

SALVATION AND RESTORATION FOR ISRAEL: THE INTERPRETATION OF CONDITIONAL PROPHECY

Elias Brasil de Souza



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Biblical Research Institute
Silver Spring, Maryland

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General editor: Ekkehardt Mueller
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Editorial assistance and layout: Patrick V. Ferreira
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Author: Brasil de Souza, Elias
Title: Salvation and Restoration for Israel: The Interpretation of Conditional Prophecy

Subjects: Bible - Prophecies - Criticism, Interpretation, etc.
Salvation - Biblical Teaching

Call Number: BS 476.B67 2020

Printed in the U.S.A.

ISBN 978-0-925675-31-6

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Introduction

Prophecies about the restoration of Israel in the Old Testament have stirred the imagination of scholars and poets. Among such prophecies are intriguing predictions that enemy nations would lay siege to Jerusalem in order to take possession of the material blessings God had bestowed upon His people (Jer 25:32; Ezek 38:8–12; Joel 3:1, 12; Zech 12:2–9; 14:2). As a result, unfaithful Israelites would perish (Zech 13:8; 14:2). Moreover, it is God Himself who would bring the nations to Jerusalem (Joel 3:1–2; Zeph 3:6–8; cf. Ezek 38:16, 18–23; 39:1–7) to judge and destroy the nations there because they rebelled against His authority (Jer 25:31–33; Joel 3:9–17; Isa 34:1–8; 63:1–6; 66:15–18). Israel would “inherit the nations” (Isa 54:3)¹ and the wicked would perish (Zech 14:12–13). Eventually, God would establish His kingdom over all the earth and former enemy nations would come to Jerusalem to worship the Lord (Isa 2; Mic 4; Zech 14:16; Isa 66:23). Although such predictions often recognize Israel’s failures, they often conclude by depicting a glorious future for the nation (e.g., Isa 2:1–5; Ezek 40–48; Joel 3:1–21; Amos 9:8–15).²

Although synthetic and concise, this scenario introduces the hermeneutical challenge that must be addressed in this paper. It stands to reason that the predictions about a glorious future for Israel remain largely unfulfilled—at least as far as a literal fulfillment would be expected. So, unsurprisingly, students of Bible prophecy remain divided about the interpretation of such prophecies.

Some Bible interpreters argue that because God’s word is infallible, such prophecies will eventually be fulfilled in a literal way.³ The temple will be rebuilt and become fully operative with priesthood and sacrifices. Then the nations will flow to Jerusalem to learn from

¹ All biblical quotations are from the NKJV, unless otherwise indicated.

² Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary, 1 vols.* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1977), 4:30.

³ For an overview of premillennial and dispensational approaches to biblical prophecy, see George Eldon Ladd, “Historic Premillennialism,” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse, Spectrum Multiview Books (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1977), 17–40; Richard S. Hess, “The Future Written in the Past: The Old Testament and the Millennium,” in *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to “Left Behind” Eschatology*, ed. Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 23–36; Charles C. Ryrie, “The Necessity of Dispensationalism,” in *Dispensationalism Tomorrow & Beyond: A Theological Collection in Honor of Charles C. Ryrie*, ed. Christopher Cone (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2008), 1–10; and Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, “The Role of Israel in Dispensational Theology,” in *Dispensationalism Tomorrow & Beyond*, 117–142.

the Lord, who will reign upon Mount Zion for a thousand years. According to this view, the focus of such unfulfilled prophecies lies on Israel as a political, ethnic, and geographical entity. Thus, the establishment of the state of Israel figures as a major step toward the eventual fulfillment of the prophetic scenario outlined above.⁴

Another explanation posits that such prophecies should be understood within a spiritual or metaphorical framework. A more extreme version of this position argues that Israel has been replaced by the church, and therefore the fulfillment of such prophecies is to be sought in an ecclesiological fulfillment that may even exclude ethnic Jews.⁵

This is a difficult problem that has challenged students of biblical prophecy for a long time. But ultimately, the issue under study not only has bearing on matters related to eschatology, but also affects the understanding of two other interrelated issues—namely, the relationship between Israel and the church and the relationship between the two Testaments of the Christian Bible. Although not all the ramifications and implications of the aforementioned issues can be discussed within the confines of this study, certainly some broad hermeneutical guidance can be offered to help Bible students make proper sense of such Old Testament prophecies.⁶

Given the political and ideological sensitivity of this topic, it must be made clear that this study does not deal with the right of the modern state of Israel to exist according to international law. Indeed,

⁴ See, e.g., Craig Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics: How Are We to Interpret the Relation Between the Tanak and the New Testament on This Question?,” in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 79–105.

⁵ Gabriel Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 148–153, identifies five types of “supersessionism.” For another description of various kinds of supersessionism, especially in the context of early Christian and Catholic tradition, see Steven D. Aguzzi, *Israel, The Church, and Millenarianism: A Way Beyond Replacement Theology*, Routledge New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis, 2018), 25–29.

⁶ Some helpful studies on this topic by Seventh-day Adventist scholars are the following: Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983); Gerhard F. Hasel, “Israel in Bible Prophecy,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 3, no. 1 (1992): 120–148; Richard M. Davidson, “Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy,” in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid, Biblical Research Institute Studies, vol. 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2006), 183–204; and Hans K. LaRondelle and Jon Paulien, *The Bible Jesus Interpreted* (Loma Linda, CA: Jon Paulien, 2014).

the term “Israel” in this study mostly refers to Old Testament Israel, whereas the designation “state of Israel” is reserved for the modern nation state.

In this study two main lines of thought will be pursued. First, one must understand that God’s relationship with humanity, and subsequently with Israel, takes place within the framework of the covenant. Indeed, the concept of covenant reveals God’s purpose for Israel and sheds light on the relationship between Israel and the nations/Gentiles, which consequently clarifies the connection between Israel and the church. Second, closely related to the covenant concept stands the relationship between the Testaments. In other words, to arrive at a proper interpretation of the unfulfilled prophecies about Old Testament Israel, one must take into consideration how the New Testament⁷ interprets the Old Testament, along with Israel and its institutions, in light of the person and work of Christ.

This study argues that the Old Testament prophecies about the restoration of Israel must be understood as conditional upon Israel’s faithfulness to the covenant. Because it failed to keep its side of the covenantal relationship, Israel forfeited its privilege as a theocratic nation to enjoy the literal fulfillment of the restoration promises announced by the Old Testament prophets. However, despite the failure of the theocratic nation, the essence of such promises has not been abrogated. Indeed, the restoration of Israel finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. From a small group of ethnic Jews, Jesus began the restoration of Israel by forming a community of believers that transcends ethnic and territorial borders. Jesus brought Jews and Gentiles under the covenant blessings and extended the border of the promised land to encompass the whole world.

Israel from a Covenantal Perspective

God’s relationship with His people in the Bible is expressed in the structures and language of the covenant.⁸ The term “covenant” presupposes the coming together of two parties “to make a contract, agreeing on promises, stipulations, privileges, and responsibilities.”⁹ Ancient records of covenants found through archaeological

⁷ One should keep in mind that the designation “New Testament” actually intends to convey the idea of a “New Covenant.”

⁸ The Hebrew word for covenant (*bērit*) occurs about 280 times in the Old Testament, while the corresponding Greek term (*diathēke*) appears at least thirty-three times in the New Testament.

⁹ Gerard Van Groningen, “Covenant,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 124.

excavations have been shown to be remarkably similar to the those mentioned in the Bible.¹⁰ In the biblical world, covenants regulated the relationship between suzerain kings and their vassals and also between equal parties, such as Abimelech and Isaac (Gen 26:26–31) and Solomon and Hiram (1 Kgs 5:12).¹¹ But unlike covenants attested in the extrabiblical literature, which tend to focus on the relationship between human parties, the Bible records covenants between God and a human party.¹² Indeed, “nowhere else in the ancient Near East is a pact or covenant found between a god and his/her worshipping community”¹³ in which “the worshipping community pledges absolute fidelity to one deity and adherence to His demands.”¹⁴

Scholars have suggested that the idea of covenant in the Bible is closely related to familial and kinship relationships¹⁵ insofar as “covenants were used to integrate foreign individuals or groups into the familial structures of another clan or community.”¹⁶ Subsequently, the concept of covenant came to be understood also in terms of kinship.¹⁷

¹⁰ See George E. Mendenhall and Gary A. Herion, “Covenant,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:1179–1202, and Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012).

¹¹ Scholars have identified two main kinds of covenants: one between a suzerain and a vassal, sometimes called a covenant of grant, and another type that was established between equal parties as in a treaty. See George E. Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 17 (1954): 50–76 and M. Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90 (1970): 184–203.

¹² The presence of divine-human covenants in the ancient Near East, although scanty, has been noted by Kenneth A. Kitchen, “The Fall and Rise of Covenant, Law and Treaty,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 40, no. 1 (1989): 118–135 and Noel Weeks, *Admonition and Curse: The Ancient Near Eastern Treaty/Covenant Form as a Problem in Inter-Cultural Relationships*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, vol. 407 (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 179–180. Note that the Bible also acknowledges a covenant between God and the non-human creation. See Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, Heythrop Monographs 7 (London: Sheed and Ward, 1992).

¹³ Elaine June Adler, “The Background for the Metaphor of Covenant as Marriage in the Hebrew Bible” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1990), 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵ Frank Moore Cross, “Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel,” in *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3–21.

¹⁶ John Kessler, *Old Testament Theology: Divine Call and Human Response* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 184.

¹⁷ Frank Moore Cross, “Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel,” in *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3–21.

Thus, it is not without significance that the Bible uses marriage as the principal image to describe the covenantal relationship between the Lord and Israel (Jer 3; 31:31–33; Isa 54:5; 62:5; Ezek 16; Hos 2) and also between Christ and the church (Eph 5:22–32; Gal 4:26–28; 2 Cor 11:2; Rev 19:7–10; 21:9–21; 22:17).¹⁸ As has been aptly put, “the idea of the covenant, one of the most profound biblical concepts, uniquely expresses the deep communion, intimate relationship, and closest fellowship between God and man.”¹⁹ And most importantly, the divine plan to save the world is conceived in covenantal terms (Rom 9:4).

At this point, a brief overview of the main covenants mentioned in Scripture sets the backdrop against which one can better understand the prophecies about the restoration of Israel. In what follows, it is noted that God’s relationship with humanity as revealed in the Old Testament expresses itself in terms of six main covenants, which are organically interrelated to the point of being regarded as six reiterations of the one covenant of redemption: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, David, and the New Covenant.²⁰

Covenant with Adam

Although the word “covenant” does not appear in the creation account (Gen 1–2), there are compelling reasons to understand God’s relationship with Adam at creation in covenantal terms. For example, the presence of some typical components of a covenantal relationship—such as the grant of land (garden of Eden), the blessing with the command to fill the earth, and the stipulation not to eat from the forbidden fruit—suggests a covenant relationship between God and humanity. Also, the “parallel between humanity being in the image/likeness of God as king in Genesis 1:26 and Seth being in the image/likeness of Adam as his father in Genesis 5:3 indicates that God rules over his people as a father relates to his son.”²¹

Further corroboration for a covenant at creation can be found at crucial junctures in the biblical account. First, one should note

¹⁸ Jonathan Warren P. (Pagán), “Marriage,” in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, ed. Mark Ward et al (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), Logos electronic edition.

¹⁹ Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002), loc. 158–159, Kindle.

²⁰ See Roy Gane, “The Role of God’s Moral Law, Including Sabbath, in the ‘New Covenant’” (2003), <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Gane%20Gods%20moral%20law.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2020).

²¹ Scott J. Hafemann, “The Covenant Relationship,” in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 33–34.

the occurrence of the covenant name *Yahweh* (Exod 3:14–16; 6:2–3) as contained in the double name *Yhwh 'Ēlōhim* in the creation account (Gen 2:4–25). It has been cogently argued that “since Yahweh emphasizes God in covenant relationship to his people, it should be obvious that the author’s purpose is to show that the transcendent Creator of the first account is also the God in covenant relationship with his people in the second account.”²² Second, as will be discussed later in this study, the verb for the establishment of the Noahic covenant indicates the renewal of a previous covenant, and the expressions describing the covenant with Noah point back to the creation account. Third, it should be pointed out that Hosea 6:7 alludes to a covenant with Adam: “But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; There they have dealt treacherously against Me” (NASB).

As the biblical narrative shows, by eating the forbidden fruit humanity broke the covenant and, due to the unfaithful party, the curse fell upon them. Expelled from the garden, they would eventually return to the dust of the earth—a tragic experience of loss of land, exile, and death, which unfortunately would be subsequently replicated in the experience of Israel. However, amidst the tragedy of sin, God intervened to bring hope and consolation to the human race. As judgment was pronounced upon the serpent, God spoke of a continuing conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Gen 3:15). But most importantly, “God promises victory centered in a single Person: ‘He’—the ultimate representative Seed of the woman, later to be revealed as the Messiah,” would crush the head of Satan.²³

Thus, when the first covenant alluded to in Scripture was broken by human sin, God responded not only with curse and judgment, but also with grace and forgiveness; He even mitigated the immediate effects of sin by covering the naked bodies of our first parents with tunics of skin (Gen 3:21).²⁴ Although the original condition of the human race has been fundamentally altered by that rebellious act,

²² Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2d ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 216.

²³ Davidson, “Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy,” 186. For more details, see *ibid.*, 186–187. For an intertextual study showing the occurrence of this imagery through Scripture, see James M. Hamilton, “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 28–43.

²⁴ David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series.10, 2d. ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 67.

God's intervention in behalf of the human race would bring about an even bigger plan: the messianic seed, who, as God incarnate, would bring a definitive resolution to the sin problem.

Understanding God's relationship with Adam as a covenant at creation provides a hermeneutical foundation to understand the subsequent divine-human covenants recounted in the Bible as natural developments of God's original relationship with humanity established at creation. God always has a plan B when plan A does not work out as first intended. In this connection, it should be mentioned that God's covenant at creation, like most subsequent covenants, has both conditional and unconditional aspects. Abstention from the forbidden fruit was the condition for the human party to dwell in the garden, and thus enjoy communion with God in a state of holiness forever. Having transgressed God's command, they lost the immediate privilege to access the tree of life and enjoy the blessings of the covenant. But, since from God's side the ultimate purpose of the covenant cannot be defeated, in the promise of the messianic "seed" God intimated that in the future the gate of the garden would reopen, and the redeemed human race would again be able to enjoy unfettered communion with their Creator.

Such understanding of God's covenantal relationship with humans as being both conditional and unconditional²⁵ becomes instrumental in understanding the outworking of the plan of salvation as shown in subsequent covenants or, in other words, subsequent reiterations of the one grand covenant of redemption. And it is from this perspective that some difficult problems related to God's election of and covenant with Israel—along with the promises made to the chosen nation—can be properly understood.

Covenant with Noah

After the fall, two genealogical lines branch out from Adam—the line of Cain representing the seed of the serpent (Gen 4:16–24) and the line of Seth representing the seed of the woman (Gen 5:1–32).²⁶

²⁵ See John H. Walton, "Conditionality of the Covenant," chap. 7 in *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), and Roy Gane, "Covenant-Law-Sabbath," Syllabus for OTST 564: Pentateuch (Andrews University, 1997), 38–39.

²⁶ The idea that the genealogy of Cain carries on the seed of the serpent is implied in Jewish tradition and modern commentators. See Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara, eds., *The Aramaic Bible: Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, trans. Michael Maher, vol. 1 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), sub. loc. Gen 4:1 (see n. 2); Nichol, 1:240; James E. Smith, *The Pentateuch*, Old Testament Survey Series, 2d. ed. (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1993), 75–76; John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Genesis: Genesis 1:1–25:18*, Evangelical Press Study Commentary,

Significantly, in the seventh generation from Adam through Cain, evil reaches a climax with Lamech, a polygamous and violent man who not only perpetrated evil but even boasted about it. But in the seventh generation after Adam through Seth, righteousness reaches a climax in Enoch, an individual who “walked with God” and did not die (Gen 5:24). In the first genealogy, a Lamech boasts about evil; in the second genealogy, “another Lamech speaks, not boasting about murder this time, but wishing for a release from the curse imposed on the earth by God (Gen. 5:29).”²⁷

Thus, there seems to be a parallel between these two genealogies. Whereas one communicates the degradation of God’s image through violence, the other “emphasizes the transmission of the divine image (Gen. 5:1–3), not its violent elimination.”²⁸ These two genealogies represent the opposing sides in the cosmic conflict between good and evil that has affected the human race since the fall in the garden.

Although held in check by the pious line of Seth, the ravishing effects of sin reached their lowest point when the sons of God intermarried with the daughters of men and the earth became corrupt and filled with violence. Observing the degraded condition of the world, God decided to send the flood to destroy the human race (Gen 6).

But the judgment came with mitigation,²⁹ and God protected humanity from obliteration by preserving a remnant through the flood: “But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you” (Gen 6:18). This is the first occurrence of the word “covenant” (*bĕrīt*) in the Bible. After the flood, God again spoke with Noah and brought the covenant process to completion (Gen 9:11–17). Several aspects of this covenant deserve attention at this juncture.

First, the biblical narrative employs the verb “establish” (*qûm*) in reference to the covenant with Noah, rather than the verb “cut” (*kārat*) used in most other covenant passages. In Hebrew to “establish

vol.1 (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2003), 142–150; and Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Genesis* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 167.

²⁷ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 15, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 71.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Clines, 66–70, shows that the plot or story pattern of the major narratives in Genesis “exhibit a movement from (a) human sin to (b) divine punishment to (c) divine forgiveness or mitigation of the punishment.” See Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, The Old Testament Library rev. ed., ed. Peter Ackroyd et al. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1972), 152–155.

a covenant” means to “affirm the validity of a prior covenant,” as has been convincingly demonstrated.³⁰ This being the case, the covenant with Noah must be understood as a confirmation of the covenant with Adam at creation. Several lines of evidence link the flood narrative with the account of creation and thus provide further corroboration for the linkage between the Adamic and Noahic covenants. One must bear in mind that the flood effects the reversal of creation by bringing the world to a kind of pre-creation condition, as the earth is covered with water. And in a way reminiscent of creation, the wind/spirit plays a most significant role by forcing the waters of the flood to recede so that dry land can appear. But the most specific and significant parallels are found in the fact that in the flood Noah features like a new Adam, “the fountainhead of the new human race.”³¹ God reiterates to Noah instructions given to Adam. Thus, Noah is to be “fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen 9:1; 1:28). Noah receives instructions about his relationship with the animal world, and should abide by certain dietary regulations.

Second, the covenant with Noah, which was first announced as a relationship between God and Noah (and his family), soon expanded to include the whole creation—namely, every living being, the earth, and all flesh. It was a cosmic covenant by means of which God committed Himself to preserve creation from another flood. Through this covenant God guaranteed the preservation of the cosmic order: “While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, And day and night Shall not cease” (Gen 8:22). Although recognizing that humanity would continue to plunge into sin, God pledged not to respond to human sin by destroying the earth by a flood.

Third, to remind the human race that the earth would be preserved from another universal flood, God put an arch in the clouds to function as a physical sign of the covenant. In this connection, one commentator perceptively notes:

The bow is a weapon of war, an emblem of wrath. God will now set it in the heavens as a token of grace. The Lord who makes His bow of wrath into a seven-colored arch of beauty to ornament the heavens is the One who will finally command the nations to beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (Mic 4:3), for the Prince of

³⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 187–195.

³¹ D. I. Block, “Table of Nations,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 4, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 78.

Peace takes pleasure in mercy (Mic 7:18), and the Righteous Judge delights in grace.³²

Fourth, God's covenant with Noah has been regarded as the only absolutely unconditional covenant recounted in the Bible. God repeatedly refers to it as "My covenant," which indicates the absolute divine sovereignty in the bestowal of this covenant. Thus, regardless of human response, God guarantees the preservation of the earth and the maintenance of the cosmic order. In a way, "the Noahic covenant renews the Adamic covenant and forms one legal package with it, under which all humans continue to live."³³ And yet, to be more specific, because it guarantees the preservation of the cosmic order, the covenant with Noah forms the foundation and context for all subsequent divine-human covenants reported in Scripture. By securing the stability of the cosmic order, this covenant allows for the covenant of redemption to unfold throughout human history. However, in spite of its unconditionality, the Noahic covenant contains stipulations about the consumption of blood and the protection of human life (Gen 9:4–6). Although violation of such specific stipulations would not break the universal and unconditional aspects of the covenant, one should note that it certainly would bring about serious consequences on the transgressors.

From what has been said, it follows that the Noahic covenant is a natural unfolding of a previous covenant with Adam. From God's commitment to Noah and his family, the covenant eventually expands to encompass the whole created order. The trajectory from the particular to the universal that characterizes the covenant with Noah also appears in subsequent covenants. And this feature holds significant implications for understanding the role of Israel in God's prophetic plan, as noted later in this study.

Covenant with Abraham

In the election of Abraham, God makes a new beginning with humanity. After the chaos of Babel, God "creates" a new Adam³⁴

³² Warren Austin Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology*, 2d ed. (Warren A. Gage, 2010), 108.

³³ Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology, Volume 2: The Special Grace Covenants (Old Testament)* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 13.

³⁴ Paul regards God's interaction with Abraham to make him a father of many nations as a new creation: "Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, 'I have made you a father of many nations') in the presence of Him whom he believed—

(or a new Noah, for that matter). Abraham emerges in the biblical grand narrative to continue the plan of redemption already set in motion from the fall through the flood up to Babel. It is not without significance that the word “blessing” occurs five times in the three verses of Abraham’s call narrative (Gen 12:1–3), which reverses the fivefold curse of Genesis 1–11 (Gen 3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25).³⁵ In fact, the commission to “bless,” “be fruitful,” and “multiply” (Gen 1:28) given to Adam also applies to Abraham and his immediate heirs (Gen 12:2–3; 17:2, 6, 8; 22:16–17; 26:3–4, 24; 28:3; 35:11; 47:27; 48:3–4). For this reason, later Jewish tradition came to understand Abraham as the one called to undo the sin of Adam.³⁶ In contrast, Paul forcefully argues that Jesus fulfilled the role of the new Adam, who—as the ultimate seed of Abraham—came to remove the curse of sin and thus fulfill God’s ultimate plan for creation (Rom 5:12–21; Gal 3:14–16). Thus, God’s call of and covenant with Abraham must be understood against the wider backdrop of redemptive history, which concerns not only an ethnic entity later called Israel but encompasses the entire human race.

It is from this wider perspective that God’s covenant with Abraham must be approached. And to facilitate the understanding of such a complex and multifaceted subject, the exposition that follows addresses the following points: the process of covenant making, the promises of the covenant, and the purpose and nature of the covenant.

God’s covenant with Abraham unfolded during a period of over forty years, during which some significant events took place. First, God made promises to Abraham (Gen 12); next, God made the covenant proper, promising descendants and land (Gen 15); then, God affirmed the covenant and established circumcision as the covenant sign (Gen 17); and finally, God acknowledged Abraham’s obedience and confirmed the covenant promises by an oath (Gen 22).³⁷ Although each of these steps is part of the covenantal process, attention must be given to the actual ceremony that inaugurated the covenant (Gen 15).

God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did” (Rom 4:16–17). Particularly, the phrase “calls those things which do not exist as though they did” seems to be a clear allusion to Genesis 1:1–3.

³⁵ Stephen G. Dempster, “Geography and Genealogy, Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 71.

³⁶ H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah* 14:6, in *Midrash Rabbah—Genesis* (London: Soncino Press, 1939), 1:114.

³⁷ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 98.

According to the ancient method of making a covenant, the sacrificial animals should be cut in halves and the parties involved would pass between them.³⁸ Through this ritual, the covenantal partners invoked a curse upon themselves: “If I break this covenant may I suffer the fate of these animals.” In the present case, God Himself commanded Abraham to bring the animals, which Abraham then cut in two, placing each piece opposite the other. Subsequently, Abraham fell into a deep sleep and soon beheld a torch of fire passing among the pieces. Eventually the biblical narrative states that on “the same day the LORD made [cut] a covenant with Abram” (Gen 15:18).

Some features of this covenant inauguration call for comment. Probably the most striking feature of the covenantal process lies in the fact that the biblical narrator mentions only a torch of fire passing between the pieces of the sacrificial animals, which seems to indicate that God alone bears the ultimate responsibility for the maintenance of the covenant. If so, it is not without reason that God repeatedly speaks about the Abrahamic covenant as “My” covenant (Gen 17:2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 21). Consequently, because this is God’s covenant, God Himself guarantees that the promises and purposes of the covenant would eventually be fulfilled.

From the above considerations, the question about the conditionality or unconditionality of the covenant must be addressed. Dispensationalists and other historic premillennialists, who hold the view that biblical prophecies made to Old Testament Israel will be fulfilled in the modern state of Israel, strongly affirm the unconditionality of the Abrahamic covenant.³⁹ Some covenant theologians, on the other hand, tend to stress the conditionality of the covenant and argue that the ethnic, geographic, and material aspects of the promises made to Abraham should be understood in spiritual terms.

Regarding the above question, the fact of the matter is that the covenant is both unconditional and conditional. From God’s perspective and sovereignty, the covenant is unconditional and its ultimate purposes for the redemption of the human race will be realized. After all, this is God’s covenant, and He will eventually bring it to fruition. But on the other hand, from the human side, the covenant is conditional because the human party retains the freedom to leave the covenant. For that reason, some covenant renewals took place in ancient Israel (Deut 5–11; Josh 8:30–35; 24:25; 2 Kgs 22–23;

³⁸ From this ritual process comes the expression “to cut a covenant,” in reference to the act of covenant making as reported in the covenant described in Jeremiah 34.

³⁹ Roy B. Zuck, *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1991), 100–101.

Neh 10:28–36). Every generation (or individual) must decide whether to stay in or out of the covenant.

A close examination of the biblical text shows that Abraham had to abide by some conditions so that God could fulfill the covenant promises. Abraham should participate in the covenant (Gen 15:17–18), practice circumcision with his descendants (Gen 17:9–14), command his descendants to practice righteousness and justice (Gen 18:17–19), and be willing to offer his son Isaac (Gen 22:16–18). Other arguments could be added, but it suffices to note that Jeremiah seems to have captured the conditional element of the Abrahamic covenant in the following statement: “If you will return, O Israel,” says the Lord, “Return to Me; and if you will put away your abominations out of My sight, Then you shall not be moved. And you shall swear, “The Lord lives,” In truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; The nations shall bless themselves in Him [cf. Gen 12:2], And in Him they shall glory” (Jer 4:1–2). It follows from this that the blessings promised to Abraham and his descendants would be enjoyed only as long as they remained faithful to God.

God promised Abraham seed, land, and blessings. Such gifts, however, were not intended to be an end in themselves but were to serve God’s redemptive purposes for the world. Thus one should view the call of Abraham against the larger backdrop of redemptive history. For example, although the “seed” (*zera*) promised to Abraham would result in a great nation, it finally narrows down to a single individual “seed,” who would “possess the gate of his enemies” (Gen 22:17).⁴⁰ As for the land promised to Abraham, it was a narrow piece of property located at a strategic crossroads of the world to serve as a witness to the true God. So by watching the blessings enjoyed by Israel flowing from her right relationship with God, the pagan nations would be attracted to Jerusalem to learn about the ways of the Lord (see, e.g., Isa 2:1–4; cf. 1 Kgs 10:1–13) and thus through Abraham and his family “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3). In addition, God promised to make Abraham and Sarah progenitors of many nations (Gen 17:4–6, 16), which expands the community of Abraham’s children far beyond the borders of ethnic Israel. In addition, it is interesting to note that the land promised to Jacob extended to the four points of the compass, or apparently to the ends of the earth (Gen 28:13–14)—another indication of the universal scope of the Abrahamic covenant.

⁴⁰ For a study of the “seed” from Genesis 3:15 to the rest of the Old Testament and the New Testament, see Afolarin Olutunde Ojewole, “The Seed in Genesis 3:15: An Exegetical and Intertextual Study” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2002).

Another subject to be addressed is circumcision, the covenant sign that reminded Abraham and his descendants of their covenantal promises and obligations. Contrary to some ancient societies that performed circumcision as a rite of initiation to manhood, God commanded circumcision to be performed on the eighth day after birth. Its theological significance may stem from the promise of seed and numerous descendants, which may explain why God chose the “organ of regeneration upon which to place the sign of his covenant with his chosen people.”⁴¹ It bears noting that circumcision was mandatory upon foreigners living among the covenant people (Gen 17:12). Therefore, it is of utmost significance that, since its inception, the Abrahamic covenant was open to Gentiles, and thus circumcision “was not intended exclusively as a racial badge, but more broadly as a covenantal sign.”⁴²

God made a covenant with Abraham in order to bring salvation to the nations. Every gift promised to Abraham and his descendants was to serve as a means to attract and incorporate Gentiles into the covenant community. Thus, to understand properly the role and nature of Israel in the plan of redemption and the Old Testament, prophecies about Israel must take into account the wider purposes of the Abrahamic covenant.

Covenant with Israel

The covenant made with Israel at Sinai (Exod 19–24) should not be regarded as a covenant of works as opposed to the Abrahamic one as a covenant of grace, as some scholars propose.⁴³ Indeed, the covenant with Israel must be understood as a natural entailment of the Abrahamic covenant; both are based on God’s grace. The exodus took place as a result of God’s remembering His covenant with the patriarchs (Exod 2:24), and the covenant at Sinai would bring to fruition the divine promises to Abraham. In the rise of Israel as a nation, the covenant at Sinai, and the conquest of Canaan, God’s previous promises to Abraham of land and offspring began to be realized for the nation of Israel and eventually would result in blessings for the whole world.

⁴¹ Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 449.

⁴² O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 149.

⁴³ See, e.g., Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 204. Cf. David VanDrunen, “Israel’s Recapitulation of Adam’s Probation under the Law of Moses,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 73, no. 2 (2011): 303–324.

Even prior to the formalization of the covenant at Sinai, God had already intimated His covenantal relationship with the slave nation by an expression of sonship: “Israel is My son, My firstborn” (Exod 4:22). Subsequently, God reaffirmed this covenantal relationship by means of an expression of mutual belonging: “I will take you as My people, and I will be your God” (Exod 6:7). In other words, “You belong to me, and I belong to you.” With some variations, such expression of reciprocal belonging—“I will be your God and you will be my people”—throughout the Bible represents “the substance of the covenant”⁴⁴ (Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Jer 30:22; John 20:17; 2 Cor 6:16; Rev 21:3, 7). Thus, it is not without significance that at the ratification of the covenant at Sinai, Moses sprinkled sacrificial blood on both the altar and the people, thus ritually enacting the covenantal bond between God and Israel (Exod 24:5–8).⁴⁵

Unlike its predecessors, the covenant at Sinai contained explicit and comprehensive enunciations of God’s will by means of laws and regulations related to different areas of communal and individual life. Such summations entailed not only responsibilities but also privileges, as expressed in the following passage: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:5–6).

Three important points must be noted regarding this passage. First, God promised that Israel would be His “special treasure” (*sêgullâ*). The Hebrew word translated as “special treasure” designates a “personally gained, carefully tended, private property”—namely, the personal treasure of a king, which belongs to him in a personal way.⁴⁶ All the nations belong to God, but only Israel would be a “special

⁴⁴ Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 15.

⁴⁵ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 364, makes the intriguing comment that the events at Sinai may have been an afterthought in God’s plan: “If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God’s law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses.”

⁴⁶ Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 792.

treasure.” Second, the expression “kingdom of priests” (*mamleket kôhănîm*) indicates that Israel should “function in a priestly role vis-à-vis the rest of the world.”⁴⁷ Because the essence of a priesthood is mediation, Israel would function as a mediator between God and humanity and would approach God in ways not immediately available to the rest of the world.⁴⁸ As custodians of the “oracles of God” (Rom 3:2), the chosen nation was in a position to announce hope and salvation to the human race.

Third, Israel should be a “holy nation” (*gôy qādôš*). Although widely understood as separation, the primary meaning of “holy” seems to be that of consecration or dedication for a special purpose. Israel was to be a “nation dedicated entirely to the service of the Godhead, in the same way as priests are consecrated thereto.”⁴⁹ It bears noting that the Hebrew text here uses the word “nation” (*gôy*) rather than “people” (*‘am*). In general, “people” (*‘am*) carries an ethnic sense while “nation” (*gôy*) carries a more universal meaning and may designate the Gentile nations. The term “nation” (*gôy*) may indicate that God’s people should be defined by relationship with God rather than ethnicity. Subsequently, the prophet Isaiah envisions a priesthood open to Gentiles (Isa 66:21). It is noteworthy that the term “nation” occurs in God’s promise to Abraham to make him a “great nation.” This links the covenant with Israel to the one with Abraham. This verbal connection “highlights Israel’s role as a *gôy* among the many other *gôyyim* (nations) of the world. Israel is a holy and priestly nation that God has chosen to work through to bring about his broad, far-reaching plan.”⁵⁰

Scholars have noted that the covenant at Sinai follows very closely the format of the Hittite treaties from the second millennium BC,⁵¹

⁴⁷ John L. Mackay, *Exodus*, Mentor Commentaries (Fearn, Ross-shire, UK.: Mentor, 2001), 328.

⁴⁸ For example, the presence of the tabernacle, and later the temple, provided Israel a privileged access and knowledge of God. To bring Gentiles to the same experience was a major missiological task of ancient Israel.

⁴⁹ U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 227.

⁵⁰ Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 389.

⁵¹ Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 84, offers the following summary:

1. Preamble/Title

Gives title of superior party
(Exod 20:2a; Deut 5:6a)

“I am Yahweh your God . . .”

which consisted of 1) preamble, 2) historical prologue, 3) stipulations, 4) provisions for reading the covenant document, 5) list of witnesses, and 6) curses and blessings. Because space constraints preclude a detailed analysis of all the mentioned components, attention must be turned to stipulations, and blessings and curses. A couple of considerations suffice for the purpose of this study.

First, the covenant stipulations as formalized in the Ten Commandments and other legal prescriptions reveal the conditional

2. Historical Prologue

Furnishes the basis of obligation and the motive for accepting the covenant's stipulations as binding
 (Exod 20:2b; Deut 5:6b; cf. Deut 1-3)

3. Stipulations/Obligations Imposed "You shall have no other gods before me. . ."
 (Exod 20:3-17; Deut 5:7-21;
 cf. Deut 12-26)

4. Deposition and Provision for Periodic Reading of the Treaty Before the People: Treaty text archived in the temple of the vassal's chief deity (i.e., the witness to his oath)

"Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand . . ." (Ex 32:15)

". . . and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I shall give you." (Exod 25:21; cf. Exod 40:20; Deut 10:5)

"At the end of every seven years. . . when all Israel comes to appear before Yahweh your God at the place which He will choose, **you shall read this law in front of all Israel** in their hearing. Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, in order that they may hear and learn and fear Yahweh your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law" (Deut 31:10-12; cf. Exod 24:7; Josh 8:30-35)

5. List of Witnesses

The deities of both parties are summoned to act as witnesses to the oaths taken
 (Deut 4:26; 30:19-20; 31:28)

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today . . ."

6. Curses and Blessings

(Deut 27:11-28:68)

"And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you if you will obey Yahweh your God . . . But if you will not obey Yahweh your God . . . all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you."

aspects of the covenant. God demanded nothing less than total loyalty to the covenant. Disregard for or open transgression of such explicit enunciations of the divine would result in the dissolution of the covenant. For the bond to remain good, both parties must remain committed to each other. But as Israel's checkered history shows, time and again the chosen nation violated the covenant stipulations in spite of the unswerving loyalty of the divine party. Such understanding of the conditional dimension of the covenant is crucial for understanding Old Testament prophecies about the restoration of Israel. Simply put, it means that although God wished the covenant to stand and ensue in a glorious future for the chosen nation, the human side retained the option to renounce or abandon the covenantal relationship.

Second, within the covenant with Israel, the Lord provided blessings (Lev 26:1–13; Deut 28:1–14) and curses (Lev 26:14–39; Deut 28:15–68). So, just as messages of hope and restoration draw from the covenant blessings, the oracles of judgment emerge from the curses. Rather than an expression of God's uncontrollable anger, the prophetic judgments were meticulous elaborations of the covenant curses (Lev 26:40–45).⁵² Indeed, the prophets were God's prosecutors in a covenant lawsuit against Israel (Jer 2:4–9; Hos 4; Mic 6:1–6; cf. Matt 21:33–46).⁵³ But the message they brought shows that even in judgment—which aimed at bringing the people to repentance (Lev 26:40–45)⁵⁴—the Lord remained faithful to the covenant. Likewise, the messages of hope announcing a glorious future for the nation must be understood from the perspective of the covenant blessings. If the people lived according to the covenant, God would bless them in such a way that Jerusalem would become the center of the world, a pole of attraction to Gentiles, and enjoy unparalleled prosperity (Deut 8:17–18; 28:11–13).

Thus, from the above considerations, it follows that the Old Testament predictions of material and political prosperity for Israel in the land of Canaan must be understood within the framework of the covenant. In the absence of Israel's faithful response, the Lord could not fulfill the covenant promises. Therefore, future realization of national greatness was contingent upon Israel living up to her covenant obligations. But given the persistent failure of the nation to stay within the covenant, the prophets began to look forward to

⁵² JoAnna M. Hoyt, *Amos, Jonah, & Micah*, ed. H. Wayne House and William D. Barrick, *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 554.

⁵³ Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 472.

⁵⁴ See Hoyt, 554.

the messianic age and the institution of a new covenant, when the law would be inscribed in human hearts (Isa 42:6; 49:6–8; 55:3; 59:21; 61:8; Jer 31:31, 33; 32:40; 50:5; Ezek 16:60, 62; 34:25; 37:26; Hos 2:18).

Covenant with David

A climatic event in the covenantal story line of Scripture is God's covenant with David. This covenant implemented God's kingship over Israel and carried forward the intentions and purposes of the previous covenants. At the outset it must be noted that although the word "covenant" does not appear in 2 Samuel 7, the foundational narrative of the Davidic covenant, allusions to that narrative elsewhere in Scripture refer to it as a covenant (2 Sam 23:5; 2 Chr 13:5; Ps 89:3, 28, 34, 39; 132:12). In addition, God's promise concerning David's son is expressed in covenantal phraseology: "I will be his Father, and he shall be My son" (2 Sam 7:14a).

The discussion that follows focuses on the promises, nature, and scope of the Davidic covenant. Ingratiated with rest from his enemies and having brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, David determined in his heart to build a "house" (*bayit*) for the Lord. But through the prophet Nathan, the Lord declared that rather than David building a "house" of cedar for God, God would build a "house" of flesh for David—namely, a dynasty. Although the play on the word "house" somehow reveals the most foundational promise made to David, the biblical narrative reveals that God made several interrelated promises to David—some of which would be realized during David's lifetime, and others to be fulfilled after David's death. For David's immediate enjoyment, God promised: 1) a great name, 2) a secure place for Israel, and 3) rest from the enemies (2 Sam 7:9–11). But for the time after David's death, the Lord announced 1) a seed (royal heir), 2) an eternal kingdom, and 3) an eternal throne (2 Sam 12:12–16). In addition, God promised that David's son would build the house (namely, the temple) and the Lord would have a covenantal relationship with that son (2 Sam 7:14a). Finally, the Lord assured David that his "throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam 7:16).

From the promises made to David, the question emerges as to whether such promises were conditional or unconditional. On the one hand, certain divine declarations indicate the unconditional nature of the covenant. For example, God says, in regard to the royal son, "If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam 7:14b–16). Apparently, no

obligations are imposed upon the human party as a condition for the fulfillment of the covenant promises.

On the other hand, upon closer examination, the aforementioned passage indicates that unless he was loyal to the covenant, the king would be disciplined by the Lord. In effect, what the passage says is “that the covenant will be fulfilled not only by a faithful father alone (i.e., Yahweh keeping his promises) but also by a faithful son (i.e., the obedience of the king to Yahweh’s Torah).”⁵⁵ Subsequent reflection on the Davidic covenant makes the condition rather explicit: “If your sons will keep My covenant And My testimony which I shall teach them, Their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore” (Ps 132:12). This obligation most likely refers to the law of the king recorded in Deuteronomy, according to which the king must uphold the Torah (Deut 17:16–20).

So, like its predecessors, the covenant with David is both conditional and unconditional. From the human side the covenant might be broken, and some human partners might opt out of the covenant, as attested in the tragic history of the Israelite monarchy. However, from God’s perspective the covenant was unconditional because in due time a faithful son/seed would rise from the stump of David, through whom God would bring to ultimate realization the promises made to David (Isa 11:1–11; Jer 23:5–6). Such promise certainly underlies much of the messianic hope announced by the prophets.

In regard to the scope of the Davidic covenant, a few points must be noted. First, one should keep in mind that such a covenant builds on previous covenants. Significantly, God refers to David as my “ruler” (*nagid*); instead of an autonomous king (*melek*); Israel’s kingship must be exercised by a ruler in submission to the kingship of God (2 Sam 7:8). In addition, 2 Samuel 7 portrays David as God’s servant (2 Sam 7:19–21, 25–29) and God refers to him as “my servant” (*‘ebed*), which points back to Adam, the first servant, who was put in the garden to work (*‘abad*), and forward to the ultimate servant (*‘ebed*) of the Lord announced by Isaiah.

But the Davidic king is also a son, and receives dominion to rule under God’s authority as God’s coregent (Ps 2:1–12). According to Psalm 72:8, the king “shall have dominion (*rādāh*) also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” The dominion (*rādāh*) given to Adam at creation (Gen 1:27) passed to the Davidic king, whose worldwide realm expands the limits of the land given to Abraham (Gen 13:14; 15:18). Furthermore, the great name, the

⁵⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 449.

blessing, and the land promised to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:2, 7; 13:14–17; 15:7, 18; 17:8; Deut 11:24) were entrusted to David and his son (2 Sam 7:9–10; Ps 72:17). The promise that God would plant (*nātaʿ*) Israel in the promised land (Exod 15:17) reached its fulfillment in the kingdom of David and Solomon (2 Sam 7:10; 1 Kgs 4:20–21). Significantly, this agricultural metaphor harks back to creation, when God “planted” a garden and entrusted it to Adam in the covenant of creation.⁵⁶

Significantly, the collective seed promised to Abraham as a multitude of nations (Gen 13:17; 15:5; 16:10) becomes the singular seed in the person of David’s royal son (2 Sam 7:12). Likewise, the nation of Israel as the collective firstborn son of God brought out of Egypt (Exod 4:22) becomes embodied in the king who as God’s firstborn son (Ps 89:27; 2 Sam 7:14) sums up the nation and becomes the corporate representative of Israel.

A final point to consider concerns David’s response to God’s covenantal promises as *tōrat hāʾādām* (2 Sam 7:19). Although the Hebrew *tōrat hāʾādām* can be translated literally as “the torah of humankind,” the meaning and implications of the phrase have been debated, as noted from the variety of translations proposed.⁵⁷ One option reads the clause as a question—“Is this the manner of man, O Lord GOD?” (NKJV). However, given the absence of any interrogation marker, the phrase most likely should be understood as an affirmation. The term *ʾādām* probably points back to creation and, in connection with *tōrah* (“law, instruction”), conveys the idea of instruction given for the benefit of humankind, or, as one scholar proposes, “a charter for all humanity.”⁵⁸ What God began with Adam and continued through other covenantal partners (Noah, Abraham, Israel) would eventually be realized through the Davidic covenant.

Significantly, in the immediate context of the phrase under scrutiny, David uses five times the compound name for God, “Adonai Yahweh” (2 Sam 7:18, 19 [2x], 22, 28, 29). Such a divine name occurs in the historical books only in connection with God’s promise to Abraham about the seed (Gen 15:2, 8) through which all the families

⁵⁶ See Eric W. Bolger, “The Compositional Role of the Eden Narrative in the Pentateuch” (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1993), 218–220.

⁵⁷ Some examples are the following: “law of men” (LXX), “vision for the sons of men” (Targum Jonathan), “law of Adam” (Vulgate), “the manner of man” (NKJV), “instruction for mankind” (ESV), “decree . . . for a mere human!” (NIV), “custom of man” (NASB), “human destiny” (NJB).

⁵⁸ Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 80.

of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3).⁵⁹ This verbal connection shows that the covenant with David reverberates not only with creation (*ʾādām*) but also with the Abrahamic covenant. As the sum and climax of previous covenants, the covenant with David becomes “the torah for humanity”—namely, the foundation upon which God deals with the human race.⁶⁰

Summing up, two points about the Davidic covenant are relevant for understanding the role of Israel in biblical prophecy. First, the covenant with David sums up the previous covenants and thus must be understood within the scope of God’s plan to bring salvation to the human race. Second, the Davidic king functions as a representative embodiment of Israel and so can rightfully act on behalf of the nation, which implies that promises to and demands from Israel can be fulfilled and realized in and through the king.

New Covenant

As the biblical narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that Israel’s relationship with the Lord failed miserably. The nation enjoyed only intermittent periods of spiritual and material prosperity, soon followed by times of spiritual decline and social injustice. In spite of God’s covenantal promises and His mighty acts on behalf of the nation, time and again the people abandoned their covenant Lord. By exploiting the poor and turning to other gods, Israel attracted upon herself the curses of the covenant. So, by the beginning of the sixth century BC, the nation had already lost the northern territory to the Assyrians and was about to fall into the hands of the Babylonians. Israel was spiritually bankrupt. As Jeremiah puts it, “they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God, and worshiped other gods and served them” (Jer 22:9).

However, from the ashes of darkness arose a glimmer of hope—God would cut a new covenant with His people. In fact, long before the door of hope closed, the prophets began to announce that God would raise another David (Isa 11:1; Amos 9:11; Jer 23:5) and would mend the broken relationship with the nation. Indeed, the same prophets who indicted the people for breaking the covenant also blended the messages of doom with offers of grace and forgiveness. And this hope expressed itself in distinct ways: new covenant (Jer 31:31–34), everlasting covenant (Jer 32:36–41; 50:2–5; Ezek 37:15–28;

⁵⁹ Kaiser, 80–81.

⁶⁰ As Peter J. Leithart, *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 & 2 Samuel* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 201, puts it, the covenant with David was instruction to humanity in that it “set out the structure for God’s future dealings both with Israel and with all men and nations.”

Isa 55:1–5; 61:8–9), covenant of peace (Isa 54:1–10; Ezek 34:20–31; 37:15–28), and the promise of a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 11:18–21; 18:30–32; 36:24–32).⁶¹

The new or everlasting covenant with Israel aims at two major redemptive actions for the nation. First, Israel must be restored from exile and brought back to the land through another exodus. This material, physical, and political restoration would be accomplished through Cyrus, called the “shepherd” (*rōeh*) (Isa 44:28) and the “anointed” (*māšīah*) (Isa 45:1) of the Lord. These designations may have been shocking to the Israelites because such titles were reserved for priests, prophets, and kings of Israel.⁶² Besides, the prophetic oracle about Cyrus echoes language used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to the Davidic king (Pss 2, 18, 20, 110).⁶³ However, the calling of a pagan king to execute God’s purposes shows that

God is not the Lord of Israel alone; he is the God of the whole world. Israel’s election is not for itself, and thus neither is its deliverance necessarily to be effected by itself. It is this sense in which *anointed* is used here: Cyrus has been especially chosen and empowered to carry out the purposes of God. In this sense he typifies the Messiah: he is God’s chosen instrument through whom God’s gracious purposes will be accomplished, especially as through him God is revealed to the world.⁶⁴

In addition to physical and political restoration, a much greater work must be accomplished for the nation. Whereas it took seventy years for Israel to be removed from Babylon, it would take seventy times seven to remove Babylon from Israel (Dan 9:23–27).⁶⁵ In other words, Israel must be forgiven for her sins to enjoy fully the covenant blessings. And such a task could be accomplished only by the servant of the Lord. In an intriguing sequence of passages, Isaiah describes a

⁶¹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 208.

⁶² John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 200–201.

⁶³ Victor H. Matthews, *Old Testament Turning Points: The Narratives That Shaped a Nation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 170 and R. Reed Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, ed. Dean O. Wenhe, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 2011), 394–395.

⁶⁴ Oswalt, 200–201.

⁶⁵ Peter J. Gentry, “Nehemiah 12: Restoring the City of God or How to Preach a List of Names,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9, no. 3 (2005): 35–36.

servant (*ʿebed*) who sometimes is identical with Israel, and sometimes distinct from and thus acts on behalf of Israel.

Indeed, the title “servant of the Lord” in Isaiah must be understood against the backdrop of the Davidic covenant⁶⁶ and in connection with the messianic prophecies of Isaiah 9 and 11.⁶⁷ Although the title “servant” may refer to other persons such as Moses and Joshua, no one is called “servant” as frequently as David.⁶⁸ In addition, it has been noted that the name David and the designation “servant” occur in appositional relationship on some forty occasions, and such a combination occurs often in passages alluding to the covenant with David.⁶⁹ Thus, the songs of the servant of the Lord and other probable references to the said figure elsewhere in Isaiah most likely announce the coming of a new David—who, by virtue of being a corporate representative of Israel, can atone for her sins and bring her back to the covenant. Significantly, the work of the suffering servant for Israel in Isaiah 53 extends to the nations in Isaiah 54–56 so that Jews and Gentiles become one people of God.

One short passage shall suffice to exemplify this reality:

“Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—The sure mercies of David. Indeed I have given him as a witness to the people, A leader and commander for the people. Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, And nations who do not know you shall run to you, Because of the Lord your God, And the Holy One of Israel; For He has glorified you” (Isa 55:3–5).

A few points bear mentioning: At the outset, it should be noted that the referent of the “leader and commander” must be the suffering servant mentioned in the previous chapters. Through this individual God makes an everlasting covenant with His people on the basis of the “sure mercies of David” (*ḥasdê dāwid hannēʿemānīm*). As

⁶⁶ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 170.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁶⁸ D. I. Block, “My Servant David: Ancient Israel’s Vision of the Messiah,” in *Israel’s Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. R. S. Hess and M. D. Carroll (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 47.

⁶⁹ Block, 47–49. See also *ibid.*, 47 n. 121, which mentions the following passages: 2 Samuel 3:18; 7:5, 8, 26 (par. 1 Chr 17:4, 7, 24); 1 Kings 3:6; 8:24, 25, 26 (par. 2 Chr 6:15, 16, 17); 8:66; 11:13, 32, 34, 36, 38; 14:8; 2 Kings 8:19; 19:34 (par. Isa 37:35); 20:6; Jeremiah 33:21, 22, 26; Ezekiel 34:23, 24; 37:24, 25; Psalms 78:70; 89:4, 21; 132:10; 144:10; 2 Chronicles 6:42, including the headings to Psalms 18 and 36.

usually understood, the word “mercy” (*hesed*) carries the meaning of “covenant love or loyalty.”⁷⁰ As used in the present phrase it can be understood either as “acts of covenant love [that God performed] for David” or “acts of covenant love performed *by* David.” Although on a strict grammatical level the phrase is ambiguous, one should note that “when *hesed* is bound to a noun or pronominal suffix, virtually everywhere the free member or pronominal suffix indicates the subject or agent of the kindness.”⁷¹ In addition, it has been pointed out that in covenant contexts, the vassal king, as the son of the suzerain, must show *hesed*.⁷² Thus, since the David mentioned here is the suffering servant, the phrase indicates the acts of covenant love performed by the new David for the benefit of humankind.

Furthermore, he becomes a witness (*ʿēd*) in that by exercising the function of leader and commander the servant bears witness “to the power of God.”⁷³ The title of “leader” (*nāgīd*) seems an allusion to the Davidic covenant, where the same word occurs (2 Sam 7:8). His subjects are described as “peoples” (*lʿumim*), indicating that his mission embraces the nations—namely, Jews and Gentiles. Subsequently, Isaiah mentions foreigners who “hold fast to my covenant” (Isa 56:6) and predicts that God will take from the Gentile nations people to serve as Levites and priests (Isa 66:21).⁷⁴ Such universal scope of the servant’s work naturally links up to the covenant with David as “instruction for humanity” (2 Sam 7:19).

According to Jeremiah, through a restored Israel the nations will “bless themselves” in the Lord (Jer 4:1–2), a clear allusion to the promises to Abraham (Gen 12:3). Significantly, the return from exile applies not only to Israel but to the nations as well (Jer 12:14–17). And to rescue the exiles, whether Israelites or Gentiles, God will send fishers of men (Jer 16:14–18). But it is in Jeremiah 30–33, the so-called “book of consolation,” that this future state of affairs is called a “new covenant”:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the

⁷⁰ See Hans-Jürgen Zobel, “חֶסֶד” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 5:54–64.

⁷¹ Peter J. Gentry, “Rethinking the ‘Sure Mercies of David’ in Isaiah 55:3,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 69, no. 2 (2007): 280.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 279–304.

⁷³ Oswalt, 440.

⁷⁴ Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, The New American Commentary, vol. 15B (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2009), 751.

house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (Jer 31:31–34).

A few aspects call for comment. First, in regard to the covenant parties, the text makes clear that the covenant will be cut “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31). After all, they were the ones who broke the covenant. But as already noted, Gentile nations also join God’s people. One should bear in mind that the new covenant may be understood as a process that begins with a physical return from exile and culminates in the forgiveness of sin (Jer 33:6–8). While the former liberation began with Cyrus, the latter would only be accomplished by the new David (Jer 33:17–16). For this reason, the timing of the new covenant, although clearly a future event from the perspective of Jeremiah, is expressed with an indefinite and unspecified expression: “Behold, days are coming” (Jer 31:31).

In contrast to the old covenant, which had a strong ethnic component—that is, people were naturally born into it as physical descendants of Abraham—the new covenant would be formed by people who believe and have God’s law inscribed in their hearts (Jer 31:30–34).⁷⁵ This aspect had already been noted by Isaiah: “All your children shall be taught by the Lord, And great shall be the peace of your children” (Isa 54:13). Interestingly, the word “taught” (*limmud*) means “disciple” and also qualifies the servant of the Lord as one instructed in the ways of God (Isa 50:4).

As one scholar states:

This covenant is not entirely new, however, for the same law is affirmed; but it has now become a law of spirit and life, sealed in the innermost depths of our being by the Spirit

⁷⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 215.

of God. This new covenant is to be seen as a reaffirmation of the covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David. It is unconditional in that it proceeds out of the free grace and mercy of God, but its efficacy is contingent on faith and obedience. At the same time, faith and obedience are virtually assured because of the way the covenantal promises will be applied to God's people.⁷⁶

Other announcements of this covenant also stress its inclusivity. Amos speaks of the restoration of the fallen tabernacle of David, which will ensue in the incorporation of "the remnant of Edom and all the Gentiles who are called by My name" (Amos 9:11–12) into the future Davidic kingdom. Similarly, after indicting Jerusalem for betraying her covenant Lord, Ezekiel proclaimed an "everlasting covenant" that would usher in the restoration of the broken relationship (Ezek 16:1–59). As a result, the Lord would give Samaria and Sodom to Jerusalem "as daughters but not apart from the covenant"⁷⁷ with Jerusalem (Ezek 61). This implies that Samaria and Sodom would enjoy the same privileges of Jerusalem because all of them would stand under the same covenant.⁷⁸ That such formerly repulsive nations can symbolize those that would join Jerusalem shows that God's "everlasting covenant" stands open to all the nations of the earth.

Preliminary Conclusions

1. Divine-human covenants are creation-wide in scope and aimed at the outworking of God's plan for the benefit of the world. Thus, election is not an end in itself but a means to carry out God's plan for the benefit of the human race.

2. Whereas the divine-human covenants are unconditional from the perspective of God's overarching purposes and long-range plans to restore creation and bring salvation to the world, they are conditional from the perspective of the human participants.

⁷⁶ Donald G. Bloesch, "'All Israel Will Be Saved': Supersessionism and the Biblical Witness," *Interpretation* 43, no. 2 (1989): 132.

⁷⁷ The Hebrew clause is difficult and may be variously translated. For several options, including the one adopted here, see Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1–20*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 2005), 493–495.

⁷⁸ M. G. Swanepoel, "Ezekiel 16: Abandoned Child, Bride Adorned or Unfaithful Wife?," in *Among the Prophets: Language, Image, and Structure in the Prophetic Writings*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, vol. 144 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 92.

3. The covenant curses are a constitutive element of God's covenant. Failure to abide by the covenant stipulations results in forfeiture of the covenant privileges and blessings.

4. Since the king embodies Israel and acts on behalf of the nation, the new David or the servant of the Lord can act vicariously to redeem and forgive the nation.

5. Divine-human covenants reveal that God's people are constituted by Jews and Gentiles, inasmuch as through the covenant Gentiles are incorporated into Israel.

Israel from an Intertextual Perspective

A fuller understanding of the prophecies related to the future of Israel requires attention to some important points: 1) the centrality of Jesus in the fulfillment of the Old Testament; 2) the New Testament understanding of the main institutions and concepts related to the covenantal promises of the Old Testament; and 3) an examination of some New Testament passages, which appear to predict a theocratic restoration of national Israel.

Jesus as the Goal of the Old Testament

One of the most foundational hermeneutical assumptions of the New Testament is that the prophetic hope of the Hebrew Scriptures finds fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus Himself claims that the Old Testament Scriptures point to Him (Luke 24:44; John 7:39) and Paul argues that in Jesus all of God's promises are confirmed (2 Cor 1:20). Support for such christological claims are borne not just by isolated passages here and there, but by the structure, themes, and flow of the biblical canon. From the opening pages through the last book of the New Testament canon, the conviction emerges that Jesus sums up in His own person and deeds the lofty hopes of Old Testament Israel.

Significantly, the New Testament canon begins with a genealogy, showing Jesus' connections to Abraham and David. Thus, it becomes clear from the outset that Jesus is the seed of Abraham and thus inherits the promises made to that patriarch. At the same time, the link with David indicates that Jesus came as the promised son of David—the seed, the branch—who arose to claim the throne of Israel as predicted by the Old Testament prophets. The three double sevens of generations may be understood as conveying “a message of completeness and fulfilment.”⁷⁹ Thus, right at the beginning of

⁷⁹ Chris Wright, “A Christian Approach to Old Testament Prophecy Concerning Israel,” in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*, 2nd ed., ed. P. W. L. Walker

the New Testament canon Jesus emerges as the fulfillment of the covenantal promises made to Abraham and David.

The annunciation to Mary reveals that Jesus is the long-awaited Savior, the Immanuel,⁸⁰ who epitomizes the covenant (Matt 1:20–23) and will rule Israel forever (Luke 1:32–33), according to God’s promise to David (2 Sam 7:12–16). To further emphasize this connection, Luke mentions that Joseph was “of the house of David” (Luke 1:27; 2:4) and refers to Bethlehem, Jesus’ birthplace, as “the City of David” (Luke 2:4; 2:11). Later in the temple, Zechariah praises God for having “raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David” (Luke 1:69), an allusion to a royal Davidic psalm (Ps 132:17).

The declaration from heaven at Jesus’ baptism—“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17; Mark 1:1; Luke 3:22)—contains significant allusions to the Old Testament. The first half of the verse (“This is My beloved Son”) alludes to Psalm 2:7—a royal coronation hymn pointing to the Messiah—and possibly to Genesis 22:2, where God says to Abraham, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love.” This phrase also occurs at the transfiguration (Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). The second half of the verse (“in whom I am well pleased”) connects Jesus with God’s affirmation of the suffering servant (Isa 42:1). These two statements “reflect the heavenly Father’s understanding of Jesus’ dual role: one day a kingly messiah, but for now a Suffering Servant—both appropriate to his unique identity as the divine son.”⁸¹

Consequently, as the rightful heir to the Davidic throne, Jesus stands as the corporate representative of Israel; His life and mission sum up Israel’s former experience as He recapitulates the exodus from Egypt and goes through the challenges of the wilderness. Thus, Matthew views Jesus’ return from Egypt through a passage that in its Old Testament context refers to Israel during the exodus: “Out of Egypt I called My Son” (Matt 3:15; Hos 11:1; cf. Num 24:8). Israel journeyed

(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 13. According to another view, the division of the genealogy into three major sections of fourteen elements (Matt 1:17)—fourteen being the numerical value of the Hebrew letters for the name David (D=4, W=6, D=4)—may have been intended to stress the link between Jesus and David. See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1; *Matthew 1–7*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 162–163. Cf. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 31.

⁸⁰ The covenant means “I will be your God and you shall be my people,” a commitment that found ultimate realization in the incarnation of the Son of God as Immanuel (“God with us”).

⁸¹ Craig L. Blomberg, “Matthew,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 14.

through the wilderness for forty years. Likewise, Jesus spent forty days fasting in the wilderness and thereafter He was tempted by the devil (Matt 4:1–3). Using three texts from Deuteronomy (Deut 6:13, 16; 8:3), Jesus defeated the devil. Interestingly, these Deuteronomic passages were instructions God gave to Israel (“God’s son”) on how to overcome temptation. But unlike Israel, who often failed to resist temptation, Jesus as Israel’s representative emerged victorious from His confrontation with the devil.⁸²

As the gospel narrative unfolds, Jesus calls the first disciples and thus begins to reconstitute the remnant of Israel around His own person (Matt 4:18–19; par. Mark 1:16–20). As Matthew recounts it, Jesus went up to a mountain to deliver His most memorable sermon (Matt 5–7; par. Luke 6). Significantly, the introductory expression saying that Jesus “went up to a mountain” (Matt 5:1) is precisely the same phrase used to say that “Moses went up into the mountain” (Exod 19:3, LXX). Inasmuch as Jesus brings into existence a community of believers constituted by the remnant of Israel,⁸³ the Sermon on the Mount in a sense recapitulates the covenant between God and Israel at Sinai. In a scene reminiscent of Moses, Jesus pronounces blessings (Matt 5:3–11) and delivers an exposition of the Ten Commandments (Matt 5–7; Luke 6; cf. Exod 20),⁸⁴ thus setting the stipulations required by the new covenant relationship.⁸⁵ Rather than abrogating the law, Jesus required it to be inscribed in the hearts of His followers (Matt 5:21–48; Jer 31:33).

Interestingly, unlike the old covenant in which the curses are addressed first and then the blessings (Deut 27–28), the curses related to the new covenant—that is, the “woes”—come last (Luke 6), and in Matthew they are addressed to a different audience (Matt 23:13–36). This may imply that “there can be no abrogation of the new covenant and no destruction”⁸⁶ of the community that gathers around Jesus. In other words, this is the final and absolute covenant, which

⁸² For an in-depth study of how Jesus recapitulates the History of Israel, see Joel Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel: Use of Israel’s History in Matthew 1:1–4:11*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, ser. 2, ed. Jörg Frey (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 57.

⁸³ John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, Society for Old Testament Study, ed. Margaret Barker (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 17.

⁸⁴ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life; A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 204 and Carl G. Vaught, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Theological Investigation*, rev. ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2001), 4.

⁸⁵ Welch, 67.

⁸⁶ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount: Mandating a Better Righteousness* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), 43.

encompasses every other covenant and represents God's ultimate stage in the redemption of the human race.

Significantly, shortly before His sacrificial death, Jesus made clear that the "new covenant" would be ratified with His own blood: "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt 26:28). Consequently, at the close of His earthly ministry, Jesus once more gathered the renewed Israel around Himself and—in ways reminiscent of Joshua on the brink of the promised land—commanded them to go and conquer the world: "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'" (Matt 28:18–20).

A few points call for comment: First, "all authority in heaven and on earth" implicitly identifies Jesus with the rightful Davidic king and the Son of Man, referred to in Daniel 7, who "was given dominion and glory and a kingdom" (Dan 7:14). This does not mean that the prophecy of Daniel 7 finds its fulfillment in the Great Commission. It does mean though that the cosmic authority given to the Son of Man in Daniel belongs to Jesus. Second, the command for the disciples to reach all nations means that in Jesus, the ultimate seed of Abraham, "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 22:18). Third, the assurance that "I am with you always" reveals that in Jesus the supreme promise of the covenant is fulfilled. This is God's presence among His people, encapsulated in the messianic title "Immanuel" ("God with us").

From the above overview, it follows that Jesus recapitulated in His own person the trajectory of Old Testament Israel, and through a new covenant gathered around Himself a community of believers to carry on the mission formerly entrusted to theocratic Israel. This implies that Old Testament prophecies related to the future of Israel must be interpreted in light of Jesus and His understanding of the renewed Israel and the new covenant ratified with His blood.

Israel's Geopolitical Institutions

This section explores how the New Testament interprets three interconnected geopolitical institutions—land, city, and temple—that played a crucial role for the existence and identity of God's people in the Old Testament. Because these institutions feature prominently in the prophecies related to Israel, they must receive attention now. Although tightly interrelated and interdependent, for the sake of

analysis they are treated separately as follows: First, the theme of land must receive attention since it was a covenantal gift to Israel and thus constituted the foundational infrastructure for the existence of theocratic Israel. Second, Zion/Jerusalem, which, after being conquered by David, became the capital of the nation and the subject of salvation oracles and several psalms, will be discussed. Third, the temple as the very locus of God's presence among His people and the organizing center for the life of the people must also be addressed.

Land

The promise of the land stands as one of the most foundational givens of God's relationship with Abraham and his descendants⁸⁷ (Gen 12:7; 15:7, 18). According to one count, "land" is the fourth most frequent noun or substantive in the Old Testament: it occurs 2,504 times. Statistically land is a more dominant theme than the covenant."⁸⁸ Although in some places the word "land" carries a non-theological meaning, many of its occurrences refer to the land promised to Abraham. Without land it would be virtually impossible for the promises of a great name, a seed, and a great nation to be fully realized. Consequently, "salvation history" and "salvation geography" go hand in hand throughout Scripture.⁸⁹ Therefore, it is not surprising that the land features so prominently in the prophetic promises about the future of Israel.

For this reason, the Old and New Testament perceptions of the land must be addressed at this point so that a holistic biblical understanding of this theme may emerge. As the discussion moves forward, one should avoid certain Western notions that view land ownership in terms of a commercial transaction in which land can be purchased and sold at will, or even taken away from its owners to make room for the construction of a new mall.⁹⁰

First, it should be emphasized that, from a biblical perspective, the land—which ultimately belonged to God (Lev 25:23)—was a gift and Israel would retain the land as long as she remained loyal to

⁸⁷ See Norman Habel, *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993) and Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, *Overtures to Biblical Theology* [2d ed.] (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003).

⁸⁸ E. A. Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* [2d ed.] (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 103–104.

⁸⁹ Marlin Jeschke, *Rethinking Holy Land: A Study in Salvation Geography* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005), 33.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

the giver.⁹¹ In other words, obedience to the Lord was the condition for Israel to enjoy the blessings and retain possession of the land. Conversely, disobedience would defile the land and cause it to “vomit out” its inhabitants (Lev 18:24–30; 20:22–27). Clearly, the “gift of the land was never intended to be an end in itself, but a means of developing the relationship between God and his people.”⁹²

Second, God is the Creator and owner of the whole earth, and He gave one small portion of it to Israel (Exod 19:5). Several laws and regulations given to the Israelites served to remind them that God owned the land and they in turn ought to be loyal to God in order to enjoy and safely dwell in it (Lev 25:23; 27:30–33; Deut 14:22; 26:9–15). Significantly, even the Sabbath commandment was somehow extended to the land in that “the land shall keep a sabbath to the Lord” (Lev 25:2). So, land could not be sold permanently because it belonged to God; rather than as settled landowners, the Israelites ought to understand themselves as “strangers and sojourners with Me” (Lev 25:23; see 25:8–17).

Third, rest and inheritance are two significant terms associated with the land and occur together in Deuteronomy 12:9, as Moses reminds the Israelites, “As yet you have not come to the rest [*mēnûhâ*] and the inheritance [*naḥālâ*] which the Lord your God is giving you.” While “rest” indicates peaceful living in the land, “inheritance” (Num 26:53; 36:2; Deut 4:21; Jer 2:7) conveys the gift of the father to the son (e.g., Lev 25:46; Deut 21:15). Thus, in “giving his people his land as *naḥālâ*, God reveals that he considers Israel to be his ‘son.’”⁹³

Fourth, the land promise given to Abraham seems to have envisioned expanding boundaries. According to the promise, Abraham would become a father of many nations, kings, and peoples (Gen 17:4, 16) and his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of heaven (Gen 15:5–7), or as the “dust of the earth” (Gen 28:14) and “sand of the sea” (Gen 32:12), as later reaffirmed to Jacob. Such language, as hyperbolic as it may be, envisions millions and millions of people. Evidently, such “promises seem to expect a greater number of faithful and obedient descendants than the territory from Dan to Beer Sheba could ever possibly hold.”⁹⁴ Thus from its inception, the promise gives some indication that in its ultimate realization the promise would transcend its original Middle Eastern boundaries. As Ellen G. White explains, “The children of Israel were to occupy all the

⁹¹ Brueggemann, 44–50.

⁹² J. G. Millar, “Land,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 625–626.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 625.

⁹⁴ Jeschke, 38.

territory which God appointed them. . . . As the numbers of Israel increased they were to enlarge their borders, until their kingdom should embrace the world.”⁹⁵

Fifth, given such rich theological contours, it should not be surprising that land is part and parcel of a number of Old Testament prophecies (e.g., Jer 23:7–8; Amos 9:14–15; Joel 3:20–21; Isa 60). A couple of examples may be taken as representative of many other passages. One case in point is found in Ezekiel 33–48. In this extended section of the book, the prophet envisions the future restoration of the land to the Israelites. Jeremiah proclaimed the restoration of the land and affirmed the reliability of this promise by buying a field in land occupied by enemy armies (Jer 32:1–15).

Upon close reflection it seems evident that the land promise has never been fully realized. Apart from a short period during the reigns of David and Solomon, when the borders were reasonably secure and the nation apparently enjoyed peace, Israel’s enjoyment of land was precarious throughout the entire biblical period until the land passed under the sway of Babylon and never again recovered the prosperity enjoyed during the golden age of David and Solomon.

Some Bible-believing Christians, however, argue that because God gave that piece of land to Abraham’s descendants, God must bring that promise to realization in a material and literal manner as the promise is usually understood in its Old Testament context. Thus, according to such a view, the modern state of Israel stands as evidence that the promise of the land and many other promises made to Old Testament Israel must apply to the realities of the modern Middle East.⁹⁶ Such claims about the promise of the land, usually bolstered with a string of biblical passages, has a profound impact on the interpretation of Scripture, and thus needs to be examined from the perspective of the whole biblical canon.

From a biblical perspective, two main complementary explanations may be advanced for such a seemingly limited realization, if not failure, of the promise of the land. On one hand, the Old Testament makes clear that the promise of the land was conditional upon obedience. By breaking the covenant, theocratic Israel forfeited its covenantal privileges. On the other hand, in spite of the nation’s failures, God remains faithful and will bring the covenant promises to fulfillment in unexpected and surprising ways. To understand

⁹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1941), 290.

⁹⁶ For a collection of essays defending this view, see Gerald R. McDermott, ed. *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

how this takes place, one must turn to the New Testament and its interconnections with the Old Testament.

At first impression, the silence of the New Testament about the land is deafening. That a theme so frequently addressed in the Old Testament should receive so little, if any, attention seems puzzling.⁹⁷ Impressions, however, may deceive, because the land does indeed appear in the New Testament, although in unexpected ways.

First of all, the blessings associated with the land are applied to Jesus. “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28; cf. Jer 31:23–25).⁹⁸ Thus, rest no longer lies in the land but in Jesus, who replaces the yoke of sin with the yoke of discipleship. Jesus also provides a rest (*katapausis*) far superior (Heb 4:8–10) than that brought about through Joshua in the conquest of the land (Josh 21:44). Also, Jesus takes the metaphor of the vineyard, which in the Old Testament refers to Israel, and applies it to Himself with the qualification that He is the true vine, and those who abide in Him are the fruitful branches (John 15:1–17). Consequently, the “land and the expected fruitfulness of its people, is [*sic*] now centered in the person of Jesus Christ.”⁹⁹ In the same vein, Paul takes up the language of “inheritance,” which stems from the land promise in the Old Testament and applies to salvation in Christ (Gal 3:18). Therefore, God “made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:5–6). Our ultimate identity lies in our identification with Jesus rather than with a particular land or nation state.

Second, the New Testament expands the land to encompass the whole world. For example, in the third beatitude, Jesus says, “Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth” (Matt 5:5)—an allusion to Psalm 37:11, which in its original context refers to the promised land.¹⁰⁰ Jesus also commands His disciples to carry the gospel message “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8; cf. Rev 14:6), which indicates that His kingdom will eventually occupy the whole world. The land

⁹⁷ See the extensive study by W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974).

⁹⁸ See Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, Hermeneia; A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, ed. Helmut Koester (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 170–172 and George Wesley Buchanan, *The Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Watson E. Mills and George Wesley Buchanan, The Mellen Biblical Commentary (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 1:503–504.

⁹⁹ Alistair Donaldson, “The Kingdom of God and the Land: The New Testament Fulfillment of an Old Testament Theme,” in *The Gospel and the Land of Promise: Christian Approaches to the Land of the Bible*, ed. Philip Church (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 71..

¹⁰⁰ Barclay Moon Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 110.

referred to in the fifth commandment, which in its original context referred to Canaan (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16), becomes the earth in the New Testament: “Honor your father and mother . . . that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth” (Eph 6:2–3). That such universal expansion of the promised land was already embedded in the Abrahamic covenant seems evident from Paul’s reference to Abraham as “the heir of the world” (Rom 4:13).

Third, another point worthy of note lies in the fact that the New Testament opted for the phrase “kingdom of God/heaven” over the term “land.”¹⁰¹ Interestingly, the exact expression “kingdom of God/heaven” does not occur in the Old Testament, but the idea of God as king occurs in a number of places—not only in the sense that God is the king of Israel (Deut 29:6; Isa 6:1), but that He rules over the nations (Pss 22:28; 29:10; 93:1–2; 96:10; 99:1; 66:1; Dan 7:9–14).¹⁰² So it seems reasonable to propose that because the term “kingdom” (*basileia*) includes not only the concept of rule but also that of territory, the New Testament writers opted for the expression “kingdom of God/heaven” (instead of using the land motif) because it better conveys the global scope of the kingdom announced and embodied by Jesus. Such a kingdom, which grows like a mustard seed (Matt 13:31), is already present and brings salvation here and now (Luke 11:20; 17:21), and yet is still future (Matt 7:21).¹⁰³

Fourth, the New Testament concludes with the eschatological fulfillment of the land promise: “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also, there was no more sea” (Rev 21:1). Here the new covenant is finally consummated, “the return from exile completed,”¹⁰⁴ and God gives back the land to His people—not a stretch of land in the Middle East, but the entire earth made new.

Zion

After conquering Zion/Jerusalem¹⁰⁵ and making it his capital, David brought the ark to the city and made it into the worship center

¹⁰¹ Donaldson, 58–74.

¹⁰² See Bernard Frank Batto, *In the Beginning: Essays on Creation Motifs in the Ancient Near East and the Bible*, Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures, vol. 9 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 114–138 and Daeguuk Nam, “The ‘Throne of God’ Motif in the Hebrew Bible” (ThD diss., Andrews University, 1989).

¹⁰³ George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 13–23.

¹⁰⁴ James M. Hamilton Jr., *Preaching the Word: Revelation—The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 382.

¹⁰⁵ As explained by Ryken et al., 980, “Zion is a symbol or metaphor for the historical

of the nation (2 Sam 6). By hosting the ark of the covenant, the city “became the place where the Sinai covenant (Exod. 19–34) was remembered and cultivated”¹⁰⁶ (Ps 68). And because of its connection with David, Jerusalem also became a chosen city (2 Chr 6:6). With the subsequent construction of the temple by Solomon, Jerusalem became even more significant as the hub of Israel’s religious life,¹⁰⁷ the place where the Lord put His name (1 Kgs 11:36; 14:21; 2 Kgs 21:4). Because of the temple, Jerusalem attracted multitudes of pilgrims and worshippers (Pss 120–134). Biblical poets and prophets refer to Jerusalem as the “city of the great King” (Ps 48:2), the mother of nations (Ps 87), and the place where God lives (Isa 4:5; 8:18). A couple of psalms may serve as a sample of many other passages throughout the Old Testament extolling Zion: “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised / In the city of our God, / In His holy mountain. / Beautiful in elevation, / The joy of the whole earth, / Is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, / The city of the great King. / God is in her palaces; / He is known as her refuge” (Ps 48:1–3); “The Lord loves the gates of Zion / More than all the dwellings of Jacob. / Glorious things are spoken of you, / O city of God! Selah” (Ps 87:2–3).

With such lofty descriptions, it is not surprising that Jerusalem features so prominently in the eschatology of the Old Testament. Indeed, as announced by the prophets, the restoration of Israel, the rise of the messianic king, and the cutting of a new covenant—to take place after the catastrophic events of the exile—are linked to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. For example, Isaiah prophesies that God will rejoice in Jerusalem and grant unprecedented longevity to its inhabitants (Isa 65:19–20). Ezekiel concludes his book by naming the city “THE LORD IS THERE” (Ezek 48:35). And Zechariah reiterates that the Lord is “zealous for Jerusalem” (Zech 1:13); He will return to Jerusalem (Zech 1:16), defeat the enemies of Jerusalem, and make the city a worship center for the nations (Zech 12–14).

city of Jerusalem. But behind this metaphor lies a complex cluster of interlocking themes of immense theological significance. In various parts of the Scriptures we find the following concepts associated with the city of Zion: the temple as Yahweh’s dwelling place; the covenant people of God, both as the apostate Israel under judgment and the purified remnant who inherit God’s blessings; the royal Davidic kingship leading to the idea of the Messiah; the world center from which God’s law will be promulgated and to which the Gentile nations of the world will flow; the renewed heavens and earth, where peace and prosperity will reign.”

¹⁰⁶ P. W. L. Walker, “Jerusalem,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 589.

¹⁰⁷ Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Signification of Jerusalem in Biblical Thought,” in *Literary Motifs and Patterns in the Hebrew Bible: Collected Studies* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 291–313.

History shows that such prophecies, if taken at face value, remain largely unfulfilled. Although the exiles returned from Babylonia and rebuilt Jerusalem, the epic predictions that the city would become the hub of the world remained far from reality. Therefore, some Bible students argue that since God is faithful, He will bring these prophecies to fulfillment for national Israel in the Middle East, exactly as the Old Testament prophets predicted.¹⁰⁸ Some believers view the foundation of the modern state of Israel and its subsequent control of all Jerusalem as evidence that God has begun to fulfill His word.¹⁰⁹

To address this understanding of the biblical prophecies, one should take two factors into consideration. First, the biblical prophecies of the Old Testament given to national and theocratic Israel were set within the bounds of the covenant. This implies that they were conditional upon the nation's loyalty to the covenant. So, the persistent failure of the theocratic nation to abide by the covenant explains why some promises were not realized.¹¹⁰ A second aspect that must receive attention relates to the interpretation of these prophecies and promises related to Zion by other inspired writers—namely, those of the New Testament.

It bears mention that the opening and closing of the New Testament canon reflects the opening and closing of the last book of the Hebrew canon, 1–2 Chronicles. As 1 Chronicles opens with a sequence of genealogies leading up to David, so the New Testament opens with a genealogy that through David leads up to Jesus, the son of David (Matt 1). But, even more interesting for the following discussion, just as the Hebrew canon concludes with the decree of Cyrus, allowing the exiles to go up to Jerusalem (2 Chr 36:23), so the New Testament canon (or the whole Bible, for that matter) closes with the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven (Rev 21–22).

Upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that Jerusalem also features significantly in the New Testament and plays a role no less important than it did in the Old Testament. However, Jerusalem emerges with a distinct significance because Jesus redefines old covenant institutions and invests them with new configurations. Interestingly, Jerusalem appears for the first time in the New Testament associated with Herod the Great. According to Matthew, upon the news of the “newborn king of the Jews,” “Herod the king. . . was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (Matt 2:2–3). Something

¹⁰⁸ Blaising, 79–105.

¹⁰⁹ Tuvya Zaretsky, “Israel the People,” in *Israel, the Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God's Promises* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 35–59.

¹¹⁰ Davidson, “Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy,” 183–204.

must have been wrong with Jerusalem because instead of recognizing its legitimate king, the city remained loyal to a tyrant.¹¹¹

According to the Synoptics, after His baptism, Jesus undertook a long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem,¹¹² and the closer He got to the city, the stronger the opposition became. On one particular occasion, Jesus seems to have recognized the theological status of Jerusalem and warned His followers not to swear by Jerusalem, “for it is the city of the great King” (Matt 5:35). Ironically, however, from the larger narrative of the gospels, “the city of the great King” eventually rejected its true king (Zech 9:9; Matt 21:5; Luke 13:34). Clearly, Jerusalem and Jesus had conflicting agendas since Jesus claimed to embody what Jerusalem claimed to be—the locus of God’s presence and redemptive activity among the chosen nation.

Some of Jesus’ most significant messianic activities took place in Jerusalem, such as His triumphal entry into the city (Matt 21:1–11), the temple cleansing (Matt 21:12–17), the lament over Jerusalem (Matt 21:23–23:37), the eschatological discourse (Matt 24:1–25:46), and the Last Supper (Matt 26:17–46). Finally, following the betrayal, arrest, and trial of Jesus (Matt 26:47–27:31), Jerusalem sealed the rejection of its king by nailing Him to a cross. But it should not be forgotten that the resurrection also occurred in Jerusalem (Matt 27:32–28:15), although the biblical text contains little reflection on what these events signify for the city itself. Indeed, the commissioning of the disciples occurred on a mountain in Galilee (Matt 28:16–20). The Gospel of John in turn narrates the ministry of Jesus from a different, though complementary, perspective; it devotes eighty percent of its narrative to events that took place in Jerusalem (compared with thirty percent in Matthew)¹¹³ and mentions at least three visits of Jesus to the city. However, Jerusalem does not perform much better in the Fourth Gospel since, as in the Synoptics, the city “was the center of opposition to Jesus and unbelief in Him.”¹¹⁴

However, although Jerusalem fell short of its theological vocation and, apparently, had no hope of an eschatological future (Matt 24:15–21; Mark 13:14–19; Luke 21:20), two events associated with

¹¹¹ Joel Willitts, “Matthew and Psalms of Solomon’s Messianism: A Comparative Study in First-Century Messianology,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 22, nos. 1–4 (2012): 42.

¹¹² P. W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 3.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹¹⁴ Stephen S. Kim, “The Significance of Jesus’ Healing the Blind Man in John 9,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167 (2010): 312–313. See also Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 307 and Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 221.

Jerusalem bring some theological significance to the city. In reporting about those who rose from the grave upon Jesus' cry on the cross, Scripture says that "they went into the holy city and appeared to many" (Matt 27:53). Ironically, Jerusalem remained a "holy city" in spite of its "unholy treatment of Jesus."¹¹⁵ Another event of theological significance for Jerusalem lies in the fact that it was in that city that the Spirit descended upon the disciples and thus empowered the renewed Israel to fulfill its mission (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4).

Jerusalem's historical and theological significance stems from the fact that it was the place where Jesus died, was resurrected, and from where the gospel reached the world (Rom 15:19). But the New Testament gives no indication that geographic Jerusalem as a Middle Eastern city will play a prophetic role in the final events. Jesus' command for the disciples to go from Jerusalem and evangelize the world contained no hint that anyone should "ever return in pilgrimage."¹¹⁶

Jerusalem is no longer the focus of God's promises. In fact, Acts 4:24–28 applies an Old Testament passage (Ps 2; cf. Act 2:34–36) about Gentile nations attacking Jerusalem to the Jewish leadership's rejection of and opposition to Jesus.¹¹⁷ Thus it becomes clear that Zion's role has been taken by Jesus. In fact, no earthly city can "convey or contain the cosmic reconciliation" that God accomplished through Jesus Christ (Rom 8:20–23; Col 1:15–20).¹¹⁸ Jerusalem is transcended by the city already anticipated by Abraham, "the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb 11:10; cf. 12:22).

In the book of Revelation, Zion "points to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom in which his [Messiah's] kingly rule is universalized. Thus, in 14:1–5 the realization of the hope of Jewish expectations that Mount Zion will be the center of the eschatological kingdom is depicted, though the Messiah's reign is inaugurated already with his enthronement in ch 5."¹¹⁹ Eventually, Revelation reports a vision of the "great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" (Rev 21:10).

¹¹⁵ Walker, 49.

¹¹⁶ Mark Strom, "From Promised Land to Reconciled Cosmos: Paul's Translation of 'Worldview,' 'Worldstory,' and 'Worldperson,'" in *The Gospel and the Land of Promise: Christian Approaches to the Land of the Bible*, ed. Philip Church (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 18..

¹¹⁷ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 2009), 200.

¹¹⁸ Strom, 24,

¹¹⁹ Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, ed. Mark Goodacre, Library of New Testament Studies, 487 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 250.

To conclude, because Jesus' death and resurrection switched the focus of God's saving work from the earthly Jerusalem to the heavenly one, there is no biblical basis to view the earthly Jerusalem as the privileged locus of God's end-time events. The present city retains its historical significance, given its role in the life of God's old covenant people. But, like Abraham, the followers of Christ should wait for the city that "has foundations" (Heb 11:10).

Temple

Through the tabernacle and later through the temple, the transcendent God (1 Kgs 8:27–30) bestowed His presence on Israel as an expression of His covenant: "I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people" (Lev 26:12). So, from its inauguration under Solomon until its destruction by the Babylonians—which was followed by reconstruction under Zerubbabel and eventual destruction by the Romans—the temple remained the social, political, and religious center of Israel and the Jewish people.¹²⁰ As the place of worship, sacrifices, and atonement, the temple played a crucial role in the life of God's people. In the biblical canon, the amount of space devoted to the temple in the books of Psalms and 1–2 Chronicles, for example, provides an instructive example of the profound influence of the temple ideas and concepts on the entire Bible.¹²¹

It must be underscored, however, that the temple had no meaning in itself since its purpose and significance derived from God's presence in it and its relationship with the original temple in heaven. Thus, the temple could not be used as an amulet; indeed, because of Israel's transgression of the covenant, God's presence eventually abandoned the temple (Ezek 1–10), and the magnificent structure erected by Solomon was razed to the ground by the Babylonians.

But even after its destruction, the temple has remained an object of reflection and longing, possibly because it features so prominently in a number of oracles of salvation and prophecies of restoration. For example, Joel speaks of a day when a "fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord and water the Valley of Acacias" (Joel 3:18) and Ezekiel, in turn, gives the most detailed description of the new temple to be erected after the judgment of the exile is over. The temple again

¹²⁰ Bruce D. Chilton, "Temple," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 1159–1166.

¹²¹ See Dan Lioy, *Axis of Glory: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Temple Motif in Scripture*, Studies in Biblical Literature (New York: P. Lang, 2011) and Roberto Ouro, "The Sanctuary: The Canonical Key of Old Testament Theology," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 50, no. 2 (2012): 159–177.

would be the locus of sacrifices with a fully operative priestly service (Ezek 44:15–27).

Given this picture, some orthodox groups among Jews and Christians expect the temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem and its ritual system reinstated.¹²² This view stems from a particular understanding of biblical prophecy that must be evaluated in light of the entire Bible. So, attention must now turn to the New Testament to determine how the temple in its prophetic and typological aspects should be understood. A few points bear mention.

In His first encounter with the temple explicitly reported by Luke, Jesus called it “my father’s house” (Luke 2:49). Later on, Jesus was brought to the pinnacle of the temple to be tempted (Luke 4:9–12). As one scholar suggests, “Satan apparently has an *entrée* into this holy institution.”¹²³ Subsequently, in response to His opponents, Jesus pronounced a judgment on the temple and this time called it “your house.” At that point, the temple seemingly had ceased to be God’s house (Luke 13:35). Then, Jesus entered the temple¹²⁴ and drove out the vendors and money changers because the “house of prayer” had become a “den of thieves” (Luke 19:46). Finally, upon His death, the veil of the temple “was torn in two” (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45), making the sacrificial system obsolete.¹²⁵

John, the “theologian of a new temple”¹²⁶ presents Jesus as the locus of God’s presence. At the prologue of his gospel, John says that Jesus “dwelt [*skēnoō*] among us” and “we beheld His glory” (John 1:14). The verb “dwelt” (*skēnoō*)—“to pitch a tent”—and the word “glory” (*doxa*) allude to God’s glory dwelling in the tabernacle/temple (Deut 12:21; 1 Kgs 5:5; 8:16–20, 29). That glory now dwells in

¹²² See, e.g., Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); David Zeidan, “Jerusalem in Jewish Fundamentalism,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (2006): 225–236; and John W. Schmitt and J. Carl Laney, *Messiah’s Coming Temple: Ezekiel’s Prophetic Vision of the Future Temple* [2d ed.] (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014).

¹²³ Walker, 61.

¹²⁴ This should not be understood as if Jesus had entered the actual nave of the temple, which was accessible only to the priests. Rather, Jesus entered one of the external areas of the temple building itself, which functioned as an open market for the activities undertaken by the money changers and vendors.

¹²⁵ According to Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew*, Reformed Expository Commentary, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 505, “the phrase ‘from top to bottom’ [Mark 15:38] means that no man, starting at the bottom, tore the curtain; God himself tore the curtain.”

¹²⁶ Harold W. Attridge, “The Temple and Jesus the High Priest in the New Testament,” in *Jesus and Temple: Textual and Archaeological Explorations*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014), 232.

Jesus, the ultimate tabernacle/temple. Therefore, worship no longer depends on a holy place but on the person of Jesus (John 4:23–24). By presenting Himself as the source of living water (e.g., John 7:37–39), Jesus actually claims to be the eschatological temple predicted by the Old Testament prophets (Ezek 47:1–12; Joel 3:18). Admittedly, the distinct and multifaceted portrayals of the temple in the gospels have a number of complexities that cannot be addressed here,¹²⁷ but one point stands out clearly: Jesus confronts, judges, and finally takes upon Himself the attributions of the temple.¹²⁸

Also, the picture emerges of the community of believers as a temple. After stating that the community of believers is God's building and mentioning the foundations and construction of such a building (1 Cor 3:9–13), Paul says, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Cor 3:16; cf. 6:17–20). God no longer dwells in a building, but in the community of believers through the Spirit. The equivalent expression "house of God" occurs elsewhere to designate the community of believers as God's dwelling place (1 Tim 3:15; cf. 1 Pet 2:4–10; 4:12–19). However, it must be emphasized that the metaphor for the church as a building conveys the crucial fact that Jews and Gentiles are made into one "whole building, being fitted together" and growing "into a holy temple in the Lord" and a "dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph 2:21–22).

However, the fact that Jesus embodies the temple—something emulated by the community of believers to a certain extent—does not obliterate the vertical typology already anticipated in the Old Testament.¹²⁹ In fact, the New Testament shows that because the ritual system of the Israelite sanctuary/temple found its fulfillment in Jesus, the focus of God's redemptive plan shifts from the earthly sanctuary/

¹²⁷ See Alan Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 220 (New York, NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 114–115; Paul M. Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007); YongHan Chung, "The Temple in Matthew's Eschatology: Matthew's Interpretation of the Temple in the Context of First Century Judaism" (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2011); Margaret Barker, *King of the Jews: Temple Theology in John's Gospel* (London: SPCK, 2014).

¹²⁸ See Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 46.

¹²⁹ Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical τύπος Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 336–367.

temple to its heavenly counterpart (Heb 9:11–15).¹³⁰ By offering Himself as the final sacrifice (Heb 10:10) and becoming a superior high priest (Heb 7:20–28), Jesus opened the way of access to the very throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary, where He intercedes for us (Heb 7:25; 8:1–2).¹³¹

As the book of Revelation brings the grand narrative of Scripture to a close, the heavenly sanctuary plays a decisive role in the scenes that introduce the various vision sequences. From a close examination of the literary structure of the book, it becomes clear that the decisive events that take place on earth as the great controversy unfolds are correlated with God's activities in the heavenly sanctuary.¹³² Revelation 11:19, for example, reports that John had a vision of the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place. This represents a scene of judgment in the heavenly temple with profound repercussions for God's people on earth.

And finally, Revelation 21–22 connects all the lines together and brings the grand biblical narrative to a grand finale. The new earth fulfills God's covenantal promise of land for His people (Rev 21:1) in global terms—not in a piece of real estate in the Middle East. Also, a holy city—the new Jerusalem—comes down from heaven, thus fulfilling in unexpected ways the Old Testament promises and oracles of restoration. Likewise, the promises related to the temple find fulfillment in the new Jerusalem, the tabernacle of God (Rev 21:3a). As the glory of God dwelt in the Most Holy Place of the ancient tabernacle, so God and the Lamb will dwell in the Holy City, which is portrayed as the “temple-city” of the new earth (Rev 21:22).¹³³ At this point, the essence of the covenant reaches its consummation: “They shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev 21:3b).

¹³⁰ For a detailed study on Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, see Ángel M. Rodríguez, “The Sanctuary,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, Commentary Reference Series 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2001), 375–417.

¹³¹ For an in-depth study on the vertical typology of Hebrews, see Richard M. Davidson, “Typology in the Book of Hebrews,” in *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 4 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), 121–186.

¹³² Richard M. Davidson, “Sanctuary Typology,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies, Book 1*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 111–119.

¹³³ T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: Exploring God's Plan for Life on Earth* (Nottingham: InterVarsity, 2008), 20.

New Testament Passages Related to Israel

This section examines three selected passages that provide a sample of how the New Testament portrays Israel in connection with the realities of the plan of salvation brought about by Jesus. The following passages are dealt with: Acts 1:6–7 and the question about the kingdom being restored to Israel; Romans 11:25–26 in connection with the statement that all Israel will be saved; and Revelation 7:1–8 and its depiction of the 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel.

Acts 1:6–7

This text has generated some interesting discussions bearing upon the future of Israel: “Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority’” (Acts 1:6–7). This question seems to imply that shortly before Jesus’ ascension, the disciples still expected a kingdom associated with the restoration of national Israel. Moreover, that Jesus cautioned them only in regard to the time of the restoration and did not deny the validity of their question may be an indication that Jesus tacitly agreed to their presumed understanding of the kingdom. At first glance, such understanding of the passage may support a political/national restoration of Israel in fulfillment of the Old Testament kingdom prophecies.¹³⁴

Upon close examination, however, a more nuanced picture emerges. Admittedly, Jesus did not explicitly address, define, or correct the understanding of the kingdom implied in the question posed by the disciples. However, without explicitly addressing the nature of the kingdom, Jesus explained how to bring the kingdom to realization: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Thus, the restoration of the kingdom may be understood as a process, which started with the pouring out of the Spirit and continued with the subsequent proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles. These major steps were part of a process that was to lead to the “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21).

Before exploring Acts 1:6–8, one should bear in mind that the early church as featured in the book of Acts seems to recapitulate the trajectory of Israel and apparently fulfills some prophecies related to

¹³⁴ See, e.g., Anthony F. Buzzard, “Acts 1:6 and the Eclipse of the Biblical Kingdom,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (1994): 197–215.

that nation. Thus, the portrait of the church in Acts provides a frame of reference to understand the relationship between Jesus and His followers. And the Old Testament prophecies about the future of a national and theocratic Israel must be understood in light of this relationship.

At the outset, it seems clear that the community of believers gathered around Jesus continued the role and mission of faithful Israel. In calling themselves the *ekklēsia* (church)—a word often used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew words *qāhāl* and *ʿedā*, which designated the congregation of Israel¹³⁵—the first followers of Jesus identified their faith with that of Israel. And since they were almost exclusively Jews, their identification with the chosen nation was more than a fictional construct. Indeed, the first followers of Jesus counted themselves and were considered by others as a branch of Judaism.¹³⁶

From this perspective some details of the Acts narrative make clearer sense. First of all, it is significant that Jesus' instructions for the disciples to stay in Jerusalem and the subsequent unfolding of the Acts narrative accord with the prophetic promises of the restoration of Israel. For example, Jesus' command that the disciples stay in Jerusalem to receive the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; cf. Luke 24:49) harks back to the promise of the Spirit in Isaiah 32:15, "Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high"—not to mention the promise of the Spirit reported in Joel 2. So, the restoration by the Spirit promised to Israel in the Old Testament comes to fruition in the experience of the first followers of Jesus at Pentecost (Acts 2).

In view of this, it is significant to note that immediately after the ascension, the biblical narrative reports the gathering of the apostles in the upper room followed by the choice of Matthias to be numbered with them (Acts 1:26). Being the first decision of the early Christian community, the theological implications of this episode should not be overlooked. Actually, the number of the twelve apostles is of utmost importance because it connects the leadership of the primitive church with the twelve tribes of Israel.¹³⁷ In other words, the twelve apostles

¹³⁵ Karl Ludwig Schmidt, "Εκκλησία," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 3:501–535.

¹³⁶ Judith M. Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 1–8.

¹³⁷ As Wright, 27, notes, "the number twelve is a stubborn element in the tradition, even though there is some fluidity over the precise names of the disciples: in other words, the intentional symbolism of the embryonic twelve tribes of a restored Israel was clearly remembered. This is strengthened by his reference to them as a 'little flock' which was a term from 'remnant theology' (Luke 12:32; cf. the quotation of Ps. 37:11 in

represent the leadership of the restored Israel, which inherits the promises made to the chosen nation.¹³⁸

Granting that the early followers of Jesus constituted the remnant of Israel, some aspects of the Acts narrative can make more sense. Apart from the explicit connection with Joel 2, the events of Pentecost can be viewed against a larger backstory. Several Old Testament prophecies link the restoration of Israel with the return of the exiles who had been scattered throughout the world by Assyrians and Babylonians. Thus, one of the idyllic prophetic depictions of future Israel shows a multitude of exiles coming back to the homeland (Mic 4:6–7). Since the exiles are described as lame, and are healed upon returning (Isa 35:6; Zeph 3:19), it is not without significance that the first miracle performed by the apostles after Pentecost was the healing of a lame man (Acts 3:8). This is precisely what took place around Pentecost as multitudes of diaspora Jews came to Jerusalem, some of whom were dwelling in the city. Such explicit mention of diaspora Jews dwelling in Jerusalem, witnessing to and being shaped by the outpouring of the Spirit as thousands of them were baptized, indicates that the ingathering of exiles predicted by the Old Testament prophets had begun. In addition, several passages report the advance of the gospel and the growth of the Jewish Christian communities (Acts 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 9:31, 35, 42; 12:24).¹³⁹

Another point worth considering focuses on the mission of Israel to the Gentiles. Several Old Testament prophecies indicate that the restoration of Israel must be understood within God's larger purpose of bringing Gentiles to conversion.¹⁴⁰ Throughout the Old Testament, a number of prophetic utterances indicate that in the eschatological times Gentiles will flow to Jerusalem to learn from the Lord. Interestingly, from the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 12), the Acts narrative turns to the Gentiles with the missionary journeys of Paul and Barnabas. As the book comes to a close, it becomes evident that more and more gentile converts are incorporated into the renewed Israel. In the last chapter, Paul makes an explicit connection

Matt. 5:5), and his saying about their judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28)."

¹³⁸ William Horbury, "The Twelve and the Phylarchs," *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 503–27 and Michael E. Fuller, *The Restoration of Israel: Israel's Re-Gathering and the Fate of the Nations in Early Jewish Literature and Luke-Acts*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 138, ed. James D. G. Dunn et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 239–245.

¹³⁹ Richard Bauckham, *The Jewish World around the New Testament: Collected Essays I*, ed. Jörg Frey, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 233 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 365.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 367.

between the mission to the Gentiles and the restoration of Israel: “For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain” (Acts 28:20). Clearly, Paul understood his work among Gentiles within the context of the restoration of Israel.¹⁴¹

Finally, the restoration of the house of David announced in the Old Testament finds fulfillment in Jesus, who rose from the dead to be enthroned as the final Davidic King (Acts 2:36). However, unlike His royal predecessors, who ruled from Jerusalem, Jesus sat at God’s “right hand” (Acts 2:34; cf. Ps 110:1) in heaven, thus becoming both “Lord” and “Messiah/Christ.” And in heaven Jesus must stay “until the times of restoration of all things”—that is, the creation of the new heavens and the new earth (2 Pet 3:7–13; Isa 65:17–25; Mic 4:8).¹⁴²

From the above, it follows that the hope of Israel for a restored kingdom under the rule of a Davidic king began to be fulfilled in Jesus and His Jewish followers, who gathered together to form the nucleus of a renewed Israel. This community of believers under the lordship of Jesus constitutes the true *qāhāl/ekklēsia*/church, which inherits the covenantal promises given to God’s people in the Old Testament. The renewed Israel, like its Old Testament predecessor under Joshua, undertakes a major work of conquest. But unlike the theocratic counterpart, which aimed at conquering a stretch of land in the Middle East, the restored Israel aims at conquering the world. It knows no borders or limitations, no ethnicity or nationality. It calls everyone everywhere to follow Jesus and join the community of believers.

Romans 11:25–26

Some scholars appeal to Romans 9–11, particularly 11:25–26, as evidence that the Old Testament prophecies about the restoration of Israel must find fulfillment in the establishment of a national/political entity in the Middle East, which during a presumed millennial reign of Jesus Christ on earth will become God’s instrument to reach the nations.¹⁴³ However, careful examination of the biblical text indicates that rather than a political restoration, the biblical text speaks about the redemption brought about by Jesus. Indeed, the present section of Romans addresses Paul’s concern for the salvation of his fellow Jews. Apparently, as the gospel progressed among the Gentiles, the number of Jewish believers may have decreased, and the prospects may have

¹⁴¹ Bauckham, *The Jewish World around the New Testament*, 367.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 331.

¹⁴³ David Rudolph, “Zionism in Pauline Literature,” in *New Christian Zionism*, 167–194.

been grim and frustrating given the increasing opposition from his compatriots. Thus, it is from this perspective and context that one should understand the present section of Romans.

To begin with, Paul clarifies that to be an Israelite is not a matter of biological descent from Abraham. Some who claim Abraham as their father are only “children of the flesh.” Only the “children of the promise” can be regarded as “the seed” (Rom 9:8). As Paul states elsewhere, “only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham” (Gal 3:7). And this is not an ad hoc argument because, as Paul argues, Gentiles become sons of Abraham on the basis of the covenant promise that in Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:1–3; Gal 3:8).

As the argument unfolds, the apostle appeals to the Hebrew Scripture to assert that Gentiles can become part of the covenant people. Interestingly, statements that in Hosea apply to the restoration of apostate Israel to the covenant become the basis for incorporation of the Gentiles into God’s people: “I will call them My people, who were not My people” (Rom 9:25–26; cf. Hos 2:23). This idea recurs later as Paul insists that “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. . . . For ‘whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’” (Rom 10:12–13).

Next, Paul introduces the concept of the remnant, which further reinforces the above argument that the true sons of Abraham are those of faith. At every stage of Israel’s checkered history of apostasy and rebellion, God had always preserved a remnant (Rom 9:27–29).¹⁴⁴ Therefore, although the number of ethnic Israelites may be like the sea sand, “the remnant will be saved” (Rom 9:27; 11:2–5). Clearly, God’s people must be defined in terms of faithfulness to God rather than by ethnic or national boundaries.

But although true Israelites continued to exist within national Israel, the apostle was suffering because the vast majority of his own people—who had precedence over the Gentiles in the history of salvation and to whom the gospel was first preached—had rejected God’s promised Messiah. For this reason, Paul asks the painful question, “Has God cast away His people?” to which he replies with a resounding “Certainly not!” (Rom 11:1).

One reason for such confidence lies in Paul’s own inclusion in the elect: “For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (Rom 11:1). Thus, “that God has not rejected his people is seen not in the latter day restoration of Israel to the land

¹⁴⁴ For an overview of the concept of the remnant in the Bible, see Gerhard F. Hasel, “Remnant,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4:130–134.

of promise, but in God's call to Paul the Jew to follow Jesus Christ, becoming 'apostle to the Gentiles,' taking the good news of Jesus Christ to the heart of the Roman Empire, and ultimately dying for his faith."¹⁴⁵ By arguing from his experience, once again Paul indicates that the matter under discussion concerns the spiritual salvation of the people of Israel.

Subsequently, the apostle mentions two other reasons for his confidence that his people can still recover: 1) through their failure salvation has come to the Gentiles; and 2) if their failure meant "riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!" (Rom 11:11–12).¹⁴⁶ Apparently, Paul expected his repentant Jewish compatriots to be grafted in again their own olive tree (Rom 11:23–24), which had already been ingrafted with Gentile believers. With that happening, tremendous benefits will accrue to the world.

This study must now turn to the most crucial passages related to the restoration of Israel in the entire Pauline corpus:¹⁴⁷ "For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins'" (Rom 11:25–27).

First, the mystery¹⁴⁸ referred to in the passage may be understood as something that was revealed to Paul through his understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures and the gospel.¹⁴⁹ In the prophetic announcements of salvation, Israel usually precedes the Gentiles, who

¹⁴⁵ Philip Church, *The Gospel and the Land of Promise: Christian Approaches to the Land of the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 155..

¹⁴⁶ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 886.

¹⁴⁷ James M. Scott, "And Then All Israel Will Be Saved' (Rom 11:26)," in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 72 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 489–527.

¹⁴⁸ Mystery, as C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 2:573, explains, "denotes characteristically in the NT not something which must not be disclosed to the uninitiated (which is its connotation in extrabiblical Greek, when used in connection with the mystery cults), but something which could not be known by men except by divine revelation, but which, though once hidden, is now revealed in Christ and is to be proclaimed so that all who have ears to hear may hear it."

¹⁴⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 730–733.

then flow in to join the covenant people. So, that large numbers of Gentiles accepted the Messiah and thus began to enjoy the blessings of salvation prior to the much-desired massive conversions of Jews may be the mystery referred to in the passage.¹⁵⁰

Second, the phrase “And so all Israel will be saved” seems to be one of the most controversial and debated statements of Scripture. Three main explanations have been offered for this difficult statement: “all Israel” refers to 1) all Jews throughout human history, 2) all Jews alive during the final stages of earth’s history, and 3) the totality of God’s people constituted by ethnic Jews and Gentile Christians. The first explanation implies a universalism incompatible with other passages of Scripture. The second view may be possible if one focuses on this particular section of Romans only. Since verse 25 refers to ethnic Israel, it would be natural to read “all Israel” in verse 26 as a reference to ethnic Israel.¹⁵¹ However, if one takes the broad context of chapters 9–11, the third view seems to have stronger exegetical and theological support. In Romans 9:6, 27, Israel is defined in terms of a relationship with God rather than nationality or ethnicity. In addition, the inclusion of Gentiles in the Old Testament covenant promises—which finds confirmation in the book of Acts’ portrait of the restored Israel—leads to the conclusion that “all Israel” refers to the totality of God’s people constituted by Jews and Gentiles.¹⁵²

Third, Paul brings the argument to a climax with a quote from Isaiah 59:20: “The Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob” (Rom 11:26). Significantly, while the Hebrew text reads “from Zion” and the Septuagint reads “concerning Zion,” Paul refers to the Redeemer coming *to* Zion. Through this significant shift, the focus changes from earthly Zion to heavenly Zion. As one scholar suggests, Paul “perhaps understood Σιών [Zion] as meaning heaven or the heavenly sanctuary,” an idea hinted at elsewhere in the New Testament (Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22; Rev 3:12; 21).¹⁵³ Thus, the earthly Zion is no longer the locus of God’s

¹⁵⁰ Moo, 732. See also Cranfield, 573–574.

¹⁵¹ Another possibility, as proposed by D. K. Bediako, “The Meaning of ‘All Israel Will Be Saved’ (Romans 11:26),” *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission & Ministry* 5 (2011): 167, is to understand Israel in an ethnic sense but argue “that the salvation Paul envisaged for Israel primarily refers to their acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. v. 14), and thus their participation in the present salvation even in Paul’s day.”

¹⁵² Clinton Wahlen, “Will All Jews Be Saved?” in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*, ed. Gerhard Pfandl, Biblical Research Institute Studies, vol. 2 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 351–355. For another view, see Wilson Paroschi, “The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation: A Study of Romans 11:26,” *Ministry*, May 2011, 21–24.

¹⁵³ Cranfield, 578.

promise, but Jesus Christ who comes *to* the heavenly Zion to save Jews and Gentiles alike.¹⁵⁴

To conclude, although used to postulate a future role for an ethnic and theocratic Israel in the plan of salvation, this passage seems to point to something else. Significantly, the land, the city of Jerusalem, and other geopolitical features of national Israel are conspicuously absent from Paul's reflection. The passage focuses on the fact that the door of salvation remains open to the Jews and eventually many of them will be grafted into their own olive tree—an event that will result in tremendous blessings for the world. In this way “all Israel” (Jews and Gentile believers alike) will be saved.

Revelation 7:1–8

The portrayal of the 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel—followed by the depiction of a great multitude before the heavenly throne—answers the question “Who is able to stand?” which concludes the previous section of Revelation (6:17).¹⁵⁵ For the purpose of this study, one should note that the term “Israel,” along with the detailed enumeration of the twelve tribes, transcends ethnic boundaries—a picture consistent with the eschatological Israel presented elsewhere in the New Testament. The discussion that follows revisits some of the main arguments to understand the eschatological Israel as a multi-ethnic community of believers in Christ.

In ways reminiscent of Ezekiel 9:6, the 144,000 receive the “seal of the living God” (Rev 7:2) and thus are “protected in the time of universal destruction.”¹⁵⁶ Although some claim that this group refers to ethnic Jews who will be sealed for protection from the last plagues,¹⁵⁷ such interpretation seems inconsistent with the language and imagery of Revelation. In fact, to be consistent with the genre of the book, the 144,000 must be understood as symbolic, and is therefore a representation of God's end-time covenant people. In support of this interpretation, the following arguments may be advanced:

First, the same group of people are mentioned in Revelation 14:3 as “redeemed from the earth.” And significantly Revelation 5:9 says that those redeemed by the Lamb come from “every tribe and

¹⁵⁴ Church, 27.

¹⁵⁵ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2d ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 259.

¹⁵⁶ Nichol, 7:783.

¹⁵⁷ Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 78 and John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1966), 140–141.

tongue and people and nation.” That being so, the 144,000 should be understood as a multiethnic community of believers in Christ.¹⁵⁸

Second, the 144,000 are referred to as “servants” (*douloi*), a term that in Revelation “is never used exclusively of Jewish Christians anywhere else in the book, but always refers to believers in general or to all saints.”¹⁵⁹ Indeed, this must be a reference to the new covenant community formed by Jews and Gentiles.

Third, the number 144,000 is the result of the square of twelve multiplied by one thousand; it conveys the “figurative idea of completeness.”¹⁶⁰ The square of twelve comes from the number of the tribes of Israel multiplied by itself, or “more likely, the twelve tribes multiplied by the twelve apostles.”¹⁶¹ The fact that both the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles “form part of the figurative structure of the heavenly city of God, ‘the new Jerusalem’”¹⁶² (Rev 21:12–14), lends credence to this suggestion. The combination of the twelve apostles with the twelve tribes makes the 144,000 a designation of the renewed Israel, which is constituted by a multi-ethnic community of believers in Christ. Such language and imagery accord with the broad New Testament way of referring to the covenant community with Israelite imagery and designations (e.g., Rom 2:29; 9:6; 2 Cor 1:20–21; Gal 3:29; 6:16; Eph 1:11, 14; Phil 3:3–8; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 2:19).¹⁶³

Fourth, it has been noted by several commentators that the language and imagery of the 144,000 alludes to the census list of Numbers 1.¹⁶⁴ As amply recognized, a census was mostly performed to assess the military strength of the tribes. So, the census recorded in Numbers 1 lists tribe by tribe the number of men, aged twenty years and over, capable of going to war. Revelation 7 in turn not only mentions the number of the sealed ones tribe by tribe, but also uses the repeated phrase “of the tribe of” in a clear allusion to the census

¹⁵⁸ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 412–413.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 413.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 417.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 418.

¹⁶⁴ See, e.g., Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 210–237; David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52B (Dallas, TX: Word, 1998), 436; Beale, 422; and Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. John J. Collins, Anchor Yale Bible 38A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 426.

of Numbers 1:20–45.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, the subsequent observation that the 144,000 “were not defiled with women” (Rev 14:4), which was expected of men preparing for war (Deut 23:9–10; 1 Sam 21:5–6), reinforces the imagery that the 144,000 constitutes “the messianic army of the lion of Judah.”¹⁶⁶ Their weapons, however, “are witness and fidelity in the face of death.”¹⁶⁷

Fifth, a final aspect that calls for comment relates to the fact that the tribal list given in Revelation 7 does not match any of the lists of tribes in the Old Testament, as noted in the following table:¹⁶⁸

REVELATION 7	GENESIS 49	NUMBERS 1:5–15	EZEKIEL 48
Judah	Reuben	Reuben	Dan
Reuben	Simeon	Simeon	Asher
Gad	Levi	Judah	Naphtali
Asher	Judah	Issachar	Manasseh
Naphtali	Zebulun	Zebulun	Ephraim
Manasseh	Issachar	Ephraim	Reuben
Simeon	Dan	Manasseh	Judah
Levi	Gad	Benjamin	Benjamin
Issachar	Asher	Dan	Simeon
Zebulun	Naphtali	Asher	Issachar
Joseph	Joseph	Gad	Zebulun
Benjamin	Benjamin	Naphtali	Gad

Five major points are worth noticing. 1) Judah, not Reuben (Jacob’s firstborn), heads the list, which most likely is due to the fact that the Messiah comes from Judah (Rev 5:4; cf. Matt 1:3; 2:6). 2) The tribe of Dan is omitted—and replaced by Manasseh—probably because of its association with idolatry (Judg 18; 1 Kgs 12). 3) Ephraim is also omitted, most likely for the same reason as Dan. As one scholar observes, “Ephraim became for the prophets a symbol of Israel’s apostasy and idolatry (Hos. 4:17; 8:9–11; 12:1; cf. 2 Chron.

¹⁶⁵ Peter S. Williamson, *Revelation*, ed. Mary Healy, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 139.

¹⁶⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 315.

¹⁶⁷ Koester, 426.

¹⁶⁸ Stefanovic, 263.

30:1, 10). The Psalmist described Ephraim as ‘archers equipped with bows, yet they turned back in the day of battle; they did not keep the covenant of God’ (Ps. 78:9–10).¹⁶⁹ 4) Joseph, who is represented by his sons Ephraim and Manasseh in the tribal lists of Numbers 1:5–15 and Ezekiel 48, appears as a tribe in its own right in the list of Revelation 7. 5) The tribe of Levi seems out of place in a military census, and probably for this reason it was excluded from the two Mosaic censuses (Num 1:49; 2:33; 26:1–51; cf. 1 Chr 21:6). However, its inclusion here reminds one of the zeal of Phinehas in executing divine vengeance upon the apostate Israelites (Num 25:6–13).¹⁷⁰

In sum, the language and imagery used to portray the 144,000 show the “completeness of the people of God as the messianic army of Christ.”¹⁷¹ This group constitutes the eschatological Israel, which transcends ethnic and geographical boundaries. This is another instance in which terms and images associated with Old Testament Israel are applied to the eschatological people of God, the renewed Israel, “who follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Rev 14:4).

Preliminary Conclusions

1. The Old Testament prophetic hope finds its fulfillment in Jesus. As the corporate representative of the nation, Jesus gathered around Himself the remnant of Israel from the nucleus of the renewed Israel.

2. Although theocratic Israel rejected Jesus, God did not reject the Jewish people. Indeed, hope still exists that many of them will accept Jesus before the consummation of all things.

3. Israel’s geopolitical institutions such as the land, city (Zion/Jerusalem), and temple are redefined in the New Testament and expanded in unexpected ways.

4. New Testament passages that seem to refer to territorial and ethnic Israel must be interpreted in light of Jesus. As the corporate representative of the nation, Jesus sums up Israel and its institutions.

5. The language and imagery associated with Old Testament Israel are applied to the eschatological Israel, which transcends ethnic and geographic boundaries.

¹⁶⁹ Stefanovic, 264.

¹⁷⁰ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 222, notes that “although the priests and Levites do not fight with weapons, they play an essential part in the conduct of war, conducting prayers before, during and after battle, and blowing the trumpets which both direct the troops and call divine attention to the battle. Without them the war could not be a holy war. Consequently, the tribe of Levi is organized on the same military pattern as the other tribes (1QM 4:1–8).”

¹⁷¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 141.

Hermeneutical Implications

The interpretation of Old Testament promises and oracles of salvation addressed to national Israel has been a debated issue. Unfortunately, certain preconceived systems of eschatology may prevent the proper interpretation of biblical prophecy. The following points offer some general guidelines for the interpretation of Old Testament prophecies related to the restoration of Israel.

1. God's plan of redemption as shown through the covenant line story must be understood in light of the creation, the fall, and God's intention to redeem the human race. Covenants exist for the ultimate benefit of the world, not for the promotion of a specific ethnic group. The particularities of race, ethnicity, geography, or nationality are embraced by God insofar as they serve as instruments for the realization of God's wider purpose of bringing blessings to the world.

2. The New Testament interconnection with the Old Testament provides a framework for the interpretation of the Old Testament oracles of salvation related to Israel. Therefore, old covenant institutions and prophetic oracles of national restoration must be understood in light of the whole Bible.

3. Abraham is a link in a longer chain. God's ultimate purposes do not default to Abraham but reach back to Adam in the garden, because the ultimate goal of the covenant is to restore creation.

4. All promises of the Old Testament must be interpreted in reference to Jesus Christ, who ultimately embodies Israel and its institutions.

5. The twelve apostles gathered around Jesus constituted the remnant of Israel from which Jesus formed a renewed Israel. So, the church has not replaced Israel, but was ingrafted in Jesus, the corporate representative of Israel, and together with the Jewish believers constitutes the people of God.

6. God's covenantal promises are conditional. Embedded in the covenant relationship lies the principle of conditionality. Unless the parties are coerced into the relationship, the covenant relationship must by definition be conditional. Then it may be proposed that if theocratic Israel had been faithful, the promises of restoration would have been fulfilled as the Old Testament describes them.

7. Concrete and material aspects of the promise are not obliterated. Distinctive elements of the covenant such as the land, the city, and the temple have been re-signified in Jesus. So when the covenant reaches its consummation, land, city, and temple become even more real and concrete than their typological counterparts.

8. God's determination to redeem the human race is unconditional. Certain covenant partners break the covenant and thus forfeit the covenantal privileges. But ultimately, God will fulfill the substance of His covenant promises.

9. The various covenants recorded in the Bible are organically interrelated and thus should be understood as reiterations of the one covenant of redemption. Therefore, the conditions to enjoy salvation are the same for everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Conclusion

In the beginning of the twentieth century, a father promised to give his young son a horse when he became a young man. In the meantime, the car was invented. So, when the son reached his twenty-first birthday, the father gave him a car instead. The father fulfilled the substance of the promise because what he intended to give was the best possible means of transportation. It would be pointless to give a horse if he could provide his son with something faster and better. To say that the original prediction failed because it was exchanged for a car would not do justice to that father's love for his son.¹⁷²

Indeed, God gave His people a piece of real estate in the Middle East, made a covenant with David, chose Jerusalem, and put His presence in the temple. By breaking the covenant, theocratic Israel lost the privilege of enjoying the promised blessings, and her cherished institutions fell under the sway of enemy nations. But with grace and forgiveness God promised to establish a new covenant, through which Israel would gain back her lost privileges. However, as the new covenant unfolds, it becomes evident that God provides better and greater gifts than those promised under the old covenant. In Christ, the ultimate seed of Abraham, the ethnic and geographic dimensions of the promises are expanded and become multi-ethnic, global, and universal.

As Jesus gathers around Himself the remnant of Israel, ethnic, national, and geographic boundaries fall away. People from all tribes, nations, and tongues are incorporated into the community of believers. The promised land turns out to be the whole world. The city of David becomes the heavenly Jerusalem. And the focus on the earthly temple shifts to its heavenly counterpart, eventually ushering in the literal and glorious presence of "God and the Lamb" in the new Jerusalem. God, indeed, has fulfilled the substance of His promises, but in surprising, unexpected, and superior ways.

¹⁷² This illustration is a slight adaptation from Wright, 5.

Elias Brasil de Souza is director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He previously served as a church pastor in the Southern Brazil Union. He was dean of the Theological Seminary at Northeast Brazil College in Bahia, and also taught in the seminary as a professor of biblical studies. He holds a BA and MA in theology from the Latin American Adventist Theological Seminary at Brazil Adventist University in Engenheiro Coelho, Sao Paulo, and a PhD in Old Testament exegesis and theology from Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. His main areas of interest are the sanctuary and biblical theology. He has authored, co-authored, and published several academic publications in English and Portuguese.



Biblical Research Institute
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600

Website: adventistbiblicalresearch.org
E-mail: biblicalresearch@gc.adventist.org
Phone: 301-680-6790
Fax: 301-680-6788

