

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SYN-COMPOUNDS FOR JEW-GENTILE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Carl B. Hoch, Jr.*

One of the vexing questions in the history of Biblical exegesis has been the relationship of the two Testaments to each other.¹ While covenantal theology has tended to maximize the continuity and minimize the discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments, dispensationalism has tended to minimize the continuity and maximize the discontinuity.² The present paper aims to narrow the gap between covenantal theology and dispensationalism by discussing a neglected dimension of the NT data relevant to the whole problem of continuity and discontinuity: the *syn*-compounds.³

A concordance study yields the following words that are *syn*-compounds and that are important theologically: *syngenēs* (fellow citizen), *symmorphizomai* (be conformed to), *symmorphos* (having the same form), *symphytos* (grown together), *synagō* (bring together), *synagōnizomai* (fight along with), *synathleō* (struggle along with), *synapothnēskō* (die with), *synarmologeō* (join together), *synbasileuō* (rule with), *synbibazō* (unite), *syndesmos* (bond), *syndoxazō* (share in glory), *syndoulos* (fellow slave), *synegeirō* (rise up with another), *synergeō* (work together with), *synergos* (fellow worker), *synerchomai* (come together), *synesthiō* (eat with), *synzaō* (live with), *synzygos* (yokefellow), *synzōopoieō* (make alive together with), *synthaptomai* (bury together with), *synkathizō* (sit down with), *synkerannymi* (unite together), *synkleiō* (close up together), *synklēr-onomos* (fellow heir), *synkoinōnos* (partner), *symmetochos* (fellow sharer), *symmimētēs* (fellow imitator), *synoikodomeō* (build together with), *synpaschō* (suffer with), *synpolitēs* (fellow citizen), *synsōmos* (belonging to the same body), *syn-stauroō* (crucify together with), *synstratiōtēs* (fellow soldier), *synchairō* (rejoice

*Carl Hoch is professor of New Testament at Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

¹See D. L. Baker, *Two Testaments: One Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1976); G. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Eerdmans, 1978).

²See the recent discussions in R. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1977); K. L. Barker, "False Dichotomies Between the Testaments," *JETS* 25/1 (1982) 3-16.

³Cf. also X. Jacques, *List of New Testament Words Sharing Common Elements* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1969) 105-106.

with), *synpsychos* (united in spirit).⁴

Since space does not permit a consideration of all thirty-eight words, the writer has selected eleven words that he considers most important for discussion: *synarmologeō*, *synbibazō*, *synegeirō*, *synzōopoieō*, *synkathizō*, *synklēronomos*, *synkoinōnos*, *symmetochos*, *synoikodomeō*, *synpolitēs* and *synsōmos*.

It will be apparent even to the reader who is familiar only with the text of Scripture and who has not investigated the usage of these words in the NT with the help of a concordance that there is a great concentration of compounds in Ephesians. The rest of this study will therefore concentrate on that epistle of Paul with the other relevant texts being discussed in relationship to it.

The comprehensive theological character of Ephesians has led scholars like Goodspeed and Mitton to suggest that it was not the product of Paul himself but of a follower who was thoroughly imbued with all of Paul's teaching in the genuine Pauline corpus, especially Colossians. In fact, Mitton felt that the author's purpose was to produce a comprehensive summary of Pauline teaching:

His purpose appears to have been to produce a comprehensive statement of Pauline teaching. All the main items of his teaching are welded into this exhaustive summary. Certain passages in the epistle seem to be deliberately constructed so as to include all that Paul taught, fragmentarily and at various points in his other letters, on a particular subject (cf. Eph. ii. 8-9 and iv. 4-6).⁵

It is not necessary to hold Goodspeed or Mitton's view of authorship,⁶ but it is important to recognize the theological development that Ephesians reflects. According to Barker, "the doctrine most extensively treated in the epistle is that of the Church."⁷ Barth considers Ephesians to be among the greatest letters under the name of the apostle Paul. He stated, "Ephesians represents a development of Paul's thought and a summary of his message which are prepared by his undisputed letters and contribute to their proper understanding."⁸

It has long been recognized that the formula *en Christō* plays a leading role in the Pauline literature.⁹ The phrase is found in every epistle of Paul except Titus. Paul uses the formula a total of eighty-three times. The phrase is used three times in the first epistle of Peter (3:16; 5:10, 14), the only occurrences outside Paul. The highest number of uses in any Pauline letter is thirteen, shared by Romans,

⁴W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament* (5th ed.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978) 914-926.

⁵C. L. Mitton, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951) 261.

⁶For a refutation see G. W. Barker, "A Critical Evaluation of the Lexical and Linguistic Data Advanced by E. J. Goodspeed and Supported by C. L. Mitton" (unpublished Harvard University thesis, 1962); "Ephesians" in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 2. 316-324; A. Van Roon, *The Authenticity of Ephesians* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

⁷G. W. Barker, "Ephesians" 323.

⁸M. Barth, *Ephesians* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 1. 4.

⁹A. Deissmann, *Die neutestamentliche Formel "in Christo Jesu"* (Marburg: Friedrich, 1892).

1 Corinthians and Ephesians. Since Romans and 1 Corinthians are much longer letters than Ephesians, the frequency of the formula in Ephesians is high proportionately.

It is fundamental to recognize that the *en Christō* formula occurs frequently in close conjunction with the *syn*-compounds. It will be the thesis of this study that the Gentiles share together with Israel in the promise made to Abraham. The continuity of the OT covenants and salvation history is maintained by Christ in his death and resurrection and by the faithful remnant within Israel who believe the gospel and proclaim it to Gentiles. Gentiles by faith in Christ are given the status of co-participants in the messianic salvation and share with the remnant from Israel in Israel's covenantal privileges. Gentiles do not become Israel but share with Israel. The remnant of Israel in the Church provides the covenant continuity. But since Gentiles share with this remnant on an equal basis, something new has been inaugurated with the Church that was not present prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hence there is also discontinuity.

In the view of the writer, the error of covenantal theology is its equation of the Church with Israel. Since there are Gentiles in the Church who are not Israel, there is discontinuity between the Church and Israel. The error of dispensationalism, on the other hand, is that it fails to recognize or give full weight to the continuity of the covenants, the remnant of believing Israel within the Church, and Israel's Messiah providing the whole basis whereby Gentiles share in the promise. Therefore a new synthesis along the lines of Kaiser's "promise theology" is needed to provide a more Biblical approach.¹⁰ It is hoped that the following discussion will facilitate further progress toward that synthesis.

The first chapter of Ephesians develops the great redemptive realities that God has provided in Christ. Jews and Gentiles have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ (v 3). Election (v 4), redemption (v 7), sealing with the Spirit (v 13), and the power of God (vv 19-20) are all concentrated in Christ.

It is only because God has provided such redemption in Christ that the Gentiles now have a new position before God. Paul can contrast the former state of the Gentiles (*pote*) with their present state (*nyn*) because this new state is grounded in Christ. Existentially, however, all Christians have had a then (*pote*, 2:3). They also lived a dissolute life and deserved the wrath of God against their sin (cf. Romans 1-2).

In 2:5 the first *syn*-compound, *syn̄dopoieō*, occurs. This verb occurs twice in the NT (Eph 2:5; Col 2:13). In both passages Christians are said to have been made alive together with Christ. Grundmann writes:

The basic meaning of the preposition *syn* with the sociative dative is "with," and the term has a personal character. It denotes the totality of persons who are together, or who come together, or who accompany one another, or who work together, sharing a common task or a common destiny, aiding and supporting one another. It can also denote sharing things or their possession, which brings into a connection with the owner.¹¹

¹⁰W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

¹¹W. Grundmann, "syn-meta," *TDNT* 7 (1971) 770.

Murray Harris adds:

In spite of the general interchangeability of the two preps., it is significant that Paul regularly ends his letters with the prayer that grace be with (*meta*, never *syn*) his addressees, whereas he depicts the Christian life as one of identification with Christ and the Christian's destiny as "being with Christ" (*syn*, not *meta*, in both cases). This would suggest that, of the two preps., *syn* was the more suited to express intimate personal union (e.g., Col. 3:4), and *meta* the more suited to denote close association or attendant circumstances (e.g., 1 Thess. 3:13).¹²

One of the vexing problems in Ephesians is the difficulty of determining the reference of the personal pronouns. Paul alternates back and forth between the first person plural and the second person plural. Mitton comments on v 3: "As in other places in this epistle there is an unexplained switch from 'you' (2:1-2) to *we*. . . . It is not likely here that 'you' means Gentiles and 'we' means Jews, though that may be true in some passages."¹³ Thus one cannot maintain a rigid distinction between "we" and "you" in Ephesians. But in light of Paul's later discussion in 2:11-22 it should be obvious that the "we" does include Jewish Christians. Therefore it is true that both Jews and Gentiles share in the life brought about by Christ's resurrection.

Verse 6 adds two more *syn*-compounds: "raised up together" and "seated together." The first verb is used also in Col 2:12; 3:1. The second verb occurs elsewhere in the NT only in Luke 22:55 in a nontheological context. These two compounds indicate a sharing of all Christians in Christ's resurrection and exaltation. Equality in Christ brings equality with one another.

Ephesians 2:11-22 forms an extensive section on the new equality Jews and Gentiles have in Jesus Christ. The former state of the Gentiles (*pote*) was one of rejection by and separation from Israel.

The first privilege of Israel that Gentiles lacked was a messianic hope. That the *Christou* in v 12 should be translated "Messiah" is argued by Mitton as follows:

Since, however, this reference to their being "separated from Christ" falls within the passage dealing with their former relationship to Israel, it is possible that *Christ* is here used in the general sense of "Messiah". They did not share any of the Jews' Messianic hopes for the future. Two factors favour this view: (i) In verse 13 the words "Christ Jesus" are both used, Jesus being added, perhaps to make clear that now the Christian Messiah is meant, not the Jewish one. (ii) In Rom. 9:4-5, where Paul lists the privileges of the Jew, he includes, along with such things as the covenants, the law, the promise, etc., "the Christ according to the flesh". So here Christ could mean "the Messiah of Jewish hopes".¹⁴

It is significant that this privilege is named first because it is due only to the fact that Gentiles are in Christ that they share in any of Israel's privileges (cf. Gal 3:29).

The second predicament of Gentiles before their inclusion in Christ was their

¹²M. Harris, "Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament," *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (ed. C. Brown; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3. 1206-1207.

¹³C. L. Mitton, *Ephesians* (Greenwood: Attic, 1976) 84.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 103.

estrangement from the commonwealth of or citizenship in Israel. This statement of Paul has been interpreted by many to mean that Gentiles are now incorporated into Israel. Israel has thus become a theological term that has lost its ethnic connotations. It is usually argued that this incorporation of Gentiles into Israel is supported by the use of *sympolitai* in v 19.

This is not the place to enter into a discussion of the use of the term "Israel" in the NT. An extensive literature exists. Suffice it to say that a number of scholars either do not feel that "Israel" is ever extended to Gentiles in the NT or are reluctant to equate the Church and Israel.¹⁵ The following context does not seem to support an incorporation of Gentiles into Israel but an extension from Israel to Gentiles of Israel's privileges given to her by God. It seems important to notice carefully what Paul does and does not say. He does not say that the Gentiles are incorporated into the old *politeia* of Israel or into the new *politeia* of Israel or into a new spiritual Israel.¹⁶ He does say that both Jews and Gentiles are created into "one new man" (2:15). If the result of Christ's work was incorporation, one would expect *eis*-compounds, not *syn*-compounds.

Why then does Paul bring up Israel at all in v 12? The writer believes that Paul is trying to maintain the continuity between the old and new covenants and at the same time emphasize the newness that Christ has inaugurated. He is endeavoring to show the absolute estrangement of Gentiles in contrast to Israel from God before the coming of Christ and the beginning of the Church. His emphasis is not on Israel as such but on Israel's privileges: her covenants, promise, hope of a coming Messiah, and knowledge of the one and only true God.

The third pre-Christ predicament of Gentiles is their exclusion from the covenants of the promise. Many commentators recognize the importance of the plural "covenants" (cf. Rom 9:4¹⁷). This plural would include at least the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants if not also the Davidic and the new covenants.

It is significant that the definite article and the singular form are used with the word "promise." Kaiser has argued that the one promise doctrine is the key to the "intramural debate over the theological and hermeneutical validity of Covenant Theology or Dispensationalism."¹⁸ The Biblical emphasis on the promise led Kaiser to state, "There is the formula: 'the promise made of God unto our fathers'; not promises, but promise, not predictions, but promise, not a promise, but *THE* promise doctrine."¹⁹

¹⁵See P. Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969); J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972); W. LaSor, *Israel: A Biblical View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); C. B. Hoch, Jr., "The Term *Israel* in the New Testament" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1971).

¹⁶G. Schrenk, "Der Segenswunsch nach der Kampfepestel," *Judaica* 6 (1950) 189.

¹⁷There is a textual problem in Romans. Although the singular is strongly supported, Metzger feels that the plural is to be preferred because of the tendency of scribes to conform the singular to the other singulars in the series and because of the theological difficulties raised by the plural. See B. M. Metzger, ed., *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971) 519.

¹⁸W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Eschatological Hermeneutics of 'Epangelicalism': Promise Theology," *JETS* 13 (1970) 92.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 96.

The last two things lacking in Gentile soteriological prerequisites were their complete lack of any hope of salvation and their alienation from the covenant God of Israel. With these five phrases Paul has delineated the dire predicament of Gentiles apart from Christ.

Ephesians 2:13 appears as a liberty bell ringing out the cry of freedom: "But now in Christ Jesus you who were formerly (*pote*) afar off were made near in the blood of Christ." Only because Gentiles are in Christ is there any hope of salvation. But because they are in Christ, they share in Christ all those privileges previously denied to them.

The crucial question raised by v 13 of course is the object of the nearness. To what were the Gentiles made near? At first sight it might appear that Paul is saying that they were made near to Israel. The writer once again feels constrained to argue that it is permissible to speak of a making near to Israel in the sense of sharing with Israel. But he does not believe that the next section, vv 14-22, supports an incorporation of Gentiles into Israel. Rather, a remnant from Israel plus believers from among the Gentiles both form one new man.

Space does not permit a full treatment of vv 14-22. However, three more *syn*-compounds are found in this section. In v 19 *sympolitai* is used. This is the only occurrence of this word in the NT. Another cognate besides *politeia* appears in Phil 3:20: *politeuma*. There Paul wrote, "For our citizenship is in heaven." There the co-citizenship appears to be a heavenly one. Now if Gentiles are incorporated into the *politeia* of Israel, then "Israel" would have to lose all of its empirical connotations—that is, it seems impossible to reconcile an earthly empirical Israel with a heavenly citizenship. Since the man is new, one would also have to postulate a new Israel. But Paul never uses the term "new Israel." It appears better, therefore, to say that Jews and Gentiles in Christ become fellow citizens in a heavenly commonwealth that is not called Israel and yet has a close historico-redemptive relationship with Israel.

A further problem is the reference of the term *hagiōn* in v 19. The usage of this word in the epistle does not demonstrate any rigid lines in similarity with the lack of uniform meaning with the personal pronouns. However, Schrenk, Hofmann, B. Weiss, von Soden, Dibelius, K. L. Schmidt, Schlatter, Haupt, Ewald and Lueken all interpret the term as referring to Jewish Christians.²⁰ If this identification is correct, then once again the sharing of Jews and Gentiles in the results of Christ's work is taught in this verse.

The last two *syn*-compounds in this section are *synarmologeō* (v 21) and *syn-oi kodomeō* (v 22). The first verb is used also in 4:16, while the second is a hapax legomenon. This chapter and chap. 4 employ architectural and physiological metaphors for the new entity in the process of development as a result of Christ's death. Every part of this new work of God, the Church, is so compacted together and built together that it serves as the dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The last important section in Ephesians in relation to the topic of this study is 3:1-13. Here Paul soars in his description of the Church as a new work of God comprised of an equality between Jew and Gentile that was a mystery in the OT revelation.

²⁰Schrenk, "Segenswunsch" 189.

Only by revelation to Paul and to the other apostles and prophets was this mystery made known. The specific content of the mystery is introduced with the epexegetical infinitive *einai* of v 6. The following three *syn*-compounds stress the truth that the Gentiles are now fellow heirs, of the same body, and fellow sharers in the promise (singular) in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Paul employs rare words to express this new relationship that was a mystery in former generations. *Synarmologeō* (2:21) is not found again apart from Paul.²¹ *Synklēronomos*, *syntōmos* and *symmetochos* are rare words. Robinson suggests that *syntōmos* was perhaps formed by Paul for this occasion.²² Barth states that "Ephesians is outstanding among the Pauline epistles because of the number of daring combinations of the Greek preposition *syn* ('with,' 'together with,' 'same') with nouns and verbs (2:19-22; 3:6; 4:3, 16)."²³ It would appear that Paul is using language to its fullest extent to convey the equality of the Jew and the Gentile in the body of Christ. The famous passage in Galatians probably states this truth best: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Now if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:26-29).

Another *syn*-compound of significance for this study is *synbibazō* in 4:16. This verb has parallels in Col 2:2, 19. All three occurrences underscore the organic unity of the body of Christ as composed of Jew and Gentile. They have truly been united together into a new unit.

There remains only one other passage where one of the eleven words selected for this study occurs that is an important reference. In Rom 11:17 Paul states that believing Gentiles have become a *synkoinōnos* of the root of the fatness of the olive tree.

Again it is difficult to find unanimity of viewpoint concerning the identification of a key metaphor in this whole discussion of the relationship of Gentiles to Israel. The following views of the olive tree can be found in various works: (1) Israel,²⁴ (2) true Israel,²⁵ (3) the Israel of God,²⁶ (4) the true people of God,²⁷ (5) God's chosen people,²⁸ (6) the continuing permanent covenant community,²⁹ (7)

²¹J. A. Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: James Clarke, n.d.) 166.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 169.

²³M. Barth, *Israel and the Church* (Richmond: John Knox, 1969) 92.

²⁴A. Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1949) 399.

²⁵O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964) 109.

²⁶G. Johnston, *The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament* (Cambridge: University Press, 1943) 78.

²⁷R. N. Flew, *Jesus and His Church* (London: Epworth, 1943) 151.

²⁸R. Kugelman, "Hebrew, Israelite, Jew in the New Testament," *The Bridge* 1 (1955) 218.

²⁹A. Pieters, *The Seed of Abraham* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950) 89.

the body of those in whom the grace of Christ has been truly operative,³⁰ (8) the Church in history,³¹ (9) the mystical body of Christ,³² (10) the place of privilege,³³ (11) the kingdom of God,³⁴ and (12) the Abrahamic covenant.³⁵ One almost despairs in light of such a plethora of views of ever arriving at any identification of the olive tree.

And yet one feels unable to identify the tree with Israel because Paul seems to distinguish the tree from Israel in v 24: "their own olive tree" (*tē idia elaia*). Without wishing to be dogmatic, the writer believes that the olive tree is the Abrahamic covenant for the following reasons. First, in chap. 9 Paul has spoken of Israel's covenants and patriarchs (9:4, 5). Certainly Abraham was one of the greatest patriarchs, if not the greatest. Second, in 9:7 Paul mentions the seed of Abraham and relates it directly to the promise in v 8. Third, in chap. 11 Paul asserts that one of the evidences that God has not cast away his people is that Paul is of the seed of Abraham (v 1), and thus he is also a member of the present Jewish remnant according to the election of grace (v 5). Fourth, in v 28 he argues that the unbelieving branches who have not yet come to faith are still beloved because of the patriarchs. Fifth, Paul had devoted an entire chapter of this epistle to Abraham, the promise, the seed of Abraham, the inheritance, the circumcision, and Gentiles (chap. 4).

Paul's whole argument in this chapter parallels that in Galatians 3. Gentiles by faith in Christ become the spiritual seed of Abraham. The olive tree metaphor of chap. 11 simply states metaphorically what Paul states elsewhere in propositional terms. Israel has a privilege before God because of his promise to Abraham. However, only believing seed inherit the blessing. Unbelieving seed are cut off. In Christ these covenantal privileges are extended to Gentiles who partake of the root (Abraham) who gives fatness (the opportunity of a vital spiritual relationship with God) to the olive tree (the covenantal relationship in Abraham). The olive tree is not cut down or set aside (dispensationalism) nor is it left undisturbed (covenantal theology), because branches from a wild olive tree are grafted in. But the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God are demonstrated in his salvation extended to all on an equal basis who are in Christ.

The purpose of this paper has been to present the relevance of the *syn-*compounds to the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ. Space has not permitted a treatment of all the compounds. The few that have been discussed have only been briefly investigated. There has been no discussion of the

³⁰H. L. Ellison, *The Mystery of Israel* (London: Paternoster, 1966) 89.

³¹J. I. Packer, "The Nature of the Church," *Basic Christian Doctrines* (ed. C. F. H. Henry; New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962) 242.

³²M. L. Bourke, *A Study of the Metaphor of the Olive Tree in Rom. XI* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1947) viii.

³³C. C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1959) 214.

³⁴Bourke, *Study* 77.

³⁵D. R. Younce, "An Exegetical Interpretation of the Figure of the Olive Tree of Romans Eleven" (unpublished master's thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1963) 53.

twenty words used in the Septuagint also or the eighteen words not used in the Septuagint. There has been no discussion of the implications of the *syn*-compounds for the Christian's union with Christ. Nor have the eschatological implications of Jew-Gentile equality and sharing in the body of Christ been worked out. A further avenue of work would be the passages where the preposition *syn* occurs but not in compound. It is hoped, however, that the material discussed has underscored the importance of recognizing the continuity of salvation history in the presence of the elect remnant of Israel within the Church and the discontinuity between the Testaments in the inclusion of the Gentiles on an equal basis with Jews so that both might share in the messianic salvation.

Much study and discussion still needs to be done. The lines of continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments need to be explicated and refined. Basic exegetical work must precede theological systematization. Pejorative labels that tend to intimidate honest treatment of the text need to be set aside. It is hoped that this paper has contributed some minute insight into that continuity and discontinuity of God's dealings with his people and motivated greater praise to the One in whom all the promises of God receive their Yes (2 Cor 1:20).