged to 'draw near' in 10, 19-25 are considered to be priestly: the Christian priesthood of all Christians is the fulfillment of the Old Testament priesthood of the Levites." See also Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 322-323.

²²Daly, *Christian Sacrifice*, 217: "The phrase ['for many' in the Eucharist] seems to be an allusion to Isa 53,10-12." On 222: ". . . the words of institution themselves carry unmistakable references to [Isaiah 53]."

²³To the Hebrew mind the word "many" usually meant "all." Joachim Jeremias, "πολλοί," in volume VI, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 536-545.

translation of Isaiah 53:12. Isaiah therein predicts of Christ, "He Himself bore the sin of many." If, as Jeremias maintains, "without Isaiah 53 the eucharist words remain incomprehensible," then it is very possible that the clear reference to Isaiah 53:12 in Hebrews 9:28 is really another esoteric reference to the Lord's Supper.²⁴ Thus Hebrews 9:28 presents a unification of Christ, the sin offering and the Lord's Supper.

The writer of Hebrews conveys in several places the Jewish belief that the earthly tabernacle had its heavenly counterpart.²⁵ In Hebrews 8:5 the priests are said to "serve a copy of the heavenly things."²⁶ Hebrews 9:24 explains that "Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." Christ has entered the heavenly tabernacle, the heavenly Holy of Holies.²⁷

Within the earthly tabernacle, God was understood to have been enthroned in the Holy of Holies, between the two gold Cherubim. Thus the psalmist prays in Psalm 80:1, "Oh give ear, Shepherd of Israel [. . .] Thou who art enthroned between the Cherubim, shine forth!" Even as in the earthly tabernacle, so too in the heavenly tabernacle, yet outside the time and space of this creation, God is enthroned in the Holy of Holies, surrounded by myriads of angels. It is into this Holy of Holies that the greatest high priest, Jesus, has entered and is now seated at the Father's right hand.

God set the stage for us to grasp Jesus' entry into the heavenly Holy of Holies when He instituted the Day of Atonement to be celebrated in the earthly tabernacle of the Jews. Uniquely on this great day the high priest was obligated to enter the Holy of Holies, the sacred place behind the veil, where God Himself was enthroned among men. At specified times in the holy liturgy of that day, the high priest had to perform several washings or "baptisms."²⁸ He had to sacrifice a sin offering for himself

²⁴Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), 291.

²⁵James L. Kugel, *The Bible as It Was* (London: Belknap Press, 1997), 420.

²⁶One may also see Hebrews 9:11, 23.

²⁷Swetnam, "The Greater and More Perfect Tent," 104. Swetnam presents some of the theories concerning the "more perfect tent," but he concludes that there is ample evidence "in favor of the Eucharistic body of Christ as being the 'greater and more perfect tent' not made with hands."

²⁸George Wesley Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1972), 128: "On the Day of Atonement, the high priest bathed

and then he could enter the Holy of Holies for the first time under a cloud of incense. The high priest then, after sacrificing a sin offering for the nation, entered the Holy of Holies a second time, sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice upon the Mercy Seat. The high priest was approaching the throne of God. Three main marks of this atonement sin offering were that the blood was placed/sprinkled in the holy places, the animal flesh was totally burned outside the camp, and no one was to eat this sacrificial flesh.²⁹

With the writer to the Hebrews repeatedly returning to the priestly actions surrounding the Day of Atonement, many exegetes have concluded that a discussion of the Day of Atonement is the author's main purpose.³⁰ Hebrews 1:3b likely introduces Christ's entrance into the Holy of Holies: "When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."³¹ Observe here the atoning "purification of sins," and likewise observe Christ enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty on high, understood to be the heavenly Holy of Holies. It is clear in other such references that Christ, unlike the Old Testament high priests, entered the Holy of Holies to reside there, not merely to present the sacrificial blood and then immediately exit. Thus Christ is seated at God's right hand in the Holy of Holies. After Hebrews 4:15 identifies Christ as the "high priest," then verse 16 elaborates by inviting: "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need." The invitation here to "receive mercy" reminds us that Christ is united with His Father on the Mercy Seat, God's throne. The invitation, "Let us draw near," will be elaborated shortly.

Concerning Christ's entrance into the Holy of Holies, it is more sharply clarified in chapter nine. Verse 24 declares that "Christ did not enter a holy place [here meaning "Holy of Holies"] made with hands, a mere

five times and washed his hands and feet ten times (Yoma 3:3)."

²⁹For a succinct summary of the Day of Atonement see Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 279-280.

³⁰Hicks, *Fullness of Sacrifice*, 236: "[The author of Hebrews] has been stressing the analogy of our Lord's sacrifice with one special aspect of Jewish sacrifice, namely, the sin offering, and in particular the great sin-offering of the Day of Atonement."

³¹Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 10-21, 258-260, 209: "We learnt subsequently (Heb. 1:3) that in taking this place at the right hand of God Christ entered as a Forerunner 'within the veil' of heaven to be the New Priest . . ."

copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." Christ only needed to enact His "Day of Atonement" once, unlike the Jewish high priests who yearly had to enter the earthly tabernacle on the Day of Atonement. Thus verses 25 and 26 inform the reader that Christ did not need to "offer Himself often, as the [Jewish] high priest . . . but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." When Christ finally exits the Holy of Holies, it will be time for Judgment Day, as clearly presented in the two verses that follow.³² And when in verse 28 Christ is said to appear the second time "without reference to sin," this is because, exiting the Holy of Holies, He has completed His Day of Atonement liturgy, and the people of God are ready to enter His glory, forever free from sin. The eschatological nature of the eucharist grasps this fact.

Return to the invitation, "Let us draw near." The word for "draw near" is commonly used in worship, especially for the priests who drew near to present and participate in the sacrifices.³³ Chapter 10 of Hebrews begins by explaining that the Old Testament sacrifices, particularly on the yearly Day of Atonement, were "only a shadow of the good things to come." Such sacrifices could not "make perfect those who draw near," nevertheless Christ's one sacrifice can indeed perfect those who draw near. Now again one finds another of Christ's radical changes as all Christians, not merely high priests, are invited to draw near and enter the Holy of Holies! Hebrews 10:19-22:

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the [most] holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The initial verse of this text conveys the startling revelation that we as Christians can "have confidence to enter the [most] holy place." The final verse in the above quote encourages Christians, "Let us draw near with

³²Hebrews 9:27, 28. See Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 280.

³³Jon Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 91-149. Scholer spends an entire chapter demonstrating the technical nature of this word.

full assurance of faith." Such "drawing near" to the Holy of Holies was formerly a right only reserved for the Jewish high priest. We, as God's baptized priesthood, are now invited to "draw near" behind the veil into the heavenly Holy of Holies! "In Didache 10,6 the word ['draw near'] signifies reception of the Eucharist."³⁴ Field concludes, "The 'drawing nigh to God' is the same as that 'coming unto' God which we have already seen to be intimately connected in the Apostle's mind with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist."³⁵

The two means named in verses 19 and 20 enabling our entrance into the Holy of Holies are the blood and flesh of Christ. Just the proximity of these two words likely caused early Christians to think of the Lord's Supper. Between Christ's blood and flesh are the words, "by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us." The word "new" originally meant "newly sacrificed." It is true that at the time of Christ it usually meant simply "new," yet some philologists are convinced the more ancient connotation of "newly slain" was still understood, and in this context in Hebrews such understanding would have been appropriate.³⁶ Christ's flesh has been "newly slain," and the resultant blood and flesh are His means of entrance into the Holy of Holies. When adding "living way" to "newly slain," one perceives then the foundational doctrines of Christ's death and resurrection.

This "newly slain and living way" has been "inaugurated" for us by Christ. The author of Hebrews has already used the word "inaugurate" to describe God's institution of the former covenant through Moses.³⁷ Such inauguration, as we have seen, involved the sprinkling of blood and the peace offering meal. The Septuagint used "inaugurate" to describe the sacred dedication of the Jewish altar and temple.³⁸ Delitzsch explains that this word, used here in Hebrews, "is the term for dedicating or setting apart for future use."³⁹ It is thus logical that the word

³⁴Daly, *Christian Sacrifice*, footnote on 375. Daly here connects Hebrews 4:16; 7:25; 10:1; 10:19-22; 12:18, 22-24.

³⁵Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 192. Field believes the Apostle Paul is the author of Hebrews.

³⁶Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 297.

³⁷Hebrews 9:18 and following.

³⁸Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 319.

³⁹Franz Delitzsch, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, translated by Thomas Kingsbury (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1978), 170.

"inaugurate" is being utilized here in Hebrews to explain Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper, a sacred thing enjoined for future use.

Many are convinced the author of Hebrews had the sacraments in mind when he penned Hebrews 10:19 and following. Albert Vanhoye speaks as one representing this viewpoint:

... the author [of Hebrews] alludes to the Sacraments which lead to faith's fullness: baptism (10:22) and the eucharistic "blood" and "flesh" of Christ (10:19-20) . . . [These] Christian sacraments are closely linked with the personal offering of Christ. It is from it alone that they draw all their worth. They make the offering present and active in the existence of the believers so that this existence is transformed.⁴⁰

Those who participated in the church's ancient liturgies understood that in Holy Communion, God's people are truly entering behind the heavenly veil into the Holy of Holies, as described in Hebrews 10:19-20. Field states that "the liturgy of S. James, from which S. Paul makes a quotation in Hebrews x. 19,20, may be traced in every [ancient] liturgy." Field explains that this liturgical portion was originally positioned "at the Great Entrance, when the priest passes with the sacramental elements into the sanctuary."⁴¹ Now, as expressed in this ancient liturgy, God's people may enter behind the veil "by virtue of the Flesh which Christ assumed in His Incarnation and which is sacramentally given to us in the Holy Eucharist."⁴²

The following are excerpts from the Prayer of the Veil as found in ancient liturgies, showing the imprint of the more ancient Liturgy of Saint James. Portions are italicized to show the unmistakable parallels to Hebrews 10:19, 20:

We give thanks to Thee, O Lord our God, that Thou hast given *us boldness for the entrance of Thy holy place*, which [entrance] Thou hast newly dedicated for us [to be] *a new and living way through the veil of the*

⁴⁰Albert Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, translated by James Swetnam (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 72. One may also see Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, 310: "The exhortations in 10:22-25 appear to rest on a pattern of worship influenced by the peace offering."

⁴¹Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 478.

⁴²Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 478.

Flesh of Christ. Therefore being counted worthy to come into the place where Thy glory dwelleth, and to *be within the Veil*, and to *behold the holy of holies*, we fall down before Thy goodness.⁴³

To the table of Thy most sweet feast, good Lord Jesus Christ, . . . with *confidence [boldness] in Thy mercy* and goodness, *I draw near* in fear and trembling . . . Take from me then, most merciful Father, all my iniquities and sins, that being cleansed in mind and body, I may be counted worthy fitly *to taste the holy of holies*. [The holy of holies is tasted!]⁴⁴

Verse 22 gives us the encouragement to “draw near in full assurance of faith.” This is the first necessity for drawing near to God through the eucharist, *full assurance of faith*. The verse then continues to explain that we may draw near, “having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” Such washing parallels the priestly prerequisite for the Day of Atonement.

Concerning this washing-prerequisite Westcott concludes: “The two phrases [here in Hebrews 10:22] appear to contain allusions to the Christian sacraments. That to the Eucharist is veiled: that to Baptism is unquestionable.”⁴⁵ Thus faith and our washing with pure water, which is obviously Holy Baptism, are prerequisites set forth here in Hebrews for our priestly approach to the eucharist.

Additionally, these verses are incorporated in the ancient communion liturgies. For example, note the exact parallels to Hebrews 10:22 in this Syriac remnant of the Prayer of the Veil: “Grant, O Lord God, that *with our hearts sprinkled and cleansed from all evil conscience* and unclean thoughts, we may be counted *worthy to enter into the holy of holies* on high, may stand before thy holy altar chastely and purely” [emphasis added].⁴⁶ Thus once again the ancient liturgy brings one to the conclusion that Hebrews 10:19-22 were written with the Lord’s Supper in mind.

Compounding this clear liturgical reference in Hebrews 10:19-22, the encouragement of “not forsaking the assembling together” in verse 25

⁴³Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 438.

⁴⁴Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 498, from a Western remnant. On 480, 486, and 493, Field identifies other liturgical remnants bearing the Hebrews 10:19-20 imprint.

⁴⁵Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 323.

⁴⁶Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 481.

would no doubt have been taken as an encouragement to receive the eucharist. Early Christians assembled together especially to celebrate the eucharist.⁴⁷

Moving to verse 29 one finds another likely eucharistic reference: "How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant. . . ?" The blood of the covenant clearly refers to the Lord's Supper wherein Christ used identical wording to refer to the contents of the chalice.⁴⁸ To regard such blood of the covenant as "unclean"⁴⁹ is explained in verse 26: "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins ['sin offering']." If, as seems likely, this is a reference to participation in the blood of the covenant as found in the Lord's Supper, then it doctrinally parallels Saint Paul's warnings in 1 Corinthians 11:27. The Lord's Supper is truly for sinners, as was the Old Testament sacrificial system. However God's covenantal grace never implies license to sin.⁵⁰

In his final chapter, the author of the epistle returns to Day of Atonement concepts. Before specifically speaking of the Day of Atonement, he first warns his Jewish readers, "It is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited."⁵¹ If one only treats sacred eating as

⁴⁷Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 166: "If (as is of course true) in Heb. x. 19-25 the prime reason for the 'assembling of ourselves together' is the Breaking of Bread, we have in that passage also the same interchange of Earth and Heaven and the same interweaving of Communion and Sacrifice as in Heb. xiii. 10ff."

⁴⁸Hebrews 9:20 and here in 10:29 are the only places beyond the eucharistic institution where "blood of the covenant" is found in the New Testament. The eucharistic connection with Hebrews 9:20 has been demonstrated. Hebrews 13:20 is a close parallel.

⁴⁹Literally, "common" [κοινόν].

⁵⁰Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, 292, shows the parallel here with Old Testament warnings concerning intentional sinning. Leviticus 4:1-2, 13, 22, 27; 5:14-15 LXX refer to the forgivable nature of "unintentional" sins. Numbers 15:22-31 reflects what is also here in Hebrews where "a deliberate and calculated violation of the commandments placed the offender beyond forgiveness."

⁵¹Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 415, 416: "Here we have an obvious reference to the Holy Communion. The unprofitable 'meats,' clearly meaning those of the old covenant, are distinguished from the 'grace' of the Lord Jesus Christ which is the appointed means of 'establishing the heart' of Christians [. . .] Our Christian 'meats,'

a law, a regulation for godly living, then his heart is not strengthened by grace. Though the Old Testament rituals required faith, they were especially understood as laws, regulations for the flesh (9:10). It thus is apparent that such legalistic Old Testament meals were likely in the mind of the author here in Hebrews 13:9 where he encourages his readers not to be strengthened by foods, "through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited." The people "who were thus occupied" were no doubt the Jews who were legalistically occupied with sacrificial and kosher foods. To re-introduce such teachings into Christianity would truly be the "varied and strange teachings" referred to in the first half of Hebrews 13:9.

Such "food" here in Hebrews 13:9 is obviously parallel to the Jewish "food and drink and washings" mentioned in Hebrews 9:10, which will be explained shortly. Such sacred eating is so important (when united with faith), that immediately after warning his readers not to be "occupied" by such foods, the author to the Hebrews continues with a description of the most sacred Christian eating. He states, "We have an altar, from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat."⁵²

This "altar," as will be shown, is the Christianized Day of Atonement altar. In the Jewish tabernacle there was no such Day of Atonement altar for the Jews, because such sacrifices were burned outside the camp, and they were not to be eaten by anyone. Many have specifically identified this altar here in Hebrews with the cross of Jesus.⁵³ It is apparent that the author of Hebrews here uses "altar" to create a mental picture of sacrifice, of worship and of God's presence.⁵⁴ "We have an altar" therefore means that we Christians have a sacrament drawn from a sacrifice, and we thus have the means of worship and we are guaranteed God's presence.⁵⁵ It all relates to the cross of Christ.

he [the author of Hebrews] would say, are the very means by which the grace of God establishes the heart."

⁵²Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 538: Though Lane himself is doubtful of the eucharistic nature of this verse, he summarizes some of the strong scholarly opinion supporting it.

⁵³Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 438.

⁵⁴Deuteronomy 12:5-7 identifies what God associated with His tabernacle altar.

⁵⁵Though it is debated, it seems clear enough that Ignatius already around A. D. 100 spoke of the Lord's Supper in relation to an altar: "Let no one be led astray: except a man be within the altar, he is deprived of the Bread of God." To the Ephesians, verse quoted from Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 416.

"Those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat" from the Christian altar. Such who "serve the tabernacle" are no doubt the Jewish priestly order. There are two fundamental reasons why they have no right to eat of the Christian altar. First, if they do not hold to Christian tenets then they do not belong at the same "altar" as Christians. Joining in a sacrificial feast presupposes oneness of belief.⁵⁶ The second reason why those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat from the Christian altar is found in the radically new nature of Christianity's sacred meal. Our Christian observance of Holy Communion is the antitype of all Jewish sacrificial meals, and then, as something radically new, it is even a meal drawn from the Day of Atonement sin offering. This is expanded upon in Hebrews 13:11: "For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp." This is unquestionably describing the loftiest type of sin offering finding its greatest application on the Day of Atonement. The next verse further describes Jesus as that "universal" sin offering: "Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate." Jesus' death is able to "sanctify the people," and thus it is a sin offering. His death upon the cross, occurring "outside the gate" of Jerusalem, is also here identified as the antitype of that greatest Jewish sin offering. Jesus, who is repeatedly shown to be the great high priest, has brought His sacrificial blood behind the veil into the Most Holy Place, into the very presence of God in the heavenly tabernacle. If the Jewish priests desire to eat of Christ's sin offering, they must remove themselves from the Old Testament regulations, for under those regulations no one could eat of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement and only their high priest could enter behind the veil. This then is the final radical change inaugurated by our Savior, that all of God's people may go behind the veil, eating of the most sacred sacrifice. Westcott, commenting on this Hebrews 13:10 and following, summarizes this thought wonderfully:

The superiority which the Christian enjoyed over the Jew became most conspicuous when the highest point in each order was reached. The great sacrifice for sin on the Day of Atonement was wholly consumed [by fire]. Though they "who served the tabernacle" "were partakers with the altar," even those who were most privileged had

⁵⁶See 1 Corinthians 10:17; Romans 16:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 5:11; and 1 John 10, 11 where such closed Communion is understood.

no right to eat of this offering. But Christ who is our sacrifice for sins, the perfect antitype of that symbol, is our food also [. . .] The Christian enjoys in substance that which the Jew did not enjoy even in shadow [. . .] We Christians *have* an altar, from which we draw the material for our feast. In respect of this, our privilege is greater than that of priest or high-priest under the Levitical system. Our great sin-offering, consumed in one sense outside the gate, is given to us as our food. The Christian therefore who can partake of Christ, offered for sins, is admitted to a privilege unknown under the old Covenant.⁵⁷

The Christian "altar" is "outside the camp."⁵⁸ It is thus outside of the Jewish tabernacle and regulations. Hence, when we approach our holy meal, it is not in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerazim. Rather, in Spirit and in truth, we approach Christ's sacrifice at the "heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22).

Elaborating the thought of eating of Christ's sacrifice, the author of Hebrews next subtly, but clearly to the Jewish reader, reiterates the fact that Christ's sacrifice is a peace offering: "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, *the fruit of lips* that give thanks to ["confess"] His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:15,16, emphasis added). The italicized words are definitely actions specifically connected to the peace offering, but in addition, all of these were themselves common terms for the peace offering. F. C. N. Hicks succinctly states the observation of many a scholar: "The 'sacrifice of praise' was the peace-offering."⁵⁹ *Confession* was also at times a term used for the peace offering.⁶⁰ Lane conveys the fact that the *fruit of lips* "came

⁵⁷Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 439.

⁵⁸"Outside the camp" is a far more pregnant thought than many realize. Not only was the concept associated with the Day of Atonement, it was associated with the sacrifice of the most unique sin offering, the Red Heifer. In addition, it was associated with the place to which the unclean were banned, as well as the place where a blasphemer was put to death. Probably the most interesting, relative to Christ, is the fact that when the children of Israel rejected God, He had Moses erect a "tent" [tabernacle?] "outside the camp" (Exodus 33:7-10)! Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, 541-546.

⁵⁹Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice*, 294: "The 'sacrifice of praise' was the peace-offering." Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 443, says that the sacrifice of praise "occurs in Lev. vii.12...of the highest form of peace-offering."

⁶⁰Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 92: "And accordingly, this word Confession, like the

to be associated with thank [peace] offerings and thank offering songs."⁶¹ *Sharing* was a technical term especially among pagans, describing the peace offering meal wherein the worshipper "shared" the same meal his god was eating.⁶² The word was then soon adopted by Christianity to label the genuine communion meal, the Lord's Supper. Tibor Horbath, realizing the eucharistic use of this word, says that here in Hebrews 13:16, "The 'koinonia' might mean not only sharing goods with others, but also the gathering where Eucharistic celebrations were held."⁶³ Even the word *continually* "connotes simply and succinctly that the whole continuous liturgy of the old covenant is fulfilled in the continual praise offering of Christians."⁶⁴ Standing alone, sacrifice of praise, fruit of lips, giving thanks [confession] or sharing [koinonia] would not give a certain witness to the concept of peace offering, but standing together they give powerful reference to the peace offering. In addition to the terms used for the peace offering, the Greek word for "sacrifice" used in these verses "appears to have been understood in the early Church of the prayers and thanksgivings connected with the Eucharist."⁶⁵

Recall then that one of the main concepts behind the peace offering was the communion meal. Thus the writer to the Hebrews is obviously, in a manifold way, drawing the Jewish Christian reader (or hearer) to think of worshipful feasting in the Lord's Supper.

Some might object to the thought that the author of Hebrews is mixing the sin offering on the Day of Atonement with the peace offering. It is important to realize that often the different sacrifices were considered a

word Eucharist or Thanksgiving, was one of the terms in the Jewish Church for the Peace-offering, or, as it was frequently called, the Sacrifice of Praise." On 268 Field connects the two sacraments under "confession": "And the 'fulfillment' of the Baptismal 'Faith' is obviously the Eucharistic 'Confession.'"

⁶¹Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, 550. One may also see Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 420.

⁶²Friedrich Hauck, "κοινωνός," in volume III, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

⁶³Tibor Horbath, *The Sacrificial Interpretation of Jesus' Achievement in the New Testament* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1979), 71.

⁶⁴Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, 550. Also on 449-450, Lane explains that διὰ πάντος was used regularly for the daily burnt offering. "It occurs fourteen times in Num 28:10-29 LXX in reference to the daily sacrifices." Thus the burnt offering enters the sacrificial picture along with the sin offering and peace offering here in Hebrews 13:10 and following.

⁶⁵Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 443.

unit, and each sacrifice was treated as a "stage" in the sacrificial process.⁶⁶ The final stage of sacrifice was the peace offering.⁶⁷ Having presented the radical sacramental eating of the Atonement sin offering, the author of Hebrews encourages such eating by describing Christian worship also in terms of the final stage of sacrifice, the peace offering. "The third stage in the Sacrifice, once more for Christ and for us, . . . is the stage of the Communion-meal."⁶⁸

Thus Christ, at the right hand of the majesty in the Most Holy Place, mediates His holy meal. It is a meal from His Day of Atonement liturgy, a meal whereby we even now enter behind the veil and participate in the divine worship of the heavenly tabernacle.

Finally, consider the eucharistic connotations behind the use of "gifts and sacrifices" in the epistle to the Hebrews. The terms "gifts and sacrifices" are used more than once in Hebrews to describe the λειτουργεῖν of the priests.⁶⁹ For example, the priestly ministration of "gifts and sacrifices" is spoken of in Hebrews 5:1 as "gifts and sacrifices for sins."

Some wrongly conclude that the Old Testament "gifts and sacrifices" indicates that which was slain and burned on the altar. As one investigates the Old Testament use of the word "gifts," it becomes apparent that it is usually used in the Old Testament for those offerings to be eaten by the priests.⁷⁰ The author of Hebrews apparently agrees

⁶⁶Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice*, 311: "In practice they [types of sacrifice] were offered together: and if, under the exigencies of language the word sacrifice could be applied to each, it is still true that each contained several of the essential acts of the whole procedure. There is no warrant for applying the word 'sacrifice' to the death of the victim alone, or to the use of the blood, or to the offering; but if there were, it would be equally applicable to the act of eating with which the complete sacrificial action ended."

⁶⁷Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice*, 251: "And, without doubt, it [the New Testament] leaves us with the Eucharist in so many words described as constituting, for us, at least the last of the six stages in the Sacrifice [which Hicks calls, "the meal"]."

⁶⁸Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice*, 341.

⁶⁹See footnote 12.

⁷⁰The word δῶρον is the translation of either Minchah or Qorban. See Alfred Cave, *The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice and Atonement* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1890), 510-520. The Minchah was usually the grain offering, and was almost always eaten of by the priests. Qorban was used for any type of offering, but of all the offerings only the burnt offering did not involve eating by humans.

with this conclusion, for in Hebrews 9:9, 10 he informs us that "gifts and sacrifices are offered [by the priests] which cannot make the worshipper perfect in conscience, since *they relate only to food and drink and various washings* [baptisms]." Then, in the Jewish system, he says that these were "regulations for the body [flesh] imposed until a time of *reformation*" [emphasis added]. After Numbers 18:8-9 presents such "gifts and sacrifices," verse 10 gives the priests the sacramental instruction that "in the most holy place shall you eat them. Every male shall eat them, you and your sons: they shall be holy to you."⁷¹

Hebrew "gifts and sacrifices" were general concepts related to ritual offerings. However, the author to the Hebrews specifically relates the "gifts and sacrifices" to "food and drink and various washings." To the Old Testament Jew it would have seemed strange that the author of Hebrews 9:10 would summarize "gifts and sacrifices" by speaking of "food and drink and various washings."⁷² To the Hebrew Christians, however, such a summary is custom-made to create the thought of the Christian sacraments, which include precisely food and drink and washings.⁷³ Thus, once again, it seems apparent that the author of Hebrews, by using "food and drink and washings" to describe the priestly "gifts and sacrifices," is directing his readers to their sacraments of the Lord's Supper and baptism.⁷⁴

This sacramental focus becomes even clearer when the word "reformation" is properly understood. Such priestly rites utilizing "food and drink and various washings" in the Jewish system were to exist, the

⁷¹The Greek word for "gifts" (δῶρον) is the same in Hebrews 9:9-10 and Numbers 18:9 (LXX). The words for "sacrifice" are slightly different (θυσίαι, θυσιασμάτων), though obviously from the same root. The sin offering of the Red Heifer in Numbers 19 is also referred to here in Hebrews 9, thus giving the distinct impression that Numbers 18 and 19 were in mind. *The Septuagint Version, Greek and English* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, seventh printing 1975), 200.

⁷²Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 254: "The mention of 'drinks' has caused difficulty, for the Law gave no universal directions in this respect . . ."

⁷³Concerning such "washings," the author of Hebrews uses this word, βαπτισμῶν, to describe Christian baptism in 6:2.

⁷⁴Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 234: "So again we may see the same contrast implied between the 'meats and drinks and diverse baptisms' of the old covenant (v. 10) and the 'good things' which belong to the Priesthood of Christ (v. 11) [. . .] Nothing, therefore, seems to be wanting to place the present allusion to the Holy Eucharist beyond doubt."

text declares, until a "time of *reformation*." The word used here for "reformation" does not mean cancellation. The use of food and drink and baptisms was not to be cancelled, but reformed. Concerning this word for "reformation" Lane says, "The use of the word in the papyri and in the hellenistic Greek indicates that it expresses the notions of correction, reconstruction, improvement, or amendment."⁷⁵ Thus the "food and drink and various washings," which stood primarily as legal regulations for the Jewish Old Testament liturgy, would be reconstructed, improved and amended. Christ now liturgizes as high priest, ministering gifts and sacrifices under the reconstructed and improved sacraments of the New Testament. God did not dispose of food and drink and baptisms, He reformed their use.

We now have "food and drink and washings," which are not legal requirements for the flesh, but means by which the conscience is cleansed. Hebrews 9:9-10 informs us that the Old Testament sacrifices could not "make the worshiper perfect in conscience." This is so because such food and drink and washings were "regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation." Simply stated, the Old Testament food and drink and washings were legal requirements based upon the sacrifice of animals and grain. Such food, drink, and washings would indeed salve the conscience of the Old Testament believer, but they could not perfect the conscience.⁷⁶ Thus Hebrews 10:1 continues: "For the Law, since it was only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near." Such perfection of the conscience cannot happen from the "shadow" but only through the reality of the cross, which empowers the sacraments.

All Old Testament sacrifices, and the meals and baptisms related to such sacrifices, were grounded in Christ's cross, even when the Jews did not fully realize it.⁷⁷ Now, in the Christian era, Christ's crucifixion finds

⁷⁵Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, 217.

⁷⁶See Hebrews 9:9, 14; 10:2, 22; 13:18 for references to a purged, perfect conscience in Christ.

⁷⁷John Leighton, *The Jewish Altar: An Inquiry into the Spirit and Intent of the Expiatory Offerings of the Mosaic Ritual* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1886), 27: "Nay, if Israel saw Christ at all in their service, they must, because of its many details, have seen nearly everything about Him; and we should find them again and again saying so. But their silence is conclusive of the fact that they saw him not."

its direct application in the food and drink and washings of the sacraments. Such sacraments are derived not from animal sacrifices but directly from Christ's self-sacrifice.

Unlike the Old Testament priests, Christ, the great high priest, never needs to perform another sacrifice. But this then means that the sacraments are His sole priestly liturgy through which we are invited in this era to enter behind the veil. Now in this temporal eon, we have a high priest at God's right hand in the most holy place. Every time there is a baptism, it is His liturgy, His service to the people. Every time the Lord's Supper is celebrated and His people partake of the body and blood given and shed on the cross, it is His liturgy, His service to the people. His Divine Liturgy, like that of the Old Testament, flows from sacrifice, only now the sacrifice is "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:10).

Theological Observer

Passing through Rockville, Connecticut

With a son in New Hampshire and a mother and sister in New York City, we pass by Rockville, Connecticut on Interstate 84 several times a year. This is not astounding, but there is some emotional involvement, since I served as pastor of Trinity there before coming to the seminary in 1966. What makes passing through Rockville so bittersweet is that ten years after I left, Trinity left Missouri for the AELC and then the ELCA. A few members found their way into nearby Missouri congregations, but the bulk remained with the revised ELCA Trinity. Since then we have stopped to visit the faithful remnant, but not the church itself. Trinity began as a society for Protestant German immigrants and was transformed into a Lutheran congregation in 1864 by a Otto Hanser, a Missouri Synod pastor who went on to head the gymnasium in Fort Wayne. It was the first Lutheran congregation in the state. Masons were taken into the membership, but later it was agreed that no more would be received. This resulted in a split in the congregation in 1880s. Upon returning from a district convention, the pastor discovered that Masonic faction had changed the locks on the doors to keep him out. At a meeting he had to defend himself with a chair. Incidentally, he was the secretary of the Eastern District and hardly a radical. Some times congregations are in the wrong!

Many New England towns have two Lutheran congregations which share the same roots but which later divided over the lodge issue. So in Rockville, First Lutheran Church accepted lodge members and Trinity did not. After the split, First Lutheran retained the building in the town center and was called "the lower Lutheran church" and Trinity retained the pastor and built another building up on the side of the valley and was still known as "the upper Lutheran church." It was not a matter of social status, liturgy or doctrine, but of geography. By the time I arrived, "the lower Lutheran church" had moved to higher ground, but the name stuck among the old timers. Some members in the congregations were related to each other, but Trinity's pastors made the issues clear which separated them. My predecessor was the Reverend Erich Otto Pieper, son of the Missouri Synod dogmatician and president. Another predecessor was the father of Berthold von Schenck, another well known name in the Synod. Soon after arriving in Rockville, I assembled the extant data which appeared in an article, "The Centennial Celebration of

Lutheranism in Connecticut," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 38 (July 1965), 95-102.

Into the mid-1960s, many New England towns maintained their nineteenth-century character which was shaped by the woolen mills driven by the area's fast moving streams. Here America first was industrialized and when the excess farm population could no longer provide the necessary labor force, entrepreneurs looked to Europe. Italians and the Irish each had their own Catholic church. Germans found their way into one Catholic church and or one of two Lutheran ones. Congregational churches had their roots in colonial days and were state supported into the nineteenth century. They had an upper class status—or so it seemed to Lutherans. Even poorly informed Lutherans knew that they had little in common with the Congregationalists, whose congregations may have been members at one time or another of Baptist and Unitarian associations. This is the complexity of New England Christianity.

During my short tenure in Rockville, it was obvious the congregation had to move from the center city. Church and parsonage were on a steep hill and there was no room for parking, especially during the long, snowy winter months. A nineteenth-century congregation walked between their homes, the mills and the church, but the mills were no more and the members had taken flight to the suburbs. Enterprising members found a large piece of property on the Hartford Turnpike, right off entrances to Interstate 84. "Church growth" had not been invented then, but we figured out the parking lot opportunities by ourselves. My successor saw to the building of the church on the new property and I returned for the dedicatory sermon. There was another visit for a wedding, but after the congregation left the Missouri Synod, there were no more visits. My name appears in the congregation's annals as the pastor who had the foresight to relocate the church and I receive appropriate invitations for anniversaries. It hurt too much to accept. Of course, there were confessional reasons. One woman went on to seminary and was ordained. This was the congregation of a *Pieper*! A church which was once the backbone of the Missouri Synod in the Connecticut River Valley had been taken into the ELCA, a fate of about thirty-five other congregations in New England.

In returning from New York for New Hampshire on December 27 last year, we stopped at a gas station near Trinity, now in Vernon and

curiosity got the best of me. I stopped in at the church and was greeted warmly and courteously by the ELCA pastor. Thirty-six years had passed, but he knew my name. The two chancel chairs and the baptismal font from the old church had found a place in the new building. In that font I had baptized many children including our youngest son. Since the church had been built around 1970, a huge social hall was tacked on to front in which was a conference room. At one end was placed the stained glass window which stood over the entrance of the old church on which was written "Trinity Lutheran Church, U.A.C.," letters which stands for "Unaltered Augsburg Confession," but this is a part of history and not what that congregation believes. ELCA congregations are in fellowship with the Reformed, which is a direct contradiction to this document's article ten on the Lord's Supper. Hermann Sasse notes that churches do not remain the same. The church before and after Constantine was not the same. This is also true of Trinity, Rockville. Not only was it now Trinity, Vernon, but in spite of the stained glass window with "U.A.C.," it was no longer the church of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. The ELCA now claims both of Rockville's two Lutheran churches. Missouri was eased out. I remember no Reformed or Presbyterian churches in the area, but four Congregational churches flourish. Fifty years ago any contact between Trinity and a Congregational church would have been an impossibility, now they are in communion with one another. After our short visit, we headed to the old wooden church at 87 Prospect Street. In place of the stained glass over the entrance where "Trinity Lutheran Church, U.A.C." had once stood was another stained glass, "Grace Bible Church." Typically such Bible churches are legalistic and know little of grace. The red paint on high bell tower had been worn away so that only the white undercoat remained. Old wooden structures are hard to maintain. So are confessional ones.

David P. Scaer

Book Reviews

***Historical Atlas of Christianity.* By Franklin H. Littell. New York and London: Continuum, 2001. Hardcover. xv+440 pages. \$35.00.**

This revised version of the atlas, first published as *The Macmillan Atlas History of Christianity*, carries on both the strengths and weaknesses of its predecessor. On the one hand, the comprehensive scope of the work ensures that, whatever the topic, students and pastors turning to this reference will likely find an insightful text and engaging visual presentation. Author Franklin H. Littell focuses on decisive points in history when the Christian church has experienced critical changes. Sections treat "Early Christianity in Its Setting," "The Christian Roman Empire," and "The Age of Personal Decision." Littell stresses theology and dogma, ethical and moral life, and the expansion of Christianity to a world religion.

On the other hand, as strong as the maps are, they suffer on two points of presentation. First, they are all in black and white, making it more difficult to discern shades and boundaries. Second, all of the maps have a certain "fuzzy" or blurry character to them. They lack crispness and clarity, which makes them somewhat tiring to the eye to read.

Nevertheless, the book remains a solid piece of work, though one would quibble with some of the author's decisions and interpretations. His rehearsal of the tired argument that Luther was the source of passivity that allowed the rise of the Holocaust simply passes over such significant elements as the Magdeburg Confession and its theory of the right of "Lesser Magistrates" to resist the Emperor. (A partial corrective to this position has recently appeared. See David M. Whitsett, *Tyranny and Resistance: The Magdeburg Confession and the Lutheran Tradition* [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001].) Given the brevity of the articles, it is a shame that Littell spends so much space on this argument. Still, this is a reasonably priced volume that can be helpful to pastors, students, and laypeople as well. Its presentation limitations aside, it might make a useful volume for a church library.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

***Exodus 1-18.* By William H. C. Propp. The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1999. 680 Pages. Cloth.**

In penning this first half of a two-volume commentary on Exodus, William Propp fancies himself "the moderator of a vast, millennial colloquium" comprised of all (or, at least, most) of those whose words on this text are worthy of continued attention (54). That lack of modern snobbery is, in itself, refreshing, given the penchant of many commentators to turn a cold shoulder to their predecessors of "pre-critical" years. In Propp's work, everyone from Origen to Calvin to Rashi to Wellhausen all get a turn at the microphone.

Each section of Exodus is presented whole and then dissected and examined according to a set pattern: translation, textual notes, source analysis, redaction analysis, and commentary. Propp's translation is literal but lively. Hebrew metaphors cooked for modern consumption in standard English translations are served raw (for example, when Moses whined about being "heavy of tongue" Yahweh's "nose grew angry at [him]"). Infinitive absolutes and emphatic pronouns are repeated in the translation (God tells Moses He has "seen, seen" the humiliation of His people, 3:7). The textual notes, while unsurprisingly maze-like in their content, prove enlightening at times, especially in those sections where the superiority of the MT is questionable. Those who take delight in source and redaction criticism will find plenty here to satisfy their interest. Although Propp salutes the flag of the Documentary Hypothesis (JEDP), at least his allegiance does not hold sway over the whole work. The commentary section is not a standard verse-by-verse exposition. Rather, Propp singles out significant aspects of the text for further contemplation and (in some cases) speculation. Since Propp's "basic approach to the Bible is anthropological" (39) it comes as no surprise to find in the commentary section as great deal of cross-cultural comparisons, use of folktale analysis, and (re-)interpretation of texts, such as the Bridegroom of Blood (4:24-26) and the Passover from a sociological perspective. Though one may disagree vehemently with some of his conclusions, even those who rightly interpret these texts from the perspective of christological fulfillment will find much in Propp's commentary of use (for instance, his exposition of the eating of the Passover lamb).

If you already have a single standard Exodus commentary on your shelf, Propp's would serve as a helpful mate to it. If for no other reason, buy it so you may possess one of those rare commentaries saturated with poetic prose that is truly a delight to read.

Chad L. Bird

Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel. By Jeffery A. Gibbs. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Academic Press, 2000.

Jeffrey Gibbs, a student of Jack Kingsbury, applies Kingsbury's narrative method to the Eschatological Discourse (ED) in Matthew 24-25. He assumes the historical reliability of the speech and allows the wider context of the narrative to illumine the speech itself. Thus, Gibbs incorporates eschatological themes from other parts of Matthew, for example, the preaching of John the Baptist, the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection. Gibbs holds that the ED predicts events after Jesus' ascension. The implied readers will understand Jesus' ED as fulfilled first in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and then in his Parousia (return) at the end of the age. The implied readers are not the disciples, but the first readers of the Gospel.

The first section of the ED (24:4-35) deals with events that will lead up to and accompany the destruction of Jerusalem. Signs accompanying these events

indicate to his enemies that Jesus is reigning as the Son of Man. The second part (24:36-25:46) sets forth the behavior required of the faithful who await Jesus' return, for which no warnings will be given. The implied readers are not to confuse the approaching destruction of the Temple with Jesus' Parousia (24:36) in response to Jesus' prediction of the Temple's destruction (24:2), as the disciples did (24:3). Since Jews reject Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, Jerusalem will be destroyed during the lifetime of the disciples, but the Parousia will be delayed.

The ED uses theophanic language that echoes Isaiah's prediction of Babylon's destruction (13:10) to describe the approaching destruction of Jerusalem (24:29). Implied readers would recognize this and apply it to the Temple's destruction. Gibbs holds that Christ's "coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (24:30) is the fall of Jerusalem in which His reign is seen. Gathering in of the elect (24:31) refers to commission of the disciples to go to the ends of the earth after the destruction.

Gibbs devotes two chapters to the end time character of Jesus' death and resurrection, which is the Gospel's goal and climax. In His suffering and death, Jesus is revealed as the "true eschatological King of Israel and the one who, by his suffering and death, fulfills his mission of saving his people from their sins (1:21; 20:28; 26:29)." In His death, Jesus begins to reign (20:21) and comes with royal power (16:28). Gibbs sees a threefold fulfillment of Jesus' words to the high priest (26:64): the rending of the veil (27:51) and other signs at Jesus' death, the testimony of the guards at Jesus' tomb to the religious leaders (28:11-15), and the fall of Jerusalem. All signify that "this man is seated at God's right hand and has been invested with power by the Ancient of Days, as Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13-14 declare." By the rending of the veil (27:51), God vindicates Jesus and verifies His predictions concerning the temple.

The cosmic distress that accompanies Jesus' death and resurrection is related to other predictions of Jesus recorded in the Gospel, but not to those in the ED. Gibbs relates the darkness over the land before Jesus' death (27:45) to the eschatological outer darkness described elsewhere in the teaching of Jesus, but not to the darkening of the sun in 24:29. The opening of tombs, resurrection of saints, their appearance in the "holy city," the earthquake, and the splitting of the rocks all underscore the end time significance of Jesus' crucifixion. Because the implied reader has learned from the rest of Matthew to think eschatologically about Jesus' life and ministry, he or she is led to understand Jesus' death and resurrection in the same way.

Much of current eschatological discussion, especially among millennialists, associates the increase of wickedness and tribulation in the world with the return of Jesus and the consummation of the age. Gibbs holds that for Matthew, God was already bringing His eschatological reign into history through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Those who respond in faith to Jesus' eschatological message "already possess the reign of heaven" and will "enter into the consummated reign of heaven on the last day." Those who oppose and reject Jesus now will receive

God's end time judgment at the Parousia, prefigured in the destruction of Jerusalem. Destruction is God's judgment against "this generation" for its rejection of His Son, but the time will come when Jesus will return and judge all according to their works (16:27). Pastors who read this volume can renew their appreciation for the eschatological dimensions of the ministry.

Paul Beisel
Concordia Theological Seminary

***Every Day Will I Bless Thee: Meditations for the Daily Office.* By Burnell F. Eckardt Jr. Sussex, Wisconsin: Concordia Catechetical Academy, 1998. xiv + 514 pages.**

As any pastor knows, finding suitable and usable material for the daily office and family prayers is more than a little challenging. The vast bulk of that which passes itself off as "devotional material" is little more than worthless tripe. "Devotional" has come to cover a category of generically religious activity and commentary, which is of a generic religious character. Hence we look in the local Christian book store and find under devotional programmatic suggestions ("pound nail into a piece of wood, because that's what your sins did to Jesus on the cross") or "how-to" suggestions ("what would Jesus do?"), or challenges to a better life ("my utmost for his highest"). In the vast majority of cases, this devotional material suffers from a fatal flaw – it is radically anthropocentric. It emphasizes *me* and *my experience* at the expense of Christ and what he has done for me.

And so, Lutheran pastors have oftentimes been sent on an unsolicited quest for devotions for their personal and family use, and that they might recommend to their parishes. The old and excellent *Daily Office Book* by Lindemann has been replaced by Sauer's *Daily Prayer*, a helpful but differently directed entity. Saints book from ALPB – too cost prohibitive. Finally, the Anglican communion's *Daily Office Book*, while very helpful for its readings, lacks any meditative character (some for which we may want to be thankful, given the state of Episcopal theology!).

Hence the welcome with which we greet this volume. Here is an eminently useful work whose application is for church and home, corporate and personal. But above all its strengths, which are numerous, is its theological character – it is summarily christocentric. Eckardt divides the book into three main sections. Following some introductory material, which includes a calendar for the church year, an Order for Family Prayer, and some general notes, Eckardt supplies the reader with meditations for the daily office, saints' days and festivals, and collects and prayers. Each mediation opens with a text from Scripture (the gospel lessons follow the historic gospels for the church year in the Western church), followed by a brief devotional commentary. Again, the meditations are unequivocally christocentric, as truly catholic devotions should and must be.

If there is one cumbersome element of the book, it is the separation of the appointed collects from their readings. One will have to do some page flipping to move from the Order for Family Prayer, to the meditation for the day, to the collect for the week. But this is common to daily office books—unavoidable, in fact—and does not at all compromise the usability of the work. One quickly adapts to the rhythm of moving through the volume.

The ultimate strength of the book is its tie to the divine service. This volume is christocentric in the extreme, which is *very* good thing. It focuses consistently on what God has done and is doing for us in His Son through church and sacrament. For that we must thank again Pastor Eckardt and the Concordia Catechetical Academy for supplying us with such an excellent, insightful, and usable book for serious Lutheran devotional use.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence. By James L. Crenshaw. New York: Doubleday, 1998. 305 pages. \$34.95

This volume in the Anchor Bible Reference Library addresses one aspect of the broader topic of Wisdom literature in the Old Testament. The “deadening silence” referenced in the subtitle alludes to the need for communication to take place from one generation to another. The authors’s overarching quest in examining Israelite communication or education is epistemological: “the manner in which learning took place, and the horizon of knowledge,” (viii). To accomplish his objective, Crenshaw examines Jewish Wisdom texts (from the Old Testament and non-canonical writings) as well as related texts from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and other ancient cultures. He discusses literacy and schools in ancient Israel, the means by which knowledge was passed down and acquired, the relationship between teachers and pupils, and the “debates” within various Wisdom traditions over the extent to which wisdom was acquired by human endeavor or given by divine favor (or both).

To its credit, the book does not assume too much. Readers unfamiliar with Wisdom literature from non-Israelite cultures are guided patiently through the texts. Although cross-cultural comparisons between Israel and others nations are found throughout the work, Crenshaw happily avoids any parallelomania that would reduce Israel to an Egyptian or Babylonian look-alike. Nor does the author attempt to accomplish more than he sets out to achieve. This is not an introduction to Wisdom literature. He is also to be commended for confessing that much of his work—excellent though it may be—is unavoidable speculation due to the lack of extant textual or archaeological material that would further illuminate how ancient Israel educated its own.

Speaking of speculation, receiving dishonorable mention in a chapter on the relationship between students and teachers is the LCMS. In a section entitled “Resistance to Learning,” our author pauses momentarily from his erudite

reflections to verbally spank communions such as those "Missouri Synod Lutherans" who have allowed conservatives to "capture control of seminaries" and to "undermin[e] theological education" (143). Dr. Crenshaw will no doubt be gladdened to know that he is gravely mistaken. Despite his fears of conservative reductionism and educational squelching, the "deadening silence" is still being filled in our seminary education with the wisdom of which he so eloquently writes in the rest of his work.

Chad L. Bird

Books Received

Barbour, Ian G. *Nature, Human Nature, and God*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress, 2002. 170 Pages. Paper. \$15.00.

Barnes, Michel R. *The Power of God*. Baltimore, Maryland: Catholic University of America Press, 2001. 333 Pages. Cloth.

Bauckham, Richard. *God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jurgen Moltmann*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2001. 289 Pages. Paper. \$20.00.

Bauckham, Richard. *Gospel Women*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. 343 Pages. Paper. \$22.00.

Baue, Frederic W. *The Spiritual Society: What Lurks Beyond Postmodernism?* Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2001. 192 Pages. Paper. \$12.99.

Beeke, Joel R., editor. *Forerunner of the Great Awakening: Sermons by Theodorus Frelinghuysen*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000. 382 Pages. Paper. \$19.99.

Boice, James M., and Philip Ryken. *The Doctrines of Grace*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002. 240 Pages. Cloth.

Braaten, Carl E., and Robert W. Jenson. *The Last Things*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. 169 Pages. Paper. \$16.00.

Braun, John. *Isaiah 40-66*. People's Bible. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001. Paper. \$16.99.

Braun, William H., and Victor H. Prange, compiling editors. *Not Unto Us: A Celebration of the Ministry of Kurt J. Eggert*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001. Paper. \$14.99.

Buckley, James J., and David Yeago, editors. *Knowing the Triune God*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001. 283 Pages. Paper. \$29.00.

Daly, Robert J., translator and annotator. *Origen*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1992. 121 Pages. Cloth. \$16.95.

Foust, Thomas F., George R. Hunsberger, J. Andrew Kirk, and Werner Ustorf, editors. *A Scandalous Prophet: The Way of Mission after Newbigin*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001. xxiv + 325 Pages. Paper. \$30.00.

Friesen, Steven J. *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. 283 Pages. Cloth. \$49.95.

Hageneder, Fred. *The Spirit of Trees*. New York: Continuum, 2000. 256 Pages. Cloth. \$29.95.

Hampson, Daphne. *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought*. Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 323 Pages. Cloth. \$59.95.

Hengel, Martin. *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2000. 354 Pages. Paper. \$24.99.

Humphreys, W. Lee. *The Character of God*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001. 281 Pages.

Issler, Klaus. *Wasting Time With God*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001. 282 Pages. Paper.

Kim, Seyoon. *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001. xv + 336 Pages. Paper. \$25.00.

Kolb, Robert, and James A. Nestingen, editors. *Sources and Contexts of The Book of Concord*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 2001. 277 Pages. Paper. \$25.00.

Kremer, Kenneth. *For One Another: Touching Hearts in a Changing World*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001. Paper. \$12.99.

Lazareth, William H. *Christians in Society*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 2000. 274 Pages. Paper. \$22.00.

Longman, Tremper, III. *The Song of Songs*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001. 222 Pages. Cloth. \$35.00.

Maggi, Armando. *Satan's Rhetoric*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2001. 256 Pages. Cloth. \$37.50.

Marcovich, M., editor. *Athenagorae*. Supplement to *Vigiliae Christianae*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000. 76 Pages. Cloth.

Matheson, Peter. *The Imaginative World of the Reformation*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress, 2000. 149 Pages. Paper.

McKim, Donald K. *Reformed Theology*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001. 241 Pages. Paper. \$29.95.

Metzger, Bruce M. *The Bible in Translation*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic Publishers, 2001. 190 Pages. Paper. \$14.99.

Meyer, Robert T., translator and annotator. *St. Athanasius*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2002. 154 Pages. Cloth. \$24.95.

Montgomery, W., J. R. Coates, Susan Cupitt, and John Bowden, translators. *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress. Translation copyright SCM Press 2000. 562 Pages. Paper. \$33.00.

Murray, Scott R. *Law, Life, and the Living God*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002. 150 Pages. Paper. \$32.99.

Packer, J. I. *Faithfulness and Holiness*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002. 256 Pages. Cloth. \$17.99.

Phillips, Richard D. *Turning Back the Darkness*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002. 240 Pages. Paper. \$15.99.

Quasten, Johannes, and Joseph C. Plumpe, editors. *The Didache*. Newly translated by James A. Kleist. Washington, District of Columbia: Catholic University of America, 2001. 235 Pages. Cloth. \$13.95.

Ratke, David C. *Confession and Mission, Word and Sacrament*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001. 240 Pages. Paper. \$26.99.

Raum, Elizabeth. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Called by God*. New York: Continuum, 2002. 184 Pages. Cloth. \$21.95.

Ross, Allen P. *Introducing Biblical Hebrew*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2001. 565 Pages. Cloth. \$39.99.

Rudbeckius, Johannes. *Loci theologici: Föreläsningar vid Uppsala universitet 1611-1613*. Text in Latin. Mit einer deutschen Einleitung: Wittenberg-Orthodoxie in Uppsala am Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts. Lund, Sweden: Bengt Häggglund och Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Lund, 2001. Cloth.

Schmeling, Gaylin R. *God's Gift to You: A Devotional Book on the Lord's Supper*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001. 133 Pages. Paper. \$11.99.

Sider, Robert D., editor. *Christian and Pagan in the Roman Empire: The Witness of Tertullian*. Washington, District of Columbia: Catholic University of America Press, 2001. 177 Pages. Cloth. \$37.95. Paper. \$17.95.

Steimer, Bruno, and Michael G. Parker, editors. *Dictionary of Popes and the Papacy*. Translated by Brian McNeil and Peter Heinigg. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001. 278 Pages. Cloth. \$50.00.

Stephan, Bradley Dean. *Meditation for Christians*. Kearney, Nebraska: Morris Publishing, 1997. 181 Pages. Paper.

Tanner, Kathryn. *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2001. 134 Pages. Paper. \$15.00.

Thompson, Marianne Meyre. *The God of the Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001. 269 Pages. Paper. \$22.00.

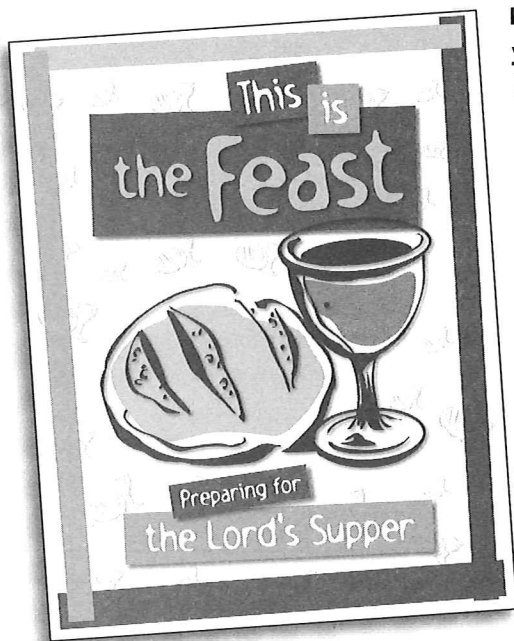
Topel, L. John. *Children of a Compassionate God*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Order of Saint Benedict, 2001. 314 Pages. Paper. \$29.95.

VanderBroek, Lyle D. *Breaking Barriers*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002. 175 Pages. Paper. \$15.99.

Wentz, Frederick K., editor. *Witness at the Crossroads: Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary Servants in the Public Life*. Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, 2001. 256 Pages. Paper.

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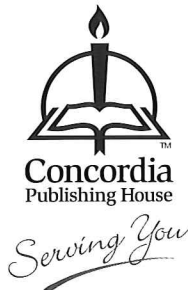
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