

## FALSE DICHOTOMIES BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

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### I. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

In my presidential letter to the members of the Evangelical Theological Society (dated January 15, 1981) I wrote that "I firmly believe in a truly evangelical ecumenicity and in projects and organizations that foster that ecumenicity, such as ETS." One of the purposes of this address is to further such evangelical ecumenicity by demonstrating that we are closer in our theological positions than many realize.

In the same letter I made this appeal:

As we deliver papers in our annual meeting and in the regional meetings, let us follow a high level or standard of evangelical scholarship, academic decorum, and professional ethics. Particularly in dealing with opposing viewpoints, let us refrain from *ad hominem* arguments and instead always be respectful, charitable, fair, and objective. As Christians, we above all people should be exemplars of propriety and etiquette.

Another purpose of this paper, then, is to promote an irenic spirit and thus a greater sense of true brotherhood in Christ. I have been heartened by what Radmacher calls the "growing rapprochement that has been taking place between covenant and dispensational theologians of orthodox persuasion over the last decade or so."<sup>1</sup> For almost ten years I have had the privilege of helping to promote such a rapprochement through involvement with the *NIV*, which was a transdenominational project, and now the forthcoming *NIV Study Bible*, which will not consciously advocate either premillennialism or amillennialism. Certainly dialogue must continue between the two theological camps, for it can only result in greater understanding, which in turn will advance the cause of conciliation. I would like to think that this message also moves in that direction. Is this not as it should be in the body of Christ? And are we not united on the issues that matter most? I am especially concerned that both dispensational premillennialists and amillennial covenant theologians begin treating each other more like brothers and less like adversaries or even heretics, which brings me to the next preliminary consideration.

Before tackling some controversial subjects about which we have some honest differences, it will be useful and important for you to know where I am coming from. Hermeneutically (I say "hermeneutically" because, with Gaebelein,<sup>2</sup> I be-

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<sup>1</sup>E. D. Radmacher, "The Current Status of Dispensationalism and Its Eschatology," *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology* (ed. K. S. Kantzer and S. N. Gundry; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 163.

<sup>2</sup>F. E. Gaebelein, "Foreword," *Dispensationalism Today*, by C. C. Ryrie (Chicago: Moody, 1965) 8.

lieve dispensationalism to be more of a hermeneutical principle than a theological system) I classify myself as a moderate dispensationalist. I am still a dispensationalist because I remain convinced (1) that Israel is not the OT "Church,"<sup>3</sup> (2) that God's future program includes ethnic or national Israel and (3) that Christ will reign literally on this earth in space-time history. Yet due to several qualifying factors I am a moderate dispensationalist: (1) I see no need to speak of more than two major dispensations—the Old Covenant era and the New Covenant era;<sup>4</sup> (2) I believe that several passages that other dispensationalists relegate solely to the future received a literal fulfillment in the NT period or are receiving such a fulfillment in the continuing Church age—in addition to a final, complete fulfillment in the future in the case of some of those passages;<sup>5</sup> (3) I prefer to think in terms of an inaugurated eschatology rather than an exclusively futurist eschatology.<sup>6</sup>

As we come now to a consideration of false dichotomies between the Testaments I think it appropriate for me to issue a challenge: Since I, as at least a moderate dispensationalist, am delivering an address stressing the continuities between the Old and New Testaments, it seems only fair that an amillennial covenant theologian among you reciprocate by writing an article emphasizing the legitimate discontinuities between the Testaments.

## II. FALSE DICHOTOMIES

Whenever our theme, "Relationships Between the Testaments," comes up for discussion, the subject of continuities and discontinuities or dichotomies is usually part of it. But I have reached the conclusion that several of the alleged dichotomies are false ones. While there are many false dichotomies I would like to

<sup>3</sup>To hold that Israel is the OT Church is almost to imply that the unifying theme of Biblical theology is the Church.

<sup>4</sup>This seems to be the perspective of Hebrews 8-10. The period prior to the establishment of the Old (Mosaic) Covenant may be regarded as simply preface, though some may prefer to apply "preface" only to the time before the Abrahamic covenant. The present and future forms of the messianic era (Church and millennium, if you wish) both fit within the time when the New Covenant is in force.

<sup>5</sup>Classic examples would be the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:17-21 and of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:16-17—without denying a final, future stage to complete the fulfillment with respect to Israel. That is to say, these are not "either-or" propositions but "both-and" ones. I am in essential agreement with G. E. Ladd's handling of these passages in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (ed. C. F. Pfeiffer and E. F. Harrison [Chicago: Moody, 1962] 1127-1129, 1151-1152). This approach I prefer to think of as "progressive fulfillment," an expression I first encountered in W. J. Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (New York: Crowell, 1905; reprint Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975) 130. As I conceive of it, it means that prophecies quite frequently include two or more stages (not the same as double or multiple sense) in the progressive fulfillment of the whole picture seen by the prophet.

<sup>6</sup>According to A. A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 17 n. 5, the expression "inaugurated eschatology" was first suggested by G. Florovsky. Cf. also the "in-process-of-realizing-itself" view of V. Eller, "Which Eschatology for Which Christ?", *TSF Bulletin* 5 (September/October 1981) 3. The reason I opt for this view is that I understand expressions like "the last days" to mean basically the messianic era. From the OT perspective that "eschatological" era has already begun, as Heb 1:2 makes clear. Many messianic prophecies, however, involve two stages in the progressive fulfillment of the whole, and these stages correspond to the two advents of the Messiah and to the present and future aspects of the messianic kingdom.

discuss,<sup>7</sup> the time limit placed on an address of this nature will permit me to touch on only the four I have selected. Hopefully I and/or others can develop these more fully in the future, either in the form of articles or even in a book. For our present purpose I wish to deal only briefly with two minor false dichotomies and in greater detail with two major ones. The two minor ones, however, are closely related to each other and to the first major one, so there is a sense in which I am dealing with only two false dichotomies—namely, that between law and grace and that between Israel and the Church.

1. *The first false dichotomy is that the OT only knows of the circumcision of the flesh while the NT speaks of the circumcision of the heart.* The basis for this dichotomy is Paul's argument in Rom 2:17-29, summarized by Sanday and Headlam in these words:

The Jew may boast of his possession of a special Revelation and a written Law, but all the time his practice shows that he is really no better than the Gentile (vv. 17-24). And if he takes his stand on Circumcision, that too is of value only so far as it is moral and spiritual. In this moral and spiritual circumcision the Gentile also may share (vv. 25-29).<sup>8</sup>

But, as Stifler notes, such an advanced spiritual notion—that the true Jew is one whose heart is pure in God's sight, whose circumcision is not only outward but also inward—"was not Paul's invention; it was as old as the Law (Deut. 10:16) and the Prophets (Ezek. 44:9)."<sup>9</sup> To Stifler's references we may add Deut 30:6 (a prophecy anticipating the New Covenant); Jer 4:4; 9:25-26. As Craigie points out, "to circumcize the heart is to take an attitude to God which is the opposite of being *stubborn* (or stiff-necked)."<sup>10</sup> Thompson adds: "[Circumcision] was never intended as a mere outward sign, but as a witness to an inward reality, the surrender of the whole life to the sovereignty of Yahweh."<sup>11</sup>

Thus there is no discontinuity here; there is only continuity. And a truth often considered to be NT teaching is discovered to be very much present in the OT.

2. *The second false dichotomy is that the OT presents the letter of the Law while the NT reveals the spirit of the Law.* One of the bases for this assertion is the popular belief that in Matt 5:21-48 Jesus is elevating, strengthening and advancing the OT Law by revealing, ostensibly for the first time, that the Law also possesses a spirit that must be followed. Such a view, in my opinion, is but another example of a false discontinuity or distinction sometimes set up between the theology of the OT and that of the NT. It seems to me that the key to the interpre-

<sup>7</sup>For example, one occasionally encounters the statement that in the OT the object of saving faith was God or his promise while in the NT the object is Christ. This is only partially correct, which means that it is also partially incorrect. It is an oversimplification. To be sure, we do not see a rather complete picture of the Messiah until the Servant Songs of Isaiah. But the faith of OT people could have included the expectation of a coming messianic deliverer as early as Gen 49:10-12 or possibly even 3:15.

<sup>8</sup>W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902) 63.

<sup>9</sup>J. M. Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Chicago: Moody, 1960) 48.

<sup>10</sup>P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 205

<sup>11</sup>J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 215.

tation of the passage is the preceding paragraph (vv 17-20), where it becomes clear that Jesus' chief concern is to correct the self-righteous Pharisees' notion of what constitutes the kind of righteousness God accepts (v 20).

In the passage, then, Jesus repudiates the Pharisees' interpretation of the Law and their view of external righteousness and preaches instead a righteousness through faith in his own person and work. In vv 21-48 he gives six specific examples of such pharisaical externalism, thus demonstrating that the Pharisees did not understand the real intent (spirit) of the Law. This analysis of the passage receives additional support from Jesus' use of the formula, "You have heard that it was said," in vv 21, 27, 31 (here the formula is simply "It has been said"), 33, 38, 43. The words indicate that the contrast Jesus draws is not between the OT and his teaching (he has just established the validity of the OT Law in vv 17-19), but between the externalistic interpretation of the rabbinic tradition on the one hand and his own correct interpretation of the Law on the other.

Is such teaching about the Law unique to Christ and thus to the NT? When one begins to probe the contents of Psalm 50 it soon becomes apparent that such teaching is not unique to the NT at all. In this great divine lawsuit God brings charges against his covenant-breaking people. The judgment in vv 16-21 is against hypocrites in Israel who claim to keep God's Law in outward observance but who use such a mask to cover over their evil thoughts and deeds.<sup>12</sup> Among the specific charges is the violation of the seventh, eighth and ninth commandments (vv 18-20). But a proper analysis of these verses quickly reveals that God condemns the people not for breaking the letter of the Law but for breaking the spirit of the Law.

Once again a false dichotomy is exposed, and both Testaments are seen to speak with a united voice on the importance—indeed, the necessity—of adhering to the spirit of the Law.

3. *The third false dichotomy (actually the first major one) is that the OT is the Testament of law while the NT is the Testament of grace.* An editorial introduction to an article in the *Evangelical Quarterly* observes: "The old heresy that the Old Testament is a book of law as opposed to the New Testament which is a book of grace dies hard."<sup>13</sup> It dies hard in spite of the fact that numerous writers have adequately demonstrated the abundant presence of grace in the OT. Time and space will allow me to mention only a few. One such writer is T. F. Torrance.<sup>14</sup> After a perceptive study of Hebrew words connoting God's grace he concludes:

The astonishing thing about these great Hebrew words is the facility they have of merging into one another or overlapping one another. That is just as true of *tsedeq* and *tsedaqah* as it is of *hesed*. And this is particularly clear in regard to the righteousness of God, for it is the prerogative of God's righteousness to save men, while the love at the back of the divine *tsedeq* or *tsedaqah* is as ultimate and unaccount-

<sup>12</sup>A convicting NT passage to study in this connection is Rom 2:17-24 (see the first false dichotomy above).

<sup>13</sup>*EvQ* 53 (January-March 1981) 16. This remark introduces T. D. Hanks, "The Chronicler: Theologian of Grace," pp. 16-28. Incidentally, Hanks makes the special point that faith and obedience are the response to grace (pp. 22-24).

<sup>14</sup>T. F. Torrance, "The Doctrine of Grace in the Old Testament," *SJT* 1 (1948) 55-65.

able as the love expressed in *ahab* or *hen* or *hesed*. As they involve one another in this way, *hesed* on one side and *tsedeq* or *tsedaqah* on the other, both become practically equivalents for salvation and justification and forgiveness. Ultimately the sure and unswerving love of God finds a righteous way of forgiving the sinner, and in spite of his apostasy of turning him back with a new heart and a new righteousness into the bond of divine love. The major point here, so difficult for us to grasp and to express in any other language than Hebrew, is that righteousness and love, grace and justice, are held together as differentiations within the same unity, and even within the unity of a single thought or word.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly Eichrodt underscores the connection between God's Law and his love: "Long before there was any human action in response, this love chose the people for God's own possession and gave them the law as a token of their special position of favour. To obey the law thus becomes man's response of love to the divine act of election."<sup>16</sup>

It must be remembered that the Law was given to the redeemed people of God as a means of expressing their love to God as well as a means of governing their relationship to God and to each other. It was not a way of salvation but a way to enjoy an orderly life and God's fullest blessing within the covenantal theocratic arrangement. Rowley sums up Exodus 20 like this:

Yahweh had chosen Israel and delivered her from Egypt; Israel in response committed herself in loyalty and obedience to Him. That is the essence of Israel's Covenant with God. It rested on her recognition of what God had done and on her gratitude to Him for His mercy. From God's side the basis of the Covenant was unmerited grace; from Israel's side it was her gratitude.<sup>17</sup>

Kline writes in a similar vein:

The Decalogue is not offered fallen man as a genuine soteric option but is presented as a guide to citizenship within the covenant by the Saviour-Lord, who of his mercy delivers out of the house of bondage into communion in the life of the covenant—a communion which eventuates in perfect conformity of life to the law of the covenant.<sup>18</sup>

Thus God's grace precedes the covenantal Law he gave to his people and represents a use of salvation history to inspire grateful obedience. To put it another way, passages like Deut 4:37-40 and 7:6-11 are saying: Because God has loved you and shown grace to you, you ought to obey him (cf. John 14:15).

Another author who discusses the subject of God's great love and grace in the OT is Snaith.<sup>19</sup> He writes:

Actually God's '*ahabah* (love) for Israel is the very basis and the only cause of the existence of the Covenant between God and Israel. '*Ahabah* is the cause of the cove-

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>16</sup>W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1. 94

<sup>17</sup>H. H. Rowley, "Moses and the Decalogue," *BJRL* 34 (1951-52) 101. See also W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Old Testament in Contemporary Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973) 61.

<sup>18</sup>M. G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 24.

<sup>19</sup>N. H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (New York: Schocken, 1964) 94-142.

nant; *chesed* is the means of its continuance. Thus *'ahabah* is God's Election-Love, whilst *chesed* is His Covenant-Love.<sup>20</sup>

He declares of *hēn*:

It therefore tends to carry with it, to a greater extent than does *chesed*, the idea of unmerited favour, or of supreme graciousness and condescension on the part of the giver, who is the superior. There is not the slightest obligation on the part of the superior to show this *chen*. It is all of his generosity.<sup>21</sup>

Later, in his study of *'āhābā*, he says, "The one thing of which all Old Testament writers are certain is that God's love for Israel was not because of anything that Israel had done or was."<sup>22</sup> This is grace!<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, not only does grace pervade the OT, but the Law itself is frequently presented in a positive fashion. If the Law is so terrible and so totally opposed to grace, how does one account for the manner in which many OT characters revel in it? The most obvious examples are Psalms 1, 19 and 119. Even the problematic Lev 18:5, rightly understood, fits into this category, as Lindsey notes:

God's integrated system of physical and spiritual laws to provide a happy and meaningful life for Israel as His redeemed people is summarized as His *decrees and laws*. The motivation for keeping these laws is stated clearly—the *man who obeys them will live* [i. e., enjoy life] *by them* (v. 5). Obedience to God's laws produces in his people a happy and fulfilled life (cf. Lev. 26:3-13; Deut. 28:1-14). For example, the marital and sexual restrictions of this chapter constitute one basis for a stable and happy family life. (However, the unregenerate or legalistically minded man experiences only the curse of the law [cf. Gal. 3:12; Rom. 10:5].)<sup>24</sup>

But, someone may object, what about those instances of a negative attitude toward the Law in the NT? In my opinion the negative attitude is due to an unlawful use of the Law. First, we have already seen<sup>25</sup> that Jesus' conflict in Matthew 5 and elsewhere (for example, Matthew 23) was not with the Law and the OT but with the "letter-of-the-law" interpretations and accretions made by the Pharisees and the teachers of the law (with particular reference to the oral tradition). Second, and closely related, what Paul condemned in Romans and Galatians was not the Law or obedience to the Law but the use of the Law in a legalistic manner for either salvation or sanctification or both. Bloesch concurs:

Works-righteousness or legalism was the principal malady that the apostle Paul felt called to combat. He resolutely raised his voice not only against misunderstandings in Judaism but also against erroneous notions in the Christian community in which

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. also C. C. Ryrie, *The Grace of God* (Chicago: Moody, 1963) 28-55.

<sup>24</sup>F. D. Lindsey, commentary on Leviticus, *Victor Bible Commentary* (ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck; Wheaton: Victor, forthcoming). Cf. W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "Leviticus 18:5 and Paul: 'Do This and You Shall Live (Eternally?)'," *JETS* 14 (1971) 19-28.

<sup>25</sup>Under the second false dichotomy above.

salvation was made contingent on adherence to the dictates of the Law. In formulating his theology of grace, particularly against those believers who sought to reappropriate the ceremonial laws of Judaism, Paul appealed to the witness of the Old Testament, since he believed that this witness, rightly interpreted, points beyond the Law to the free and unconditional grace of God.<sup>26</sup>

The only proper role the Law can play for the unregenerate is to reveal the darkness of his sin against the backdrop of the radiant light of God's holiness and point him to the Savior (1 Tim 1:8; Rom 3:20; Gal 3:24). But for the person of faith it is the gracious revelation of God's righteous will and is to be followed as the grateful expression of that faith. There are, however, certain obvious exceptions, such as the purely ceremonial laws (those types and shadows that received their fulfillment and reality in Christ). As Kaiser puts it,

God will never change, and therefore those things that are based on His nature, such as His holiness, will always stay the same. God will never shrink, nor will His standards of righteousness and holiness go up or down. They will be reflected permanently in the moral Law.

There are, however, also those things that are true because they are spoken by our Lord, but they still can be temporary. Such are the ceremonial and civil aspects of the Law.<sup>27</sup>

Here also is where Fuller's book<sup>28</sup> makes a valid contribution. While I cannot agree with all his interpretations and conclusions,<sup>29</sup> I am prepared to acknowledge the essential correctness of his thesis that the relationship between gospel and law is more continuum than contrast and that a "proper exegesis of Romans 10:4 is that Christ is the *telos* of the law, not in the sense of being its termination, but as climaxing it as the One who is in a continuum with it."<sup>30</sup> Later he explains: "In other words, Christ is the completion of the law in that, as himself a revelation from God, he embodied in all his teaching and work a pure expression of the righteous standard of God found in the law."<sup>31</sup> Such an understanding seems more in harmony with Matt 5:17-19 and Rom 3:31.

<sup>26</sup>D. G. Bloesch, "The Reformers Shed the Shackles of Legalism: A Primer in Pauline Theology," *Christianity Today* 25 (October 23, 1981) 18.

<sup>27</sup>Kaiser, *Old Testament* 60.

<sup>28</sup>D. P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

<sup>29</sup>For example, I do not agree that "all biblical promises (except those in the Noachic and Davidic Covenants) are conditional" (ibid., p. 121). Moreover this statement seems to me to contain faulty logic (the conclusion does not necessarily follow from the premise): "Because Christ was a physical descendant of Abraham, there would then be every reason to regard those united to him as the seed of Abraham in a physical sense" (p. 125). Nor can I accept this generalization: "Dispensationalism could no longer stand if his [Walvoord's] understanding of the 'seed of Abraham' were narrowed down to denote the remnant" (p. 129). With the prophets (for example, Isa 6:13; 66:22-24) I believe that, most of the time at least (if not always), the "seed of Abraham" refers to the believing, obedient remnant. Yet I regard myself as a moderate dispensationalist. Fuller may think I am inconsistent, but somehow I have managed to combine the two.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 85. As stated above, I am inclined to agree with Fuller's understanding of *telos*. But even if one interprets it as meaning "termination" he must qualify the statement in some way. Otherwise he cannot

On Paul's use of the term "law" Cranfield suggests that

it will be well to bear in mind the fact (which, so far as I know, has not received attention) that the Greek language used by Paul had no word-group to denote "legalism," "legalist," and "legalistic". . . . In view of this, we should, I think, be ready to reckon with the possibility that sometimes, when [Paul] seems to be disparaging the law, what he really has in mind may not be the law itself, but the misunderstanding and misuse for which we have no convenient term.<sup>32</sup>

Fuller adds that Paul, "as in Philippians 3:9, simply used the word 'law' to represent not the revelation given by Moses, but the legalistic misunderstanding of the law which the majority of the Jews have espoused since the time of Moses."<sup>33</sup>

Once again, we conclude that the Old and New Testaments are united on the latter of law and grace.

4. *The fourth false dichotomy is that the OT is concerned with Israel while the NT is concerned with the Church.* There is some truth to this dichotomy, but such a concession also means that it contains some error. I have already intimated<sup>34</sup> that some "both-and" situations are forced into "either-or" ones, as though there are no other options. Similarly, two "either-or" extremes are to be avoided with respect to the relationship between Israel and the Church: (1) their complete amalgamation by many in the ranks of covenant theology, and (2) their almost total separation by traditional dispensationalists. In my view the truth lies somewhere between such a polarization. That the Church in some sense is latent in the great promises of Gentile blessing in the OT seems clear from Paul's use of such promises in Rom 15:8-12. That ethnic Israel, on the other hand, in some sense continues in the present and future aspects of the NT era seems clear from the most "natural"<sup>35</sup> exegesis of Lev 26:40-45; Deut 30:1-10; Jer 31:36-37; 32:37-41; Ezek 11:17-21; 36:24-31; 37:24-28; Rom 11:11-29. At the same time, since the latter passage indicates that Gentiles have been grafted into Israel's olive tree, by so much it stresses the continuity of the people of God.

Snaitch's study of *hesed* bears on the question of the perpetuity of national Israel (or at least a remnant thereof). Note these statements by him:

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account satisfactorily for the many instances where the NT uses the OT Law for exhortation and for application of eternal truths and principles, particularly in the area of morality and ethics. These last two statements hold true regardless of one's interpretation of Gal 3:15-4:7, another passage whose meaning is much debated (see the commentaries and journal articles). After all, the commandments are reiterated in the NT and are presented as part of the permanent spiritual and moral (and divine) standard that Christians are to follow. Motivation and enablement may change, but the standard continues because it expresses the immutable moral nature of God. It can change only if God's character can change—so it seems to me. Finally, as I understand Paul, he condemns not only legalism (and "nomism," according to some (in Romans and Galatians but also antinomianism and libertinism (Galatians 5; Philippians 3). The gracious liberty we enjoy in Christ is not to be (mis)construed as license to do as we please. Rather our liberty is limited by God's eternal moral law, which includes Exodus 20 and its expositions in the Pentateuch.

<sup>32</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, "St. Paul and the Law," *SJT* 17 (March 1964) 55; cited by Fuller, *Gospel* 87.

<sup>33</sup>Fuller, *Gospel* 87 n. 33; see also pp. 199-204.

<sup>34</sup>In n. 5.

<sup>35</sup>As distinguished from "forced."



Here [in Isa 54:8] undoubtedly, as in all these cases, *chesed* has to do with mercy and forgiveness, but its true significance, as the *chesed* of God, is that it is everlasting, determined, unshakable. Wonderful as is His love for His covenant-people, His steady persistence in it is more wonderful still. The most important of all the distinctive ideas of the Old Testament is God's steady and extraordinary persistence in continuing to love wayward Israel in spite of Israel's insistent waywardness.<sup>36</sup>

All this speaks of Jehovah's determined, steadfast love for chosen Israel. It is a love which nothing can destroy, not all her waywardness, nor her apostasy. This attitude on the part of Jehovah appears not only in the first three chapters of Hosea, where the figures of betrothal and marriage are maintained, but elsewhere in the book, and in parts which cannot by any means be held to be later insertions. We deprecate the tendency to deny to Amos and Hosea all sections which speak of a restoration, and to leave only passages which contain messages of doom. Such exegesis is based on *a priori* assumptions, often with little justification except the belief that the prophets were always condemnatory.<sup>37</sup>

God's determination is that the bond between Him and Israel shall never ultimately be broken, that the Covenant shall survive, even though with the smallest remnant. The waywardness of Israel was so inborn, her stubbornness and her rebellion so sustained, that for the preservation even of the Remnant, God has always, in every age, had more need of mercy than of any other quality. . . . If God's mercy is to be greater than His demand for Righteousness, then how wondrous great His mercy must be, and how steadfast and insistent. We do not make His demand for Righteousness any the less. Rather we demonstrate the surpassing wonder of His unfailing covenant-love. . . . How can Israel, whether Ephraim or Judah, be brought to that repentance which will provide the opportunity for the exercise of God's unceasing love? . . . The answer of Jeremiah is in the new Covenant which God will make with both North and South, xxxi. 31. In that day there will be no more only a written Law on parchment and skin, but a Law written on men's hearts, xxxi. 33. Every man himself will know God. Jeremiah has thus pointed to the solution of man's apostasy. He has solved it by his belief that even though man himself will not turn to God, yet God Himself can bring this to pass. God's sure, unswerving love will find a way by which even stubborn, unrepentant Israel can turn. It will mean new hearts, but God will accomplish even this. Then there will be a turning to God in all sincerity, and loyal obedience to His Law. Not all Israel will be partakers in this, but only a Remnant.<sup>38</sup>

Kaiser rightly relates the New Covenant not only to Israel but also to Christians:

The "new" began with the "old" promise made to Abraham and David. Its renewal perpetuated all of those promises previously offered by the Lord and now more. Therefore Christians presently participate in the new covenant now validated by the death of Christ. They participate by a grafting process into the Jewish olive tree and thus continue God's single plan. However, in the midst of this unity of the "people of God" and "household of faith" there is an expectation of a future inheritance. The "hope of our calling" and the "inheritance" of the promise (in contradistinction to our present reception of the promise itself) awaits God's climactic work in history

<sup>36</sup>Snaith, *Distinctive Ideas* 102.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 120-122.

with a revived national Israel, Christ's second advent, his kingdom, and the [new] heavens and the new earth. In that sense, the new covenant is still future and everlasting; but in the former sense, we are already enjoying some of the benefits of the age to come. With the death and resurrection of Christ the last days have already begun (Heb. 1:1 [and 1:2]), and God's grand plan as announced in the Abrahamic-Davidic-New Covenant continues to shape history, culture and theology.<sup>39</sup>

Fuller argues that

according to Romans 11:26-27, all of ethnic Israel will be converted at the second coming of Christ. Then the physical descendants of Abraham through Jacob who are alive at that time will occupy the land and will truly be the seed of Abraham, because there will then be an intervention of and response to the word of God in which God banishes ungodliness from Jacob.<sup>40</sup>

Such a future fulfillment of the New Covenant for Israel also appears evident to me from Zech 12:10-13:1.

By this time it should be readily apparent from some of the foregoing remarks that, as I perceive the grand sweep of what God is doing, the old sharp distinction between Israel and the Church begins to become somewhat blurred. After all, according to my understanding of Romans 11 and other passages both entities are involved in the present and future forms of the kingdom of God as well as in the eternal kingdom. (In my view, 1 Cor 15:20-28 teaches that the messianic, or millennial, kingdom merges into the eternal kingdom.)

Strictly speaking it is also incorrect to call Israel God's earthly people and the Church God's heavenly people, since in the eternal state we will all live together, sharing in the blessings of the New Jerusalem and the new earth. In Rev 21:2-3<sup>41</sup> John plainly says:

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God" (NIV).

As far as the eternal state is concerned, it seems safe to deduce that there will be no heavenly people in the sense of living somewhere off in space or even beyond space. So, then, there is a greater unity or integration in God's grand design and in his overall purpose and comprehensive program for this earth and its people than many dispensationalists have been willing to acknowledge. In the past some of us have not been able to see the forest for the trees. We have compartmentalized too much. Cook wisely states:

Those dispensationalists who object to considering Jesus Christ as King today suffer from the same problem (a wrong view of dispensationalism) as do the antidispensationalists who refuse to recognize Israel and the church as distinct entities. Such a dispensationalist tends to compartmentalize his theology to such a degree that he

<sup>39</sup>W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-34," *The Bible in Its Literary Milieu* (ed. V. L. Tollers and J. R. Maier; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 116; Kaiser's article has been reprinted in this work in its entirety from *JETS* 15 (1972) 11-23. Cf. Fuller, *Gospel* 189, 191.

<sup>40</sup>Fuller, *Gospel* 133-134.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Heb 12:22-24. According to Rev 21:2-3 this "heavenly Jerusalem" does not remain in heaven; it comes down to the new earth.

does not admit any relationship of saints from one dispensation with those of another. . . . The glory of God must be the dominant note of all theology and practice, but He is supremely glorified only when the sovereign King of the universe is allowed to extend His rule within every sphere of reality, including the church, of which Christ is Head and King (Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Tim. 6:13-16).<sup>42</sup>

Finally, in our consideration of Israel and the Church, what is to be done with Israel's land promises? Fuller maintains that "ethnic Israel will some day inhabit the land that God marked out for Abraham's descendants."<sup>43</sup> Van Ruler, who to my knowledge is not a dispensationalist, seems to concur:

To the very depths of Old Testament expectation, the people of Israel as a people, the land, posterity, and theocracy play a role that cannot possibly be eliminated. This role cannot be altered by regarding Christ and his church as the fulfillment, in other words, by spiritualizing. There is a surplus in the Old Testament, a remnant that cannot be fitted into the New Testament fulfillment.<sup>44</sup>

He continues:

I believe that the NT never says that the people of Israel . . . is definitively rejected. It simply says that the people of Israel is blind and hardened, and indeed with a view to a new development. This development has an eschatological range: it contains the solution to the riddle of the world (Rom. 11:15).<sup>45</sup>

Then he says:

The question still remains: how are we, as the Christian church standing in the New Testament in the light of God's act in Jesus Christ, to handle the Old Testament? . . . A renewal of allegorizing may seem to offer a way of assigning an authentic function to the Old Testament in the Christian situation. . . . I believe that we must resist to the last the temptation lurking in this idea. The idea is in fact a temptation, for it seems that allegorizing can solve all the problems of the Christian church in relation to the Old Testament. . . . [It] gives the appearance of making it perfectly plain that the Old Testament is wholly and exclusively the book of the Christian church, which can be exploited fully by it alone.<sup>46</sup>

Returning to the "surplus" mentioned earlier, he asserts: "For the consciousness of the Christian church throughout the centuries there has always been a surplus in the Old Testament that it could not assimilate."<sup>47</sup> He then raises some searching and humbling questions:

Does everything end in the church? Does everything, not only Israel, but history and creation, exist for the sake of the church? Or is the church only one among many forms of the kingdom of God, and does its catholicity consist precisely in the fact

<sup>42</sup>W. R. Cook, *The Theology of John* (Chicago: Moody, 1979) 90-91 n. 35.

<sup>43</sup>Fuller, *Gospel* 129.

<sup>44</sup>A. A. van Ruler, *The Christian Church and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 45; cited by Radmacher, "Current Status" 172.

<sup>45</sup>Van Ruler, *Christian Church* 55.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

that it respects, acknowledges, and holds dear all forms of the kingdom, for example, even the people of Israel?<sup>48</sup>

Part of the "surplus," of course, that the Church cannot assimilate are Israel's great land promises. Some amillennialists have recognized this problem and have solved it in a way different from the one proposed here. Hoekema, for example, now writes:

Unfortunately, amillennial exegetes fail to keep biblical teaching on the new earth in mind when interpreting Old Testament prophecy. It is an impoverishment of the meaning of these passages to make them apply only to the church or to heaven. But it is also an impoverishment to make them refer to a thousand-year period preceding the final state. They must be understood as inspired descriptions of the glorious new earth God is preparing for his people.<sup>49</sup>

He further explains:

From Galatians 3:29 we learn that if we are Christ's then we are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise. Heirs of what? Of all the blessings God promised to Abraham, including the promise that the land of Canaan would be his everlasting possession. That promise will be fulfilled for all of Abraham's spiritual seed (believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews) on the new earth. For if it is true, as we saw, that the church is the New Testament counterpart of Old Testament Israel, then the promises given to Israel will find their ultimate fulfillment in the church.<sup>50</sup>

Again he says:

We therefore agree with dispensationalists that Old Testament prophecies about the restoration of Israel to its land do, at least in one sense, look forward to a glorious future. But we see that glorious future not as limited to the millennium but as involving all of eternity, and we understand that future as being good news not just for Israelites but for all of God's redeemed people.<sup>51</sup>

He continues:

It is not correct to say, as dispensationalists often accuse amillennialists of saying, that the kingdom Jesus offered and established was *only* spiritual. The kingdom of God involves our activities in every realm of life, the material as well as the spiritual. But it is now *primarily* a spiritual rule of God through Christ in our hearts and lives. Ultimately that kingdom will include a visible rule of Christ with God the Father over the new earth, as an aspect of Christ's glorification.<sup>52</sup>

Hoekema's position marks an advance over the old view that argued that the land and kingdom promises either were forfeited through Israel's disobedience or are all now being spiritually fulfilled in the Church. But my hermeneutics still will not let me agree with his expungement of national Israel (or a remnant thereof) from God's future program, nor with his elimination of a literal, visible reign of Christ in time-space history. Significantly, Murray comments on Rom 11:27:

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>49</sup>Hoekema, *Bible* 205-206.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

"Thus the effect is that the future restoration of Israel is certified by nothing less than the certainty belonging to covenantal institution."<sup>53</sup>

Before leaving the subject of Israel and the Church altogether, I feel compelled to respond to a challenge presented by Kaiser. He begins by quoting Ryrie: "If our concept of the kingdom were as broad as it appears to be in Scripture and our definitions of the Church as strict as they are in the Scriptures, perhaps nondispensationalists would cease trying to equate the Church with the Kingdom and dispensationalists would speak more of the relationship between the two."<sup>54</sup> Then Kaiser issues this challenge: "We agree wholeheartedly and urge this state of affairs to begin immediately."<sup>55</sup> While I do not fully agree with Kaiser's center of Biblical theology as expressed in the article just quoted and in his other writings,<sup>56</sup> I am ready to join him in calling for more dialogue and discussion in facing together the key problems in Biblical hermeneutics, Biblical exegesis and Biblical theology. I accept his challenge because I have become convinced that if all of us could approach the text of the Bible as honestly and objectively as possible, without being unduly influenced by our conscious or unconscious presuppositions from systematic or dogmatic theology, we would move even closer in our theological positions. It is an attempt at such an approach that has caused me to make some adjustments and refinements in certain areas of Biblical exegesis and Biblical theology such as those delineated here.

### III. CONCLUSION

To conclude, while recognizing the existence of legitimate discontinuities between the Old and New Testaments this address has stressed the continuities. It is my belief that, within God's comprehensive purpose and unified program, the present form of his kingdom is moving toward the grand climax of history when that kingdom will find expression in a visible reign of Christ that will include elect Israel, the true Church, and elect Gentiles who may not fit into either of the two previous categories. The future kingdom of history will then merge into the eternal kingdom, and the Lord God Omnipotent will rule forever. This overall program of God is all of grace from start to finish (including the OT part of it),

<sup>53</sup>J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 2. 100. For additional bibliography on the land promises see W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View," *BSac* 138 (October-December 1981) 302-312; M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant Grant in the OT and in the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 90 (1970) 184-203. On the future restoration of Israel see now also S. L. Johnson, Jr., "Romans 11:25-27, G. C. Berkouwer and the Ethnic Future of Israel," a paper delivered at the 33rd annual meeting of ETS at Ontario Theological Seminary on December 29, 1981. For a contrary view see O. P. Robertson, "Is There a Distinctive Future for Ethnic Israel in Romans 11?", *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology* (ed. K. S. Kantzer and S. N. Gundry; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 209-227.

<sup>54</sup>Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* 145-146.

<sup>55</sup>Kaiser, "Old Promise" 117 n. 23.

<sup>56</sup>Kaiser stresses the promise motif. Here is my attempt at stating such a center or unifying theme: God is asserting and establishing his kingdom or rule over all that he has created, thus bringing all creation, through the mediatorial work of his Son, into complete submission and order under his sovereignty in order to bring the highest possible glory to himself. (Most statements of a theological center are too anthropocentric.)

and all will redound to the praise and glory of God through Jesus Christ our Lord and King.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup>To the extent that this paper has validity, should we not begin to speak less of OT theology and NT theology and more of Biblical theology? Is not the former nomenclature in itself a false dichotomy, at least to some degree?