

## COUNTING STARS WITH ABRAHAM AND THE PROPHETS: NEW COVENANT ECCLESIOLOGY IN OT PERSPECTIVE

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### I. JEWS AND GENTILES AS “THE SEED OF ABRAHAM”

Paul refers to *both* Jews and Gentiles in Christ as Abraham’s “seed” [σπέρμα].<sup>1</sup> This is clear in Gal 3:28–29 where he asserts: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”<sup>2</sup> This echoes his stress in 3:8–9 that all “those who are of faith [whether Jews or Gentiles] are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

Similarly, with a citation of Gen 17:5, Paul affirms in Rom 4:16–17 that the promised inheritance “depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all the offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, ‘I have made you the father of many nations.’” In the next verse, Paul again alludes to the same text and links Abraham’s fatherhood of the nations with the promise in Gen 15:5 that the patriarch’s “seed” would be as numerous as the stars: “who in hope against hope believed that he would become a father of many nations, according to what he was told: ‘So shall your offspring be’” (Rom 4:18; cf. 3:28–30). The apostle views the Gentile Christian participation in the new covenant community as fulfilling OT promises regarding the “seed” of Abraham.

Turning back to the OT, as sections II–III show below, within the original context of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, “seed” [רֵעַ/σπέρμα] most directly designates a category of biology or ethnicity often distinguished from the “na-

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<sup>1</sup> The noun σπέρμα occurs 43 times in the NT, and all but 7 refer to “descendants, children, posterity” (BDAG, s.v. “σπέρμα”). Of these, the most predominant occurrence is to the “seed” of Abraham (22x), which refers either to Christ himself or to the whole family of God including both Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Luke 1:55; John 8:33, 37; Acts 3:25; 7:5, 6; Rom 4:13, 16, 18; 9:7 [2x], 8; 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22; Gal 3:16 [3x], 19, 29; Heb 2:16; 11:11, 18). As to the other 14 references, 7 concern “children in general” (Mark 12:19, 20, 21, 22 // Matt 22:24, 25; Luke 20:28), 4 relate to “the seed of David” (John 7:42; Acts 13:23; Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8), one refers to “a remnant, survivor” (Rom 9:29, citing Isa 1:9), one pertains to “the seed of the woman” (Rev 12:17), and one is the problematic “seed” of God (1 John 3:9).

<sup>2</sup> All translations are the author’s unless otherwise noted.

tions/Gentiles” [ἐθνεγενεσθαι/ἔθνη]. Indeed, it is through the “seed” that the “nations” would be blessed—God’s overcoming Adam’s curse and reconciling to himself some from all the families of the earth (Gen 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; cf. 12:3; 18:18; Jer 4:2; Ps 72:17; Acts 3:25; Gal 3:16).

How, then, can Paul in Rom 4:18 link Abraham’s fatherhood of many nations (Gen 17:5) with the promise that his “offspring” would be as numerous as the stars (Gen 15:5)? Genesis 15:5 appears to address most immediately only *natural* “seed”: “Please look to the heavens and count the stars if you are able to count them. . . . So shall your offspring be.”<sup>3</sup> Within the context of Genesis 15, the “seed” promise specifically answers the dilemma raised by Abram’s assertion that Eliezer of Damascus is his heir but not his “seed.” God stresses that the very “offspring” that would “come from your loins” (Gen 15:4) would inherit the land (Gen 15:13, 18). Also, Abram’s struggle in chapter 15 is directly associated with the earlier parallel promise that his “seed” would become like “the dust of the earth” and claim the land (Gen 13:16; cf. 22:17; Heb 11:12).

Genesis associates the “seed” promise of Gen 15:5 most immediately with the patriarch’s *natural* descendants, a select group of which would inherit the promised land (e.g. Gen 28:13–14). Elsewhere, references to the “stars” and “dust” are similarly limited in focus to the promise of land and to the old covenant nation of Israel (Exod 32:13; Deut 1:10; 10:22; Neh 9:23)—the land that would be lost and the nation that would dwindle to a small remnant through the curse of exile (Deut 28:62; cf. Isa 48:18–19). Furthermore, later OT texts, especially from Esther and Ezra–Nehemiah, explicitly restrict “seed” language to biological lineage when associated with the old covenant age.

Nevertheless, we will see that Genesis itself and several OT prophetic texts anticipate the expansion of “the seed of Abraham” to include those redeemed from both ethnic Israel and the nations during the eschatological age of the Messiah. As Paul recognizes, including “nations/Gentiles” among the “seed” (Rom 4:16–18) fulfills a new covenant eschatological hope that is linked with the new covenant and associated directly with the representative saving work of the promised royal deliverer, Messiah Jesus (Gal 3:8, 14, 16, 29).<sup>4</sup>

This article considers some OT roots to new covenant ecclesiology, specifically from the perspective of the language of “seed.”<sup>5</sup> Following a brief overview of

<sup>3</sup> G. K. Beale writes, “The designation of a multiplied ‘seed’ never refers to Gentiles in the various forms of the promise, but only to the patriarchal ethnic line . . . Gen. 22:17–18 and 26:4 . . . [make] explicit that the multiplication of the patriarch’s ‘seed’ refers only to Israel and that the ‘blessing’ of the ‘nations’ results from the Israelite seed’s domination of the nations” (*The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999] 430).

<sup>4</sup> For more on this, see Jason S. DeRouchie and Jason C. Meyer, “Christ or Family as the ‘Seed’ of Promise? An Evaluation of N. T. Wright on Galatians 3:16,” *SBJT* 14/3 (2010) 36–48, esp. 40–43.

<sup>5</sup> G. K. Beale provides a broader, helpful overview of the OT data concerning the latter-day true Israel including a remnant from the nations (*A NT Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the OT in the New* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011] 656–65). For other overviews of the “seed” data that support the schema of progressive covenantalism, see John G. Reisinger, *Abraham’s Four Seeds: A Biblical Examination of the Presuppositions of Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 1998);

“seed” language in the OT (section II), I will consider the makeup of the Abraham-ic and Mosaic covenant communities in order to define the “offspring” of Abraham and its relationship to the nations (section III). Next, I will focus on the promise in Genesis 17 that Abraham would be the father of a multitude of nations (section IV) and then will overview a number of prophetic texts from Isaiah and Jeremiah that highlight the eschatological inclusion of Jews *and* Gentiles into Abraham’s “seed” (section V). After noting the lack of new covenant fulfillment in the OT era (section VI), I will synthesize my argument and assess Paul’s use of the OT (section VII). I will conclude the paper by unpacking the implications of this study for new covenant ecclesiology, arguing for the legitimacy of a progressive covenantal framework in contrast to the theological systems found in dispensational and covenant theologies (section VIII).

## II. AN OVERVIEW OF “SEED” IN THE OT

Table 1 overviews the use of זרע “seed” in Scripture. Three points are immediately noteworthy from the breakdown. First, when referring to humans, some instances of זרע are not all-inclusive but restrictive, pertaining to a certain group of “offspring” or even an individual descendant within the greater unit. This fact will prove theologically significant when determining the meaning of “the seed of Abraham” in different texts and at different points within redemptive history.

Second, of all OT books, Genesis makes the most of “seed” language, employing זרע 59 times (25.8% of the total 229 OT occurrences) with samplings of most OT uses (see A, B, C.2, C.3, C.5).<sup>6</sup> Within Genesis, זרע operates alongside the *toledot* structure: (1) to highlight the initial fulfillment of the blessing commission that fronts the book (Gen 1:28); (2) to distinguish the chosen minority, God-dependent, missional line from the rejected majority that is in need of divine blessing; and (3) to bring focus to the agent of global blessing.<sup>7</sup> The latter is stressed most directly in three texts that together clarify how a single, male “offspring” of the first woman and of Abraham would serve as the instrument of worldwide salvation, conquering the evil one and overcoming the curse with blessing for some from all the families of the earth (Gen 3:15; 22:17–18; 24:60).<sup>8</sup>

Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012) 632–33, 696.

<sup>6</sup> Σπέρμα “seed” is found 217 times in the LXX and almost always translates זרע. Other words used to translate זרע are γενεά “generation,” γένος “ancestry,” καρποφόρος “fruitbearing,” σπείρω “sow seed,” σπόρος “kernel; process of sowing,” συγγενής “kin, belonging to the same group,” υἱός “son, male descendant,” φυτόν “a plant.” These terms clarify the semantic range of “seed” in the OT and highlight the scope from which a biblical theology of “seed” can draw.

<sup>7</sup> See especially Jason S. DeRouchie, “The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the *Toledot* Structure of Genesis,” *JETS* 56 (2013) 219–47.

<sup>8</sup> For more on this, see DeRouchie and Meyer, “Christ or Family as the ‘Seed’ of Promise?” 36–48, esp. 38–40. See also Jack Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?,” *TynBul* 48 (1997) 139–48; T. Desmond Alexander, “Further Observations on the Term ‘Seed’ in Genesis,” *TynBul* (1997) 363–67; John C. Collins, “Galatians 3:16: What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?,”

Table 1: The Uses of זרע in the OT

Category	Texts	Totals
A. Plant seed or seed-time	Gen 1:11–12[4x], 29[2x]; 8:22; 47:19, 23–24; Exod 16:31; Lev 11:37–38; 26:5, 16; 27:16[2x], 30; Num 11:7; 20:5; 24:7; Deut 11:10; 14:22; 22:9; 28:38; 1 Sam 8:15; 1 Kgs 18:32; Job 39:12; Ps 126:6; Eccl 11:6; Isa 5:10; 17:11; 23:3; 30:23; 55:10; Jer 2:21 (figurative for C.3); 35:7, 9; Ezek 17:5[2x] (figurative for C.3); Amos 9:13; Hag 2:19; Zech 8:12.	43 (18.78%)
B. Animal natural seed	Gen 3:15 (figurative for humans displaying serpent-like hostility to God); 7:3; Jer 31:27.	3 (1.31%)
C. Human seed		
C.1. Male semen	Lev 15:16–18, 32; 22:4; 19:20; Num 5:13. (Other potential examples: 1 Kgs 11:14; Ezek 43:19; Dan 9:1.)	7 (3.06%)
C.2. Human natural seed, all-inclusive	Gen 9:9; 15:3; 16:10; 17:12; 19:32, 34; 21:13; 38:8–9[3x]; 46:6–7; 48:11, 19; Exod 28:43; 30:21; Lev 18:20–21; 20:2–4; 21:15, 17, 21; 22:3–4, 13; Num 5:28; 14:24; 17:5[16:40]; 18:19; 25:13; Deut 28:46, 59; 30:19; 31:21; Josh 24:3; Ruth 4:12 [or C.5]; 1 Sam 1:11; 2:20; 20:42[2x]; 24:22[21]; 2 Sam 4:8; 1 Kings 2:33, 33 [or C.3]; 11:14 [or C.1], 39 [or C.3]; 2 Kings 5:27; 11:1; 17:20; 25:25; 2 Chr 22:10; Ezra 2:59; 9:2; Neh 7:61; 9:2; Esth 6:13; 9:27–28, 31; 10:3; Job 5:25; 21:8; Pss 21:11[10]; 22:31[30]; 25:13 [or C.3]; 37:25–26, 28; Isa 1:4; 14:20; 57:3–4; Jer 7:15; 22:28, 30; 29:32; 36:31; 41:1; 49:10; Ezek 17:13; 43:19 [or C.1]; Dan 1:3; 9:1 [or C.1]. [Also texts concerning “seed” of Jacob/Israel as covenant community: Gen 28:4, 13–14; 32:13; 35:12; 48:4; Esth 6:13; 9:27–28, 31; Pss 22:24[23]; 106:27; Isa 45:19; Ezek 20:5; 44:22; Mal 2:3, 15. (Other potential examples: Gen 15:5; 2 Sam 22:51; Prov 11:21.)	87 (37.99%)

C.3. Human special natural seed, subset 1: usually pre-exilic old covenant community in direct fulfillment of Abrahamic land promises	Gen 4:25; 12:7; 13:15–16[3x] [or C.6]; 15:5 [or C.6], 13 [or C.6], 18 [or C.6]; 17:7–10[5x], 19; 21:12; 22:17; 24:7; 26:3–4[3x], 4 [or C.5], 24; 28:4, 13–14, 14 [or C.5]; 32:13; 35:12; 48:4; Exod 32:13[2x]; 33:1; Deut 1:8; 4:37; 10:15; 11:9; 34:4; 2 Chr 20:7; Neh 9:8 [or C.6]; Pss 22:24[23][2x]; 105:6; 106:27; Isa 41:8 [or C.6]; 45:19; 48:19; Ezek 20:5; 44:22; 1 Chr 16:13. (Also Gen 46:6–7 concerning Jacob’s children brought to Egypt; Esth 6:13; 9:27–28, 31; and Jer 2:21 and Ezek 17:5[2x] where plant “seed” is used figuratively for the nation, all regarding Jewish lineage. Other potential examples: 1 Kgs 2:33; 11:39; Pss 25:13; 112:2.)	49 (21.40%)
C.4. Human special natural seed, subset 2: usually post-exilic old covenant community in stage 1 of restoration—physical return to the land	Isa 43:5 [or C.6]; Jer 23:8 [or C.6]; 30:10 [or C.6]; 31:27 [or C.6]; 46:27 [or C.6]. (Other potential examples: Deut 30:6; Neh 9:8; Ps 18:51[50]; Isa 44:3; 45:25.)	5 (2.18%)
C.5. Human special natural seed, subset 3: unique, singular, male descendant with key role in redemptive history (type or antitype)	Gen 3:15; 22:17–18; 24:60; 2 Sam 7:12; 22:51 [or C.2]; 1 Chr 17:11; Isa 6:13 [or C.6]; Jer 33:26. (Other potential examples: Gen 26:4; 28:14; Ruth 4:12; Pss 18:51[50]; 89:5, 30, 37[4, 29, 36].)	9 (3.93%)
C.6. Human special regenerate/adopted seed, subset 4: usually redeemed new covenant community in stage 2 of restoration—spiritual reconciliation with God (includes ethnic Israelites and Gentiles).	Deut 30:6 [or C.4]; Pss 18:51[50] [or C.4 or 5]; 69:37[36]; 89:5[4] [or C.5], 30[29] [or C.5], 37[36] [or C.5]; 102:29[28]; 112:2 [or C.4]; Prov 11:21 [or C.2]; Isa 44:3 [or C.4]; 45:25 [or C.4]; 53:10; 54:3; 59:21[3x]; 61:9[2x]; 65:9, 23; 66:22; Jer 31:36–37; 33:22, 26[2x]. (Other potential examples: Gen 13:15–16; 15:5, 13, 18; Isa 6:13; 41:8; 43:5; Jer 23:8; 30:10; 31:27; 46:27.)	26 (11.35%)
TOTAL		229

Third and very importantly, when “seed” refers to humans in the OT, it almost always denotes *natural* children.<sup>9</sup> In Genesis, for example, Eliezer of Damas-

<sup>9</sup> So, too, T. Desmond Alexander, “Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis,” *TynBul* 44 (1993) 260.

cus was Abra(ha)m's heir and a member of his household but not his "seed" (Gen 15:2–3), whereas Moab and Ben-ammi were the biological "offspring" of Lot's daughters (Gen 19:32, 34; cf. vv. 37–38). The only exception to human "seed" referring to physical descent comes in OT eschatological promise texts that address the makeup of the new covenant community (C.6). As this study will show, the combination of the old covenant's restriction of "seed" to natural descent and of the new covenant's lack of such restriction highlights a substantial progression in the makeup of the old and new covenant communities and brings focus to the centrality of Christ in redemptive history.

### III. THE MAKEUP OF THE ABRAHAMIC AND MOSAIC COVENANT COMMUNITIES

In order to clearly understand the distinction between Israel and the nations, we must first assess the ethnic and ethical makeup of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenant communities. We will see that the OT uses "seed" language in different ways, that individuals could forfeit their "seed" status, and that all Israelites, whether native-born or proselyte, were distinguished from the nations.

1. *All Abraham's physical descendants as his natural "seed."* Genesis assumes that a patriarch's "seed" included every physical descendant and that each received certain privilege and promise. For example, Ishmael, son of Hagar, was Abraham's "son" and on this basis distinct from household servants (Gen 17:23). He was circumcised along with Abraham (Gen 17:26), and God promised him fruitfulness, princes, and nationhood like Abraham (Gen 16:10; 17:20; cf. 17:6), simply "because he is your [Abraham's] offspring" (Gen 21:13; cf. 25:12–18). Similarly, Isaac blessed both Jacob and his eldest son Esau (Gen 27:39–40; cf. Heb 11:20), and Yahweh made Esau into a mighty nation (i.e. Edom; Gen 36:1, 43) and settled him in the hill country of Seir (Gen 36:8; Deut 2:5; Josh 24:4).<sup>10</sup> Finally, Jacob's "seed" included "his sons and his sons' sons with him, his daughters and his sons' daughters," all who went down to Egypt (Gen 46:6–7) and became known as "the people of Israel" (Exod 1:7). As the natural descendants of Abra(ha)m, they were also deemed his "seed" (Gen 15:13).

2. *Not all Abraham's natural "seed" as the "seed" of promise.* Nevertheless, not all who were Abraham's biological "offspring" enjoyed permanent reception of covenant privilege or the promises given to the "seed." The narrowing focus on particular "seed" among the natural line occurs in one of two ways: (1) explicit divine selection or (2) human forfeiture. Within Scripture's developing plot, the combination of the two climaxes in the person and work of Jesus.

a. *Narrowing of the "seed" by divine selection.* On the surface, the initial promise to Abram in Gen 12:7 appears to be all-inclusive: "To your offspring I will give this land." As the narrative progresses, however, the reader is shown that only those

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<sup>10</sup> The text never explicitly refers to Esau as Isaac's "seed," but such is clearly implied.

children descending from Isaac and then Jacob would inherit the land.<sup>11</sup> Ishmael was Abraham's first biological son, and as a true "seed" of the patriarch, he would enjoy special privilege (Gen 17:20; 21:13, see above). Nevertheless, Ishmael's own progeny and property would not be directly associated with what is known as the Abrahamic covenant, for God declared, "And my covenant I will establish *with Isaac*" (17:21; cf. v. 19) and "*through Isaac* seed will be named to you" (21:12; cf. v. 10). Citing this latter passage, Paul states that only "the children of promise are counted as offspring," thus showing that some biological "seed" are not viewed as Abraham's "children" from a covenantal perspective (Rom 9:7–8). Similarly, while Esau was born before his twin brother, Jacob received the firstborn birthright and blessing (Gen 27:27–29; cf. 25:29–34), in accordance with Yahweh's decree that "older will serve younger" (Gen 25:23; cf. Rom 9:12). Jacob's "seed" would become like "the dust of the earth" and through him and his "offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (28:14). The "seed" of Jacob would thus be a subset within the greater "seed" of Abraham and stand as a testimony to God's elective purposes for different peoples: "And I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated" (Mal 1:2–3; cf. Rom 9:13). Furthermore, the "offspring" of Ishmael and Esau would actually become part of the focus of the Abrahamic covenant's missionary effort.<sup>12</sup>

b. *Narrowing of the "seed" by human forfeiture.* Along with divine selection, the narrowing of "seed" language is also evident in the way Genesis takes pains to show how certain characters' lifestyles resulted in their forfeiting "seed" status. For

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<sup>11</sup> Genesis as a whole witnesses a progressive narrowing of focus, beginning with the whole world and ending with "the descendants of Abraham in the direct line as sole claimants to the land of Canaan" (Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* [ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992] 109). Matthew A. Thomas rightly observes that the five major *toledot* divisions in Genesis move from the heavens and earth (Gen 2:4) to Adam (Gen 5:1) to Noah (Gen 6:9) to Shem (Gen 11:10), and to Jacob (Gen 37:2), which evidences a movement from: (1) all creation to (2) humanity in general to (3) all living humanity (after the execution of the rest) to (4) a subset of living humanity (through a shift in genealogical focus) and finally to (5) Israel (*These Are the Generations: Identity, Covenant, and the "Toledot" Formula* [Library of Hebrew Bible/OT Studies 551; New York: T&T Clark, 2011] 73; cf. David M. Carr, "βίβλος γενέσεως Revisited: A Synchronic Analysis of Patterns in Genesis as Part of the Torah," *ZAW* 110 [1998] 159–72, 327–47; DeRouchie, "Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the *Toledot* Structure of Genesis" 219–47). The book's general narrowing is accompanied by further specification that a unique "seed" would overcome the world's curse by blessing, bringing the joy of reconciliation with God to all the families of the earth. The promise of blessing mediation begins broadly by highlighting that the first woman would produce a single, male deliverer (Gen 3:15). We then learn that he would descend from the line of Abraham (Gen 22:17b–18), through the next two sons receiving the firstborn blessing (i.e. Isaac [Gen 24:60; 26:4] and Jacob [Gen 27:27–29; 28:14; cf. 25:29–34]), and then through Judah (Gen 49:8–10), after his three older brothers forfeited their right through shameful acts (Reuben [Gen 49:3–4; cf. 35:22]; Simeon and Levi [Gen 49:5–7; cf. 34:25–26]) and after Judah led his family in securing safety from Joseph in Egypt (Gen 43:8–10; 44:14–18; 46:28).

<sup>12</sup> Note how the term מִשְׁפָּחָה "families/clans/kingship groups," which is found in the promise to Abram that "in you all the *families* of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3), is applied to the members in both the Table of Nations (Gen 10:32; cf. vv. 5, 18, 20, 31) and Esau's genealogy (Gen 36:40). This link suggests that the rejected lines highlighted in the segmented genealogies of Genesis are the very ones to whom Israel must serve as agent of blessing (DeRouchie, "Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the *Toledot* Structure of Genesis" 239–42).

example, H. D. Preuss insightfully observes that the stories of Lot's daughters (Gen 19:32, 34) and of Onan (Gen 38:8–9), both of which use “seed” language and are set in the context of the promises made to “seed,” are designed to distinguish those “who are *not* included among these descendants, why they cannot be included, and why their conduct is not right in the eyes of YHWH and consequently has no share in his promise” (cf. Gen 34:1–31 and 35:22 with 49:3–7).<sup>13</sup> Similarly, within Genesis the notion of “offspring” implies a resemblance between the producer and its “seed” (Gen 1:11–12), a quality highlighted when sons follow or depart from the pattern set by their fathers (e.g. Gen 12:10–20; 20:1–18 with 26:1–11).<sup>14</sup> Jesus echoed this principle when he declared to those claiming to be Abraham's “offspring,” “If you were children of Abraham, you would do the works of Abraham . . . [And] if God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here” (John 8:39, 42, cf. 33). He then recalls the promise in Gen 3:15 regarding the serpent's “seed” and destruction when he tags his listeners as children of the devil, for their will was to do their father's desires (8:44).

In Genesis, the “seed” designation necessitates ethical and spiritual conformity to God's call to “walk before me and be blameless” (Gen 17:1).<sup>15</sup> Such were the “conditions” for enjoying the Abrahamic covenant and for participating in its ultimate fulfillment. Only by “being a blessing” in this way would the worldwide curse be overcome and all the families of the earth be blessed (Gen 12:2–3).<sup>16</sup> Not to live this way would leave Abraham's special natural “seed” looking no different than their pagan neighbors.

The above texts suggest that even those who were born into the Abrahamic covenant community and who received the covenant sign could, through unforgiven sin, lose their covenant privilege and identity as “seed,” at least from God's perspective. The natural implication is that Paul's statement “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (Rom 9:8) is true in more than one way—that the true “Israel” to which “God is good” is made up of up “those who are pure in heart” (Ps 73:1) and that “a true Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a

<sup>13</sup> H. D. Preuss, “זרע זָרָא; זֶרַע זְרָא,” in *TDOT* 4:154.

<sup>14</sup> So Alexander, “Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis” 260.

<sup>15</sup> In the days of Noah, he alone exemplified blamelessness, walking with God, and righteousness (6:9). By nature, however, he was no different than any other human (Gen 6:5; 8:21), which highlights that his pursuit of God was all due to divine “grace” [חַן] (Gen 6:8). When linked with the fact that Abra(ha)m was counted righteous by faith in Yahweh and his “seed” promise (Gen 15:4–6), we highlight that fulfilling the “blessing-commission” of Gen 12:2–3 would only be accomplished by grace through faith. With this, it seems plausible that “seed” language is closely tied to the “image” language of the early chapters of Genesis, for in Gen 4:25 and 5:3 Seth is deemed Adam's “seed,” born in his likeness. Just as God created man in his own image (Gen 1:26–28), so, too, Adam became the father of a “seed” in his own image and likeness (Gen 5:1–3). For a development of the significance of OT faith being in the “offspring” promise, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Is It the Case That Christ Is the Same Object of Faith in the OT? (Genesis 15:1–6),” *JETS* 55 (2012) 291–98.

<sup>16</sup> For this reading of the imperative “be a blessing” in Gen 12:2 followed by the *veyiqtol* “and they shall be blessed,” see Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Promise* (NSBT 23; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007) 78–79, 82–84; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 230–34.



matter of the heart, by the Spirit" (Rom 2:29). God's perspective was that every member had to himself remain faithful to the covenant in order to retain his "seed" status, to enjoy sustained covenant blessing, and ultimately to participate in the worldwide blessing.

c. *Divine commitment, human responsibility, and the work of Christ.* Affirming mankind's innate sinfulness (Gen 6:5; 8:21), the fact that the world's hopes for blessing and reconciliation with God rested on Abraham's "seed" remaining faithful (e.g. Gen 12:1–3; 17:1; 18:19; 22:16–18; 26:5) creates a tension within the biblical plotline that is only resolved in the work of Christ.<sup>17</sup> Some have tried to remove the tension by positing two distinct Abrahamic covenants in Genesis 15 and 17, the first temporal, unilateral/unconditional, and national and the second eternal, bilateral/conditional, and international.<sup>18</sup> However, these texts more likely point to two distinct aspects of the same covenant.<sup>19</sup> Both texts address "seed," "land," and God-dependence, and together they progressively develop the two halves of the Gen 12:1–3 command + promise schema: *going* to the land will result in nationhood (Gen 12:1–2; chap. 15), and *being a blessing* will overcome the curse and bless all families of the earth (12:2–3; chap. 17).<sup>20</sup> With this, the covenant-making ceremony in Gen 15:9–18 highlights the perpetual, binding nature of the divine promise of nationhood,<sup>21</sup> whereas the call to walk with God blamelessly in Gen 17:1 stresses the need for Abraham's "seed" to remain loyal to the covenant in order to generate

<sup>17</sup> For conditionality in the Abrahamic covenant, see Bruce K. Waltke, "The Phenomenon of Conditionality within Unconditional Covenants," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison* (ed. A. Gileadi; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 123–39; William J. Dumbrell, "The Prospect of Unconditionality in the Sinaitic Covenant," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration* 141–55; Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the OT: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) 199, 419–21; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27* (AB 3B; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 2338–42, 2343–46; Craig A. Blaising, "The Structure of Biblical Covenants: The Covenants Prior to Christ," in *Progressive Dispensationalism* (ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) 133–34; David Andrew Dean, "Covenant, Conditionality, and Consequence: New Terminology and a Case Study in the Abrahamic Covenant," *JETS* 57 (2014) 281–308.

<sup>18</sup> See most recently Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and Its Covenantal Development in Genesis* (JSOTSup 315; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), esp. 212–14; idem, *Sealed with an Oath*, esp. 84–91; cf. idem, "Covenant," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000) 422–24; idem, "Covenant," in *Dictionary of the OT: Pentateuch* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003) 146–48.

<sup>19</sup> See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 275–80, 89.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath* 77–84; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 233–35.

<sup>21</sup> While some scholars offer alternative explanations, the covenant ratification ceremony in Genesis 15 most likely implies a self-maledictory divine oath (so Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998] 195–96; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 250–56). For an overview of the question, see Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Meaning of the Animal Rite in Gen 15," *JSOT* 19 (1981) 61–78; cf. Gordon J. Wenham, "The Symbolism of the Animal Rite in Gen 15: A Response to F. F. Hasel," *JSOT* 22 (1982) 134–37; Richard S. Hess, "The Slaughter of the Animals in Genesis 15: Genesis 15:8–21 and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context," in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12–50* (2d ed.; ed. R. S. Hess, G. J. Wenham, and P. E. Satterthwaite; Cambridge: Tyndale, 1993) 55–65.

a worldwide community under the patriarch's headship. As such, the Abrahamic promise of global blessing will be fulfilled, but only through a faithful Israel.<sup>22</sup>

In the history of Israel, the majority of Abraham's special natural "seed" forfeited their distinct status through covenant rebellion. As Moses testified just before his death, the very audience that he could in one breath tag the "seed" of the patriarchs (Deut 1:8; 4:37; 10:15; 11:9; 34:4) he could also declare "no longer [Yahweh's] sons" because they were "a crooked and twisted generation" (Deut 32:5), "a generation of perversity" and "sons in whom is not faithfulness" (Deut 32:20). Ultimately, because the disobedience of the "seed" of Abraham would continue beyond Moses' generation (Deut 28:46, 59; 31:16, 27), Yahweh would cut them down to a small remnant and scatter them among the nations (Deut 4:27; 28:62, 64; 31:17, 29).

Nevertheless, in the "latter days," moved by Yahweh's discipline and mercy, Israel would return to the Lord and heed his voice (Deut 4:30–31; 30:2, 8). God would first take them out of exile and restore them to the land (Deut 30:3–5). He would then give them new hearts and empower love, and he would curse all enemies (Deut 30:6–7; cf. Gen 12:3). Deuteronomy connects this change from deafness (Deut 29:4[3]) to heeding God's voice with a prophet like but superior to Moses (Deut 18:15, 18; 34:10–12), and the Scripture elsewhere identifies this one as Israel's representative king, Messiah Jesus. He is the ultimate "offspring" who would overcome all enemy power and secure blessing and salvation for Israel and the world (Gen 3:15; 22:17b–18; Isa 49:3, 5–6; Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:8, 14, 16). He would operate like Moses as the new prophetic mediator, overseeing the new covenantal economy (Deut 18:15, 18; 34:10–12; Luke 7:16; John 1:21, 25, 45; Acts 3:22–26; 7:36–37, 52) and guiding it by his law (Isa 42:4; Matt 7:24–27; 17:5; 28:19–20; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 1:1–2). God's unilateral covenant purposes would be brought to fulfillment not only through a faithful covenant Father but also through a faithful

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<sup>22</sup> This is exactly the pattern witnessed to in ancient grants of royal succession and land outside the Bible. What made grant treaties distinct from suzerain-vassal treaties was that, in contrast to suzerain-vassal treaties that could be absolved, grant treaties were perpetually binding, ensuring that the promised land or kingship would stay in the family, even if certain individuals forfeited their participation in the covenant blessing. One example is found in a grant bestowed by Hattusili III of Hatti on Ulmi-Teshshup of Tarhuntassa: "If any son or grandson of yours commits an offense, then the king of Hatti shall question him. . . . If he is deserving of death, he shall perish, but his household and land shall not be taken from him and given to the progeny of another" (Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts* [2d ed.; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999] 109). By calling royal grants "unconditional" and suzerain-vassal treaties "conditional," many scholars have missed the fact that both treaty types included conditional elements but that the grant alone was perpetually binding. For the ancient Near Eastern data, see Moshe Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the OT and in the Ancient Near East," *JAOs* 90 (1970) 184–203; Gary N. Knoppers, "Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants and the Davidic Covenant: A Parallel?" *JAOs* 116 (1996) 670–97; cf. Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975). Scholars have traditionally linked the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants with royal grants and the Mosaic covenant with suzerain-vassal treaties, and I believe these connections are right and essential in order to maintain the necessary discontinuity Paul highlights between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants (Gal 3:17), which itself anticipates the discontinuity between the old and new. While the Mosaic covenant was broken, temporary, and superseded by the new in Christ's fulfillment, Christ's coming and the birth of the church uniquely consummate the Abrahamic covenant.

covenant “seed” or Son, whose active obedience would meet all necessary conditions (Rom 5:18; Phil 2:8; cf. Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5), providing freedom from the law’s condemning power and supplying all the righteousness that the law requires (Rom 3:21–26; Phil 3:8–9; Col 2:13–14).<sup>23</sup>

3. *The offspring of proselytes considered “seed” of Abraham.* While not all natural descendants of Abraham carry the covenant promise throughout their generations, whether due to their rejected status or their forfeiture of privilege, the Abrahamic covenant community itself was also not limited to the patriarch’s biological “seed.” Indeed, every permanent constituent of an Israelite household, whether native-born or not, was considered a full covenant member with all the privileges and responsibilities pertaining thereto, and this was the case both at the time of the patriarchs and in the age of Mosaic Yahwism. In Gen 17:12, for example, God declared to Abraham and his “offspring” that every male throughout their generations needed to be circumcised, including “those born in the house or bought with money from any son of a foreigner [בְּנֵי־נֶכְרִי], who is *not* from your offspring.” Just as Eliezer was *not* Abra(ha)m’s “seed” but was a full member of the patriarch’s household who could have been heir had there not been a biological son (Gen 15:2–3), so both sons and servants alike were circumcised, attesting to their status as full covenant members.

Similarly, the Israel of the exodus was a “mixed multitude” (Exod 12:38; cf. Lev 24:10–11), made up of “native born” [אֲזִרָה] and “alien” [גֵּר] who together were allowed to celebrate the Passover (Exod 12:44, 48–49). In the years following, the circumcised alien “shall be as the native of the land” (Exod 12:48), but a “son of a foreigner” [בְּנֵי־נֶכְרִי], a “temporary sojourner” [תּוֹשֵׁב], or a “hireling” [שָׂכִיר] who failed to be circumcised and thus refused to integrate into Israelite society and worship could not partake of the feast that recalled Israel’s new birth as a people (Exod 12:43, 45).<sup>24</sup> Thus, D. Kellermann recognizes that native Israelites were to treat a resident alien (who was circumcised if a male) as a “fully integrated proselyte,” regarded and loved as if he were native-born (Lev 19:34; Ezek 4:22; cf. Exod 12:49; Lev 24:22; Num 9:14; 15:29).<sup>25</sup> Some examples in Scripture include Rahab the Canaanite harlot (Josh 6:25), Ruth the Moabitess (Ruth 4:13, 17), and Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam 11:3–5; 12:10), all of whom play a role shaping Jesus’ lineage (see Matt 1:5–6).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> For a development of the covenantal necessity for the perfect obedience of Christ, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 643, 666, 705–6.

<sup>24</sup> For the role and status of the alien and foreigner in OT religion, see R. J. D. Knauth, “Alien, Foreign Resident,” in *DOTP* 26–33; cf. G. H. Haas, “Slave, Slavery,” in *DOTP* 778–83; K. Kuhn, “προσηλύτος,” *TDNT* 6:728–29.

<sup>25</sup> D. Kellerman, “גֵּר,” *TDOT* 2:447.

<sup>26</sup> As is frequent in the LXX, the Greek rendering of גֵּר in Exod 12:48–49 is προσήλυτος. In the ancient world, national identity was substantially gained through political affiliation (note how often גוֹ “nation” is paired with מֶלֶךְ “king” or מַמְלָכָה “kingdom”), but many factors like ethnicity, territory, theology, kingship, and language also contributed (Daniel I. Block, “Nations/Nationality,” in *NIDOTTE* 4:966–69; idem, “The Role of Language in Ancient Israelite Perceptions of National Identity,” *JBL* 103 [1984] 321–40; Ronald E. Clements and G. Johannes Botterweck, “גוֹ,” in *TDOT* 2:426, 428–29). Most significant for this discussion is how much Israel’s national identity was determined by

Working from this perspective, Moses addresses his entire audience as “Israel” (Deut 1:1; 5:1; 27:9; 29:1; 31:1; 32:45), which includes “the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the alien [גֵר] who is in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water” (Deut 29:10–11). Moses tags this same group the “seed” of the “fathers” (Deut 1:8; 4:37; 10:15; 11:9; 34:4; cf. 6:10; 9:5; 29:13; 30:20), which suggests that every child of a covenant member was considered “offspring,” even if his or her ethnic ancestry included foreign blood. The narrator of Joshua, too, applies the title כְּלִי־יִשְׂרָאֵל “all Israel” to “native born” [אֲזֻרָה] and “resident alien” [גֵר] alike (Josh 8:33).

Two points are significant. First, the participation of non-racial Israelites in the covenant shows that neither circumcision nor the covenant associated with the rite was race-restrictive.<sup>27</sup> God’s promises were for all who would devote themselves to him. Second, when Paul used the ethnic term “Jew” in contrast to “Greek” in Gal 3:28 and elsewhere (e.g. Rom 1:16), his reference parallels in some manner the way “Israel” is used in distinction from the “nations” in the OT (cf. 2 Kgs 25:25; Jer 34:9; Zech 8:23; Dan 3:12; Esther and Ezra-Nehemiah). That is, for Paul, the term “Jew” pointed to Israelites, both those who were native-born and all God-fearing proselytes who had submitted themselves to circumcision and the rest of the law. In contrast, the “nations/Gentiles” were a different group, and no OT texts we have addressed thus far suggest that those from the “nations” were considered Abraham’s “seed.”<sup>28</sup> One wonders, then, how Paul in Rom 4:18 could ap-

ethnic and/or racial-biological distinctions. While the importance of such features varied in the ancient world, Block has noted a number of factors that suggest ancient Israel had a high sense of ethnic and racial cohesion (“Nations/Nationality,” 4:967–68): (1) the use of the eponym “Israel” as the national name; (2) the designation of the nation as “sons of Israel,” “house of Israel/Jacob,” and “seed of Israel”; (3) national and tribal genealogies; and (4) diligently preserved traditions of the patriarchal ancestors. He thus concludes that Israel’s “core population was perceived to be ethnically united” and that “membership within ... [Israel’s] national state was determined by affiliation with an ethnic group” (4:968). While it appears that Israel’s national identity was highly influenced by ethnic and racial distinctions, it is nevertheless clear that national states like Israel were *not* ethnically or racially pure. Inter-marriage (e.g. Gen 34:15–16), the incorporation of native Canaanites (e.g. Joshua 9), dynastic marriages (e.g. 1 Kgs 16:31), the engagement of foreigners in royal service (e.g. 2 Sam 15:18–23; 1 Chr 27:30–31), and the identification of foreigners with Israel in its worship of Yahweh (e.g. Exod 12:48; Ruth 1:16) all contributed to the introduction of extraneous elements into Israelite society (*ibid.*).

<sup>27</sup> For circumcision as a covenant sign, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “Circumcision in the Hebrew Bible and Targums: Theology, Rhetoric, and the Handling of Metaphor,” *BBR* 14 (2004) 175–203, esp. 182–89; see also John Meade’s essay on circumcision in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* and Stephen J. Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (New American Commentary Studies in Bible & Theology; ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright; Nashville: B&H, 2006) 97–161.

<sup>28</sup> In light of Ishmael being among Abra(ha)m’s *natural* “seed,” we can say that both Jews and Arabs are Abraham’s “seed” in this way (so too Michael Riccardi, “The Seed of Abraham: A Theological Analysis of Galatians 3 and Its Implications for Israel,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 25 [2014] 58). However, once the focus is on the special subset of Abraham’s “offspring” through whom the covenant would be fulfilled, the Bible considers anyone outside the ethnic community as part of the “nations” and therefore part of the mission field (for more, see DeRouchie, “Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the *Toledot* Structure of Genesis” 239–42).

ply a text like Gen 15:5 (“So shall your offspring be”) to include a remnant from the nations/Gentiles.

#### IV. ABRAHAM, FATHER OF A MULTITUDE OF NATIONS

Having assessed the makeup of Israel’s covenant community, we are now able to wrestle with the relationship of OT Israel to the nations and the long-range promises regarding Gentile participation in the one family of God. I have already noted how Paul applies Gen 17:5 to Jews *and* Gentiles in Christ (Rom 4:17). With this, Paul most likely cites Gen 17:8 when he states in Gal 3:16, “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his seed. It does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your seed,’ who is Christ.” These references demand a closer look at Genesis 17.

1. *Abraham’s fatherhood—by nature or adoption?* In Gen 17:5, Yahweh changes the patriarch’s name from *Abram*, “exalted father,” to *Abraham*, “father of a multitude,” thus highlighting his revealed destiny (cf. Gen 4:1, 25; 5:29; 16:15).<sup>29</sup> Specifically, God would make Abraham “a *father* of a multitude of *nations*” (Gen 17:4–5), the fulfillment of which Paul identifies when he writes, “In you [Abraham] shall all the nations be blessed” (Gal 3:8; see Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; cf. 12:3; 28:14). Yahweh further promised, “I will give you for nations, and kings will come from you” (Gen 17:6), and then he reiterated the same proclamation with respect to Sarah (Gen 17:16). Similar promises were reiterated to Jacob: “A nation and a company of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your loins” (Gen 35:11); “Behold, I am making you fruitful and will multiply you, and I will make you for a company of peoples” (Gen 48:4).<sup>30</sup>

Two observations suggest that the paternal language used in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’s relationship to the nations connotes a family tie that is *not* restricted to or perhaps even associated with biological descent. First, throughout the OT, the plural form “nations” [גוֹיִם] most commonly refers to political entities larger than

<sup>29</sup> So Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC 2; Dallas: Word, 1994) 21.

<sup>30</sup> Another noteworthy passage is Gen 48:19, wherein Jacob declares that Joseph’s youngest son Ephraim would become greater than his older brother and that “his offspring would become the fullness of the nations” [וַיִּרְעוּ יְהוָה מְלֵא הַגּוֹיִם]. What this key phrase means, however, is obscure, though most scholars suggest that it echoes 17:4–6 and 35:11. Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks suggest it points to Ephraim becoming chief among the northern tribes (*Genesis: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zonderan, 2001] 600), a view similar to that of C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, who write, “This blessing began to be fulfilled from the time of the Judges, when the tribe of Ephraim so increased in extent and power, that it took the lead of the northern tribes and became the head of the ten tribes, and its name acquired equal importance with the name Israel, whereas under Moses, Manasseh had numbered 20,000 more than Ephraim (Num. xxvi. 34 and 37)” (*The First Book of Moses (Genesis)* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986] 1:384–85). In contrast, Victor P. Hamilton suggests that “the Hebrew text opens the possibility of the intermixture of non-Israelite peoples with the tribe of Ephraim” (cf. *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995] 639 n. 7). Chee-Chiew Lee develops a twist off this latter option when she observes that plural nouns can be used for intensification and suggests the phrase means “the descendants of Ephraim would become ‘full of the qualities that the nations would entail’” (Chee-Chiew Lee, “גוֹיִם [sic] in Genesis 35:11 and the Abrahamic Promise of Blessing for the Nations,” *JETS* 52 [2009] 469–70).

tribes and usually not including Israel.<sup>31</sup> As such, because the promise to Sarah that “she shall become nations” (Gen 17:16) most likely reiterates the parental promise made to Abraham (Gen 17:6; meaning the two promises refer to the same reality) and because two nations (Israel through Sarah’s grandson Jacob and Edom through her grandson Esau) seem far from the “multitude” promised, the parenthood to which Gen 17:4–6, 16 refer most likely points to a non-biological relationship of authority.<sup>32</sup> Second, while the Ishmaelites, Edomites, Midianites, and several other peoples mentioned in the genealogy lists of Genesis 25 and 36 biologically derived from Abraham, only the one nation of Israel is known to have descended from Jacob.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, the fact that Jacob is to bring forth a “company of nations” suggests his “family” is larger than Israel and will include some adopted from other nations. In T. Desmond Alexander’s words, the very fact that Gen 35:11 distinguishes between a “nation” and a “company of nations” seems to imply that “whereas many nations will be closely associated with [Jacob], only one nation will be directly descended from him.”<sup>34</sup>

Abraham’s paternal relationship over the nations is principally an elected rather than formal/biological association.<sup>35</sup> This more figurative use of “father” language parallels the ancient world’s use of the term for various authoritative or shepherding social roles, whether advisor (Gen 45:18), priest (Judg 18:19), king (1 Sam 24:11), master (2 Kgs 2:12; 5:13), prophet (2 Kgs 6:21), governor (Isa 22:20–21), or legal protector (Job 29:12–16).<sup>36</sup> Perhaps most significant is the designation

<sup>31</sup> On my count, of the 504 instances of  $\text{יִשְׂרָאֵל}$  in the Hebrew OT, only 53 refer to what would become known as Israel (= 10.52%; see Gen 12:2; 18:18; 35:11; 46:3; Exod 19:6; 33:13; Deut 26:5; 32:28; Josh 3:17; 5:6, 8; 10:13; Judg 2:20; 2 Sam 7:23; 1 Chr 17:21; 2 Chr 15:6; Pss 33:12; 43:1; 83:4; 106:5; Isa 1:4; 9:3; 10:6; 26:2, 15; 49:7; 58:2; Jer 2:11; 5:9, 29; 7:28; 9:8[9]; 31:36; 33:24; Ezek 2:3; 36:13–14; 37:22; Mic 4:7; Zeph 2:1, 9; Hag 2:14; Mal 3:9). If one only treats the 108 singular instances, 52 point to Israel (48.15%). Ezekiel 2:3 is the only occurrence of plural  $\text{יִשְׂרָאֵלִים}$  referring to Israel’s “tribes” and not “nations,” unless the plural references in the Abrahamic promises also point only to Israel and not the Gentiles (see Gen 17:4–6, 16; 35:11; 48:19), which seems unlikely in light of the contrast of Israel with the “nations” in these contexts (see Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; cf. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50* 381; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20* [AB 22; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983] 63). For a discussion of these texts that shows how unlikely it is that  $\text{יִשְׂרָאֵלִים}$  refers to Israel’s “tribes,” see Lee, “ $\text{יִשְׂרָאֵלִים}$  in Genesis 35:11” 468–70.

<sup>32</sup> So also W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the OT Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1984) 73; T. Desmond Alexander, “Abraham Re-Assessed Theologically: The Abraham Narrative and the NT Understanding of Justification by Faith,” in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12–50* (ed. R. S. Hess, G. J. Wenham, and P. E. Satterthwaite; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 17–18; idem, “Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings” 200–201; Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 2004) 210.

<sup>33</sup> Along with the nation of Israel, the nations that biologically derive through Abraham come from the descendants of Ishmael (Gen 25:12–18), the descendants of Abraham’s concubine Keturah (Gen 25:1–5), and the descendants of Esau (Gen 36:1–19, 31–43).

<sup>34</sup> Alexander, “Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings” 201 n. 22.

<sup>35</sup> Williamson has further observed that in every other place where the construction found in Gen 17:4 occurs (i.e. the inseparable preposition  $\text{וְ}$  + the noun  $\text{אָב}$  in a resultative sense), a non-physical concept of fatherhood is always in view (*Abraham, Israel, and the Nations* 158–60; idem, *Sealed with An Oath* 88).

<sup>36</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, “ $\text{אָב}$ ,” in *NIDOTTE* 1:221; cf. Helmer Ringgren, “ $\text{אָב}$  ‘abb,’” in *TDOT* 1:1–19. See also Alexander, “Abraham Re-Assessed Theologically” 17–18; idem, “Royal Expectations in

of kings as “fathers” of their vassal peoples (cf. 1 Sam 24:11, 16).<sup>37</sup> While Abraham himself is never called a king in the Hebrew text, a number of textual hints, both in and outside Genesis, suggest that the biblical authors viewed him like one. Already noted are the texts that state the patriarch would produce a royal line: “kings will come from you” (Gen 17:6, 16; 35:11). Also, God promises Abra(ha)m that he would become a great nation, bear a great name, and receive divine protection (Gen 12:2; cf. 18:18; 35:11; 46:3), all of which are qualities that point to a royal future for Abraham and his descendants (cf. 2 Sam 7:9; Ps 72:17).<sup>38</sup> Abra(ha)m’s battle with the northern kings (Gen 14:1–24), his covenant with Abimelech (Gen 21:22–34), and his standing in the eyes of the Canaanites (Gen 23:6) all portrayed the patriarch with status similar to his contemporary monarchs.<sup>39</sup> With this, the LXX translator called Abraham βασιλεύς “king” in place of his title נָשִׂיא “prince” in Gen 23:6, and Matthew opened his Gospel with a royal genealogy for the “King of the Jews”: “the genealogy of Jesus Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1; cf. 2:2).<sup>40</sup> It seems plausible, then, to understand Abraham’s fatherhood over the nations primarily as a royal designation by which he and his wife Sarah, the “princess” (Gen 17:15), are regarded as the founders of a new dynasty that will climax in a specific, royal descendant who will rule Israelites (both native-born and alien residents) and those from vassal nations.

2. *The implications of Abraham’s fatherhood.* Because blood tie is not determinative in Abraham’s “fatherhood,” his status and role, at least with all nations other than Israel, must be established on the basis of covenantal adoption. Nevertheless, while this adoption will *result from* the “covenant of circumcision” (Genesis 17), the adoption is *not into* this specific covenant in its original form, for all circumcised members of the community (whether the alien resident or the father, son, or household servant among the native born) were considered part of *one nation* later named Israel (Gen 17:12; Josh 8:33)—a nation that is here only one part of the “multitude of nations” parented or overseen by Abraham (likely through his royal representative, Gen 17:6).<sup>41</sup>

These observations give rise to at least three significant implications. First, Genesis 17 highlights the progression of two distinct covenant eras that were al-

Genesis to Kings” 201; Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations* 158–60; Lee, “גִּים in Genesis 35:11” 473–74.

<sup>37</sup> For an example in Mesopotamian literature, see Ringgren, “נָשִׂיא ‘abb,’” *TDOT* 1:3; on the use of adoption language in covenant relationships, see Weinfeld, “Covenant of Grant in the OT and in the Ancient Near East” 190–94.

<sup>38</sup> For more on royal ideology in the Abrahamic narrative, see Ronald E. Clements, *Abraham and David* (London: SCM, 1967); E. Ruprecht, “Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund der einzelnen Elemente von Gen. 12:2–3,” *VT* 29 (1979) 444–64; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* 275; James Hamilton, “The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham,” *TynBul* 58 (2007) 266–72.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander, “Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings” 205.

<sup>40</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 465 n. 15.

<sup>41</sup> Beale rightly observes, “The *covenantal* promise in [Gen] 17:7 to Abraham’s ‘seed’ that God would ‘be God to you and to your seed’ is made to the ethnic seed through Sarah and the patriarchs, not to the nations mentioned in 17:4–6” (*Book of Revelation* 429).

ready anticipated in the framework of Gen 12:1–3, where Abra(ha)m must first “go” to the land in order to become a nation (realized in the Mosaic covenant) and then once there “be a blessing” in order for all the families of the earth to be blessed (realized through Christ in the new covenant).<sup>42</sup> The initial period is shaped by Abraham’s biological descendants living in the promised land as a nation that would become known as Israel under the Mosaic covenant. They would claim the promised land, bearing the charge to heed God’s voice in order to serve as mediators and displays of God’s holiness to the world (Exod 19:4–6; Deut 4:5–8). That is the initial era. Next comes the final period, the age of fulfillment, which is enjoyed only after Abraham’s royal “seed” (realized in Jesus Messiah) serves as agent of curse-overcoming blessing to the world. During this new covenant period, God would reconcile mankind, and Abraham would stand as the father of many nations—a fatherhood manifest through an earthly royal descendant who would rule over all (Gen 17:4–6; cf. 22:17b–18; 49:8, 10; Isa 9:6). Within Genesis, the hope of blessing reaching the nations (Gen 12:3) is dependent on a single, male, royal offspring (Gen 22:17b–18; 49:8–10), the fulfillment of which only comes in the person of Jesus (see Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:8, 14, 16). Furthermore, the age of Jesus and faith brings an end to the law covenant but the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (Gal 3:24–26)—a redemptive-historical progression that identifies the temporary nature of the Abrahamic covenant’s stage one (= the Mosaic covenant) and the permanent nature of the Abrahamic covenant’s stage two (= the new covenant).

Second, at one level, both the covenant and land promised should be treated as “eternal,” for God would fulfill his purposes for the Abrahamic covenant progeny and property (Gen 17:7–8; cf. Deut 4:31).<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, at another level, the eternality is qualified by the period of fulfillment. That is, while the Abrahamic covenant is eternal, both the participation and property aspects get transformed in the age of the Messiah. Genesis 17 envisions a day when Abraham’s “fatherhood” will expand beyond ethnic Israelites to include the nations. The fact that God chose to use Israel (represented through her Messiah) as the agent of the world’s deliverance will ever establish a temporal, positional distinction within the one family of Abraham (see Rom 1:16; 2:9; cf. Acts 13:46). Yet as Paul would note, there are *natural* and *wild* branches in the tree of new covenant life (Rom 9:11–27; cf. 3:1–2; 9:4–

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<sup>42</sup> When two imperatives are linked via the conjunction *waw* (as in Gen 12:1–2 and 17:1), the second imperative is in some way contingent on the first (captured in GKC by the term “consequence,” §110f and i), while still maintaining its imperatival force (so esp. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 230–34; cf. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath* 78–79, 82–84). With this, when imperatives are followed by volitional *yiqtol*s, the latter often expresses purpose (GKC §108d; Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* [New York: Scribner’s, 1971] §107c). As is evident in Gen 17:1–2 where God commands, “Walk before me and be blameless so that I may give my covenant between me and you,” the grammar of the consecutive imperatives requires only that the second action be a consequence of the first and not fully temporally successive. Nevertheless, the two eras I see in the text are supported by the grammar.

<sup>43</sup> The term rendered here as “eternal” עולם (from עלם “what is hidden, concealed”) at base only means something that is so far-reaching that it stands beyond purview of the present audience. Literary and biblical context, however, can mark עולם as “eternal” in the traditional sense, and I think such is a legitimate rendering in light of both the self-maledictory covenant ratification ceremony of Genesis 15 and the way later biblical authors treat the new covenant era as the *fulfillment* of the Abrahamic covenant.



5; Eph 2:11–22), for the promise of a global inheritance is for both Jews and Gentiles, who share “the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all” (Rom 4:16; cf. Gal 3:18). With this, there is an implication that God’s kingdom will no longer be limited to the promised land but will, like the original vision for the garden of Eden, have expanded to include the planet and its numerous peoples (Gen 1:28; Matt 5:5; Rom 4:13; cf. Eph 6:2–3; Heb 11:13–16), God’s blessed glory filling the earth as the waters cover the sea (Num 14:21; Hab 2:14; Ps 72:19).<sup>44</sup> This kind of expansion is suggested in Gen 22:17b–18 where we are told that the unique, male deliverer will not only bless “all the nations of the earth” but will also possess “the gate of his enemies,” claiming once-enemy territory, his kingdom expanding to fill the earth (cf. Gen 24:60). The same expansion appears evident in Gen 26:3–4 where, in the context of the global blessing promise, God pledges to give Isaac and his “seed” not only “the land” but also “these lands” (plural).

Third, because Abraham will oversee Israel and many nations as covenant father, and because the particular male, royal descendent of Abraham alone will inaugurate the age of blessing (Gen 22:17b–18; Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:14, 16, 29), *Genesis 17 works with Gen 15:5 to set the stage for Paul, in a context of eschatological fulfillment in Christ, to identify Jews and Gentiles as having a place in the one family of Abraham apart from circumcision and the law that would later be associated with it.* That is, the progression from the Abrahamic and Mosaic administrations to the new covenant in Jesus answers how Paul can apply “seed” language to Christian Gentiles who never became Jewish proselytes. They are counted as “seed” only because they are identified by faith with *the* “seed, who is Christ.”<sup>45</sup> The makeup of the new covenant community is shaped around the connection with Christ through a faith like Abraham’s (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3–5). Whether Jew or Gentile, covenant membership requires adoption into Christ by faith (Rom 8:15; Gal 3:26; 4:4–5; Eph 1:5). This new covenant community stands distinct from that of the previous era because: (1) the members include elect from both ethnic Israel and many other nations of the world (Gen 17:4–5); (2) all of whom are heirs of the life-giving, barrenness-overcoming, miraculous power of God (17:21; 18:14; cf. Rom 4:19); (3) who have witnessed a pattern of faithfulness (Gen 12:2; 17:1); and (4) through this have become recipients of divine blessing (Gen 12:2–3; 22:18); and (5) who are now serving together under a king in the line of Abraham who bears global influence and rule (Gen 17:6; 49:8, 10). All of these are features of progressive covenantalism that highlight the centrality of Christ in God’s redemptive purposes.

<sup>44</sup> See Beale, *Temple and the Church’s Mission* 81–167. Perhaps more than any other, the prophet Isaiah progressively depicts how the vision of the exalted Zion is identified with the new creation as a whole (Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 468–70; cf. 703–16).

<sup>45</sup> See DeRouchie and Meyer, “Christ or Family as the ‘Seed’ of Promise?” 36–48, esp. 40–43. Interpreting Rev 7:9, Beale writes, “The Jewish Christian church is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise and . . . are able to participate in that fulfillment because they have identified with the Messiah from Judah (the head of the tribes in 7:4–8), who is the end-time fulfillment of the true Israelite ‘seed’ of Abraham (as in Gal. 3:16, 29)” (*Book of Revelation* 430).

## V. THE ESCHATOLOGICAL INCLUSION OF JEW AND GENTILE IN ABRAHAM'S "SEED"

While tagging Abraham as the future "father of a multitude of nations" sets the stage for non-Israelites in the age of fulfillment to be considered part of the Abrahamic "family," we have thus far not focused on any OT texts that overtly apply the term "seed" to non-biological descendants of Abraham (though Gen 15:5 and similar promises do so through their long-range fulfillment). The Pentateuch teaches that non-native aliens and household slaves could become Israelites and that their children would be considered the patriarch's "seed" (e.g. Rahab, Ruth, Uriah the Hittite), but this required full incorporation into the Abrahamic and (later) Mosaic covenant communities, including male circumcision and other law keeping (see Exod 12:48–49; Lev 19:34; Num 9:14).<sup>46</sup> There are a number of OT eschatological texts, however, especially in Isaiah and Jeremiah, which explicitly anticipate a broadening in how "seed" language is applied in the new covenant age of the Messiah. While Jeremiah ministered after Isaiah of Jerusalem, beginning my commentary with Jeremiah will serve the overall flow of this study.

1. *Jeremiah's vision of a trans-ethnic new covenant community.* In the OT, the phrase "new covenant" only occurs in Jer 31:31,<sup>47</sup> and there it is explicitly related to a transformed remnant from a reunited "Israel" (Jer 31:33), every member of which would, in the day of fulfilled restoration, enjoy forgiveness of sins leading to a true knowledge of God and to an internalization of his law (Jer 31:33–34; cf. 17:1).<sup>48</sup> Though many from this "nation" forfeited their "seed" status and perished due to covenant rebellion, God would nevertheless fulfill his unswerving commitment to "the offspring of Israel" (Jer 31:36–37) and "the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Jer 33:26). He would establish his "everlasting covenant" (Jer 32:40) through the rule of one of David's "offspring" (Jer 33:26), and both the capital Jerusalem and the king would be called "Yahweh is our righteousness" (Jer 23:5–6; 33:16). The new covenant community would enjoy proper unity and fear so that they and their children would never again turn away (Jer 32:39–40), and praise would be given to Yahweh for redeeming "the offspring of the house of Israel" from exile (Jer 23:8).

The texts just mentioned speak only of a restored national Israel under the Davidic king. Nevertheless, Jeremiah, "a prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5), affirmed from the book's earliest stages that the new covenant community would include a transformed remnant from ethnic Israelite *and* non-Israelite "nations."

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Lev. 24:22; Num. 15:29; Ezek 47:22. See Knauth, "Alien, Foreign Resident," *DOTP* 26–33; Haas, "Slave, Slavery," *DOTP* 778–83; Kuhn, "προσῆλυτος," *TDNT* 6:728–29.

<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere the major prophets refer to the same reality as an "everlasting covenant" (Isa 55:1–5; Jer 32:36–41; 50:2–5; Ezek 16:59–63; 37:15–28 [esp. v. 26]), a "covenant of peace" (Isa 54:1–10 [esp. vv. 9–10]; Ezek 34:20–31 [esp. v. 25]; 37:15–28 [esp. v. 26]), and the hope of a new or unified heart and a new spirit/Spirit (Jer 32:39; Ezek 11:18–21; 18:30–32; 36:24–32 [esp. v. 26]).

<sup>48</sup> For an exposition of Jer 31:31–34 with specific reference to the discussion of new covenant ecclesiology, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 491–516.

a. *The Abrahamic blessing reaching the nations in the context of Jerusalem.* In Jer 3:16–18 we read that, following Israel’s post-exilic return to the land (Jer 3:16), heart-changed people from every nation would gather to transformed Jerusalem, joining with a reunified Israel under the presence of God:

At that time, Jerusalem will be called the throne of Yahweh, and all the nations will be gathered to it, to the name of Yahweh, to Jerusalem. And they shall not walk any longer after the stubbornness of their evil heart.<sup>48</sup> In those days, the house of Judah will walk by the house of Israel, and they will go together from the land of Zaphon unto the land which I gave your fathers for a heritage” (Jer 3:17–18; cf. Isa 2:2–4 with 4:2–6).<sup>49</sup>

The text then anticipates the fulfillment of the Abrahamic blessing promise to the nations as an overflow of Israel’s loyalty: “If you, O Israel, will return—the declaration of Yahweh, then to me you shall return. And if you will remove your detestable things from my presence and not wander, then you shall swear, ‘As Yahweh lives,’ in truth, in justice, and in righteousness and the nations will declare themselves blessed in him [i.e. Yahweh], and in him they themselves will praise” (Jer 4:1–2; cf. Gen 22:18; 26:4 with 12:13; 18:18; 28:14).<sup>50</sup>

b. *Once evil neighbors incorporated into the midst of God’s people.* Next, speaking of Yahweh’s “evil neighbors” who oppressed and deceived Israel and among whom God’s people were scattered, Jer 12:16–17 reads: “And it shall come to pass, if they [i.e. the evil neighbors] will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, ‘As Yahweh lives,’ even as they taught my people to swear by the Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people. But if they will not listen, then I will utterly pluck up that nation and destroy it.” While the once evil neighbors are here distinguished from the redeemed Judah, the promise is that these foreigners, by turning from their evil schemes and surrendering to Yahweh and his ways, could become fully integrated into the community of God—listening to Yahweh, living for him, and treasuring him as the One worthy of their allegiance (cf. Deut 30:8). We thus see here further anticipation of the fulfillment of Abraham’s international fatherhood (Gen 17:4–5).

c. *Foreigners with new identities worshipping Yahweh their God and David their king.* Later, in the section of the book that develops most fully the doctrine of new covenant restoration (Jeremiah 30–33), we read that this same group of foreigners,

<sup>49</sup> For more on Jer 3:16–18 within its biblical context, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “Making the Ten Count: Reflections on the Lasting Message of the Decalogue,” in *For Our Good Always: Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block* (ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Jason Gile, and Kenneth J. Turner; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013) 419–21. The NT stresses that believers through Christ are already identified with the new Jerusalem (Gal 4:26) and have already “come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb 12:22; cf. Gal 4:26, 31), even as we await the consummation when our eternal dwelling with God will come to the new earth (Rev 21:1–2).

<sup>50</sup> For a developed discussion of this text that affirms it indeed speaks of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic blessing promise, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 484–87.

having turned away from the yoke of Babylon (Jer 30:8),<sup>51</sup> would serve “Yahweh their God and David their king” (Jer 30:9). Specifically, Jer 30:8–11 reads:

And it shall come to pass in that day ... that I will break his yoke from off your neck, and I will burst your bonds, and foreigners [גֵּרִים] shall no more serve with him. But they shall serve Yahweh their God and David their king, whom I will raise up. But as for you, do not fear, O Jacob my servant ... , for I will save you from far away, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. ... I will make a full end of the nations among whom I scattered you, but of you I will not make a full end.

In this text, the deliverance of Israel (addressed with the 2ms “you”) would be accompanied by a number of foreigners (referred to with 3mp “they/their”) finding refuge with them under “Yahweh *their* God and David *their* king” (cf. Ezek 34:24; 37:23–24; Hos 3:5, all with respect to Israel). While the shift in grammatical person and number and the emphatic “but as for you” in verse 10 distinguishes Israel from these foreigners, the fact that verse 11 speaks of the “nations” being destroyed suggests that these “foreigners” have somehow gained new identities through their incorporation into God’s people (cf. Psalm 87) and that the new covenant, managed by the Davidic ruler and governing the newly united Israel, will also oversee this remnant from the nations.<sup>52</sup>

d. *Possible implications of Jeremiah’s vision of the new covenant community.* With these texts in mind, it seems plausible that the new covenant references to Israel as a “nation” and to the “offspring” of the patriarchs (Jer 31:36–37; 33:26) are properly understood to include the remnant from the nations (cf. 1 Pet 2:9). This would explain how the writer of Hebrews so naturally applies the new covenant promises of Jer 31:31–34 to the church (Hebrews 8–10). In Christ, the new covenant “has

<sup>51</sup> The “yoke” that Yahweh would break was most immediately that of Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon (Jer 27:12; cf. Isa. 10:27), and the agency by which God would bring his global dominance appears to be through his king, the new David. The treatment of Babylon elsewhere in the Bible as a symbol of evil power that God will destroy (e.g. Jer 1:14; 6:1, 22–23; 50:41–42; Isa 14:4–23; 47:1; 1 Pet 5:13; Rev 16:17–18:24) suggests that the imagery of Jer 30:8–11 is directly linked with the original promises from Genesis that God would one day put an end to all serpent-like and Babel-like hostility and replace it with blessing through a royal deliverer (see Bill T. Arnold, “Babylon,” *NDBT* 393–94).

<sup>52</sup> My tracking of the participants provides the most natural reading of the text and finds support in the broader context of Jeremiah, which addresses the concept of a remnant from the nations enjoying relationship with God alongside ethnic Israelites in the age of the new covenant (cf. Jer 3:16–18; 12:14–17). Interpreters as far back as the LXX translators, however, have struggled with this view, likely due to the fact that a comment regarding the nations seems abrupt in the context. This fact led William L. Holladay to treat 30:8–9 as “an expansionist gloss interrupting the continuity of vv 7 + 10” (*Jeremiah 2* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989] 150). Furthermore, Holladay asserted that “the personal references in *M* [i.e. the MT] are muddled,” and he posited that both the 2ms and 3mp forms in 30:8–9 refer to Israel and *not* the foreigners from the nations. J. A. Thompson also treated Jer 30:8–9 as an “editorial insertion” and viewed “*their* God and *their* king” as a reference to Israel, not the nations (*The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 556). But in contrast to Holladay, Thompson arrived here by following the LXX in substituting the 3mp “their” for the 2ms “your neck ... your bonds” in the MT (555)—an unnecessary move, in my opinion. Because in his discussion of passages like Jer 12:14–17 Thompson affirms that the prophet anticipated some from the nations integrated into the new covenant (pp. 361–62), it is strange that he felt compelled to read Jer 30:8–9 in a different way.

been enacted” (Heb 8:6),<sup>53</sup> which means one expects the global kingdom to be operative *already*, even though the full ramifications remain *not yet*.

2. *The Servant and his “seed” in Isaiah.* More than any other OT prophet, Isaiah detailed the nature of the messianic age that would fulfill the Abrahamic promises of worldwide curse-destruction. Like other OT prophets (e.g. Deut 30:3–7; Dan 9:2, 24–27; Hos 3:1–5; Zech 3:9; 12:10; 13:1), he envisioned Israel’s restoration coming in two stages, the second of which parallels the second stage of the Abrahamic covenant highlighted in Gen 12:2–3 and 17:4–5: (1) initial physical restoration to the promised land (Isa 42:18–43:21) and then (2) spiritual reconciliation with God (Isa 43:22–44:23).<sup>54</sup> Stage one (liberation), later associated with Jeremiah’s “seventy years” (Jer 25:11–12; 29:10), would be wrought by one named Cyrus (Isa 44:24–48:22; cf. 2 Chr 36:20–22). Stage two (atonement) would be secured by the royal Davidic servant (Isa 49:1–53:12) and would include blessing reaching the nations, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (stage 2). The book ends with the proclamation of such glories to Zion and the world (Isa 54:1–55:13) and the climactic vision of the new creation (Isa 56:1–66:24). Wrapped into the midst of these eschatological texts are a number of references to “seed” that help clarify Paul’s application of “offspring” language in the NT.

a. *Becoming sons and daughters by identification with the Royal Son.* We initially learn that Israel’s very “offspring”—God’s “sons and daughters”—that are gathered from the earth’s distant realms in (what appears to be) stage one of the nation’s restoration (Isa 43:5–7) will ultimately enjoy God’s blessing, Spirit, justification, and glory in the age of fulfillment (Isa 44:4; 45:25; cf. 60:3–4 with Rev 21:24). The latter elements relate to stage two, for all are features elsewhere associated with or directly secured by the royal Davidic servant (Isa 9:6–7; 11:1–2, 10; 49:3; 53:11; 61:1). Paul later drew on the promise of “offspring” release in Isa 43:5–6 and combined it with an allusion to the Davidic royal “seed” promise of 2 Sam 7:8, 14: “And I will be to you for a father and you will be to me for sons and daughters” (2 Cor 6:18). The ease with which Isaiah connects stage one return in Isa 43:5–6 with stage two promises of blessing, Spirit, justification, and glory in Isa 44:4 and 45:25 seems to have allowed Paul seamlessly to read the former text typologically for the ultimate freedom from sin and death secured only through the servant king’s work. Moreover, because Messiah Jesus is the antitypical “seed” of David to which 2 Samuel 7 points (Luke 1:32–33; Acts 2:30–31), Paul’s hermeneutic seems to be making new covenant sonship for both Jews and Gentiles fully contingent on and only under-

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<sup>53</sup> James R. White writes, “It is important to see that for the writer, *the New Covenant has been, as a past-tense action, officially enacted.* The term used is *νενομοθέται*, the perfect passive of *νεμοθετέωμαι*, ‘to enact on the basis of legal sanction, ordain, found by law’ (BDAG). The New Covenant is not something *that will someday be established* but has already, as a completed action, been founded, established, enacted, and that upon ‘better promises’ than ‘the first’” (“The Newness of the New Covenant: Better Covenant, Better Mediator, Better Sacrifice, Better Ministry, Better Hope, Better Promises [Part I],” *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 1 [2004] 157).

<sup>54</sup> For the following breakdown of Isaiah, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 437–38, and Peter J. Gentry, “The Atonement in Isaiah’s Fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13–53:12),” *SBJT* 12 (2007) 21–24.

stood in relationship to Christ. We become “sons and daughters” of God only by identifying by faith with Jesus, the Davidic divine son.<sup>55</sup>

b. *The “survivors of the nations” as the “seed” of Israel.* It is intriguing that the assertion in Isa 45:25 that “in Yahweh all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and will glory” directly follows the identification of Cyrus as the agent of exilic release (Isa 45:1, 13), a comment regarding the salvation of the nations (Isa 45:14), and an extended call for “the survivors of the nations” [פְּלִיטֵי הַגּוֹיִם] to repent (Isa 45:20–24). Who are the “survivors” (Isa 45:20), and what is their relationship to the “offspring” (Isa 45:25)?

“Survivors” in Isa 45:20 is the plural form of the masculine noun פְּלִיט and could refer to the remnant of Israelites who experienced exile. Nevertheless, elsewhere in the book the restored Jews are called “the survivors of Israel” (Isa 4:2) and “the survivors of the house of Judah” (Isa 10:20; 37:31; cf. 37:32), all with the plural form of the feminine noun פְּלִיטָה. Furthermore, the fact that God calls “all the ends of the earth” to turn to him and be saved (Isa 45:22) suggests that the “survivors” are actually members of the nations amidst which Israel was exiled. In Isaiah’s words elsewhere, “Yahweh has bared the arm of his holiness before the eyes of all the nations, and all *the ends of the earth* shall see the salvation of our God” (Isa 52:10; cf. 5:26; 24:15–16; 41:5). Similarly, though using a singular instead of a plural, Isaiah wrote of the representative messianic servant’s mission: “It is too light a thing that you [Israel] should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to *the end of the earth*” (Isa 49:6; cf. Acts 1:8; 26:23).<sup>56</sup> Though steeped in idolatry (Isa 45:20), the nations were being called to recognize the superiority and authority of Israel’s God (Isa 45:15–17).

These observations are significant because, after climaxing with the declaration that “to me [Yahweh] every knee will bow, every tongue will swear [allegiance]” (Isa 45:23; cf. Rom 14:11; Phil 2:10) and after noting the shame that God will place on all nations that remain angry with him (Isa 45:24), verse 25 then speaks of the righteousness and praise of “the offspring of Israel.” While the point may simply be that the saving of the nations does not nullify the promises to Israel,<sup>57</sup> the prophet is more likely suggesting that in the new age of fulfillment Yahweh will consider *all* who turn to him, both from Israel and the nations, full “offspring” of the patriarchs, as if all were biological descendants of Abraham.<sup>58</sup> This latter possibility is further suggested by two facts: (1) The phrase “offspring of Ja-

<sup>55</sup> Cf. James Scott, “The Use of Scripture in 2 Corinthians 6:16c–18 and Paul’s Restoration Theology,” *JNT* 56 (1994) 73–99.

<sup>56</sup> Here the Davidic servant is named “Israel” (Isa 49:3), whom God in turn commissions to redeem a remnant from both “Israel” and the “nations” (49:5–6; cf. 42:6; 52:13–53:12). See Beale, *NT Biblical Theology* 656.

<sup>57</sup> So John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 225 n. 83.

<sup>58</sup> So F. Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 2:231; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 3:218; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 176; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 356; Preuss, “עַרְוָה *ʿara*; עָרַע *ʿara*,” *TDOT* 4:160; Robert L. Hubbard Jr., “פְּלִיט,” *NIDOTTE* 3:624.

cob/Israel” in Isa 45:19 and 25 shapes an inclusio around the call for Gentile repentance; and (2) the remark about “the seed of Israel” in verse 25 would be extremely abrupt if indeed it bore no reference to the nations just addressed.

c. *The “many” becoming “seed” through the Servant King’s atoning work.* Does Isaiah clarify what generates the broader application of “seed” language in the age of fulfillment? He elucidates this answer in the last servant song, which highlights the Davidic servant’s substitutionary atoning work (Isa 52:13–53:12). The prophet earlier noted that following the fires of judgment against Israel, Yahweh would cause a “holy seed” in the line of David to sprout (Isa 6:13)—a royal “seed” whose kingdom would be eternal, whose life would bear fruits in the likeness of God and in a new and consummate garden of Eden, and whose reign would include a remnant from every nation (Isa 6:13; 9:6–7[5–6]; 11:1–5, 10–11).<sup>59</sup> Building off this botanical imagery (Isa 6:13; 11:1), the prophet later says of Yahweh’s servant, “He grew up as a tender plant before him [i.e. Yahweh], and like a root from dry ground, neither form nor majesty was to him” (Isa 53:2). Thus the servant of Isaiah 53 is none other than the promised royal Son of David anticipated throughout the book.<sup>60</sup> While he would indeed be exalted over all and enable spiritual sight and understanding to nations and their kings (Isa 52:13–15; cf. Rom 15:21), such would be accomplished only by his bearing the sins of “many” in his death so that the “many” could in turn be counted righteous (Isa 53:11–12; cf. Rom 5:18–19; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9).<sup>61</sup> This

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Jer 23:5–6; 33:14–26. That “holy seed” in Isa 6:13 refers immediately to the promised king and not a remnant from the nation (see 4:3) is made clear by: (1) the “offspring’s” rise *after* national judgment; (2) the close association with the royal “child” of hope (7:14; 9:6–7); and (3) the servant king’s association elsewhere with botanical imagery (see Isa 11:1–5, 10; 53:2–6). He stands in contrast to the “evil seed” of Jerusalem (Isa 1:4 LXX), and in him, a renewed Israel will blossom, bearing fruits of righteousness, faithfulness, and holiness (Isa 1:26; 4:2–3; 60:21; 61:3; note how the LXX of 1:26 adds “mother” before city, likely providing the backdrop to Paul’s mention of “Jerusalem ... our mother” in Gal 4:26—so Karen H. Jobes, “Jerusalem, Our Mother: Metalepsis and Intertextuality in Galatians 4:21–31,” *WTJ* 55 [1993] 310). This messianic interpretation of Isa 6:13 seems better than that of G. K. Beale, who claims of 6:13 that the “stump” is an image of a destroyed idol and “holy seed” an “ironic taunt” against the idolatrous remnant (*We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* [NSBT; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008] 51–64; cf. Ezra 9:1–2).

<sup>60</sup> On this, see further Kaiser, *The Messiah in the OT* (Studies in OT Biblical Theology; Grand Rapids: Zondervan) 173–81; G. P. Hugenberger, “The Servant of the Lord in the ‘Servant Songs’ of Isaiah: A Second Moses,” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of OT Messianic Texts* (ed. P. E. Satterthwaite, R. S. Hess, and G. J. Wenham; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 105–40; Richard L. Schultz, “The King in the Book of Isaiah,” in *The Lord’s Anointed* 141–65; Daniel 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. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 17–56; Gentry, “The Atonement in Isaiah’s Fourth Servant Song” 20–47; Gordon H. Johnston, “Messianic Trajectories in Isaiah,” in *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promise, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King* (ed. Herbert W. Bateman, Darrell L. Bock, and Gordon H. Johnston; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012) 133–67; J. Alec Motyer, “‘Stricken for the Transgressions of My People’: The Atoning Work of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant,” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, and Pastoral Perspective* (ed. David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013) 247–66.

<sup>61</sup> On the fact that Isa 52:13–53:12 is indeed speaking of penal substitutionary atonement that includes double imputation—our sins placed on Christ and his righteousness counted to us, see Thomas D. Petter, “The Meaning of Substitutionary Righteousness in Isa 53:11: A Summary of the Evidence,” *TrinJ* 32 (2011) 165–89.

righteous servant would suffer as a substitutionary guilt offering under Yahweh's just wrath, but having fulfilled his purpose unto death, he would rise and be completely satisfied at the sight of "his offspring" now redeemed (Isa 53:10–11). What is the identity of the "many," the servant's "seed"?

Recognizably, when Isaiah speaks of redemption accomplished and applied in this unit, he regularly uses the first common plural: "And he was being pierced on account of *our* wrongdoings, being crushed on account of *our* iniquities. The chastisement that secured *our* peace was on him, and with his stripes he has secured healing for *us*" (Isa 53:5). While Isaiah was an old covenant enforcer, the "us" to whom he refers did not include most of his Israelite peers, who were never granted ears to hear (Isa 6:9–13) and from whom the prophet's visions were "sealed" (Isa 29:9–12; cf. 8:16). Indeed, anticipating that the rebel majority would remain unmoved at the coming of the messianic servant king, Isaiah declared, "Who has believed unto our report?" (Isa 53:1)—a passage both Jesus and Paul cite in relation to Jewish hardheartedness (John 12:37–38; Rom 10:16). Certainly the "us" included a remnant of ethnic Israelites who would have ears to hear, but at least five reasons suggest that a saved, adopted remnant from the nations is also included or that at least these from the nations are part of the "many" and the "offspring" in Isa 53:11–12, fulfilling the Abrahamic promises (cf. Rev 7:9). (1) The book has already highlighted the international nature of the royal servant's saving work (Isa 42:1–4, 6; 49:6; 51:4–5). (2) Leading into the servant song we are told that the age of fulfillment would include testament that "God reigns" in Zion (Isa 52:7) and a vision of "the salvation of our God" by all the nations at the ends of the earth (Isa 52:10).<sup>62</sup> (3) This servant song explicitly opens with a message of *global* salvation (Isa 52:13–15), with the mention of "kings" perhaps echoing the Abrahamic promise of Gen 17:6, the "many" nations of Isa 52:14–15 paralleling the redemption of the "many" in Isa 53:11–12, and the "sprinkling" of the nations in Isa 52:15 highlighting that direct benefit from the servant's sacrifice.<sup>63</sup> (4) Isaiah explicitly shifts from the first common plural referents ("our, we") to the generic "many." (5) The NT authors

<sup>62</sup> Directly following this statement in Isa 52:10 is a call to purity that Paul applies in 2 Cor 6:17 to the new covenant church. I noted earlier that the same group of OT quotations in 2 Corinthians 6 includes the "sons and daughters" reference in Isa 43:5–6.

<sup>63</sup> Under a heading titled "Worldwide Triumphant Salvation," J. Alec Motyer observes how the theme of "universal salvation" forms an inclusio around the whole fourth servant song: "Many nations" (רַבִּים; Isa 52:15) is matched, and more closely defined, by 'the many' (הַרְבִּים; 53:12); the 'kings' (מְלָכִים; 52:15) are revisited as 'the strong' (עֲצוּמִים; 53:12), and their subservient 'silence' (קִפְצוּ מְלָכִים; 52:15) becomes the more emphatic metaphor of defeat and spoliation (חֵלֶק שָׁלַל; 53:12)" ("Stricken for the Transgressions of My People" 252; cf. pp. 264–66). He also identifies further bracketing: "My Servant" (עַבְדִּי; 52:13) is balanced by 'the righteous one, my Servant' (יְצִדִיק עַבְדִּי; 53:11), and the suffering of 52:14–15 is matched by the bruising of 53:10. Just as 52:14–15 expressed the relationship between cause and effect by 'just as ... so' (כֵּן ... בְּאִשֶּׁר), so 53:12 uses the preposition of causative exactitude: 'precisely because' (תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר) (p. 262 n. 25). Furthermore, he notes that reading "sprinkle" (יָזַח) instead of "startle" in 52:14 is more likely given its frequent use with this meaning in the OT (albeit with different syntax; p. 252 n. 6), and he suggests, therefore, that the verse introduces the concept of substitutionary atonement by equating "those who are appalled by the Servant's suffering with those who become the beneficiaries of his shed blood" (p. 252).



readily draw on these texts with application to all the redeemed in Christ from both Jews and Gentiles (e.g. Rom 4:24; 1 Pet 2:24). Significantly, Messiah Jesus neither married nor fathered physical children. His “offspring” in whom he delights (Isa 53:10), therefore, must be identified through spiritual adoption. This means that the “offspring” of the new covenant community will only include the “many to be accounted righteous” in Christ (Isa 53:11). This bears significant implications for new covenant ecclesiology.

d. *New covenant “seed” as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.* The next chapter of Isaiah supports this view of “offspring” and develops a portrait of this messianic age. The text opens: “Sing, O barren one—she did not bear! Break forth a song and cry aloud—she did not experience labor pain, but many more are the children of the desolate one than the children of the married one!” (Isa 54:1). Here the “barren one” recalls Sarah’s barrenness (Gen 11:30), whereas “the married one” appears to point to Hagar, maidservant whom Sarah gave to Abram as wife in order to answer the “offspring” problem (Gen 16:3–4). Like Paul years later (Gal 4:21–31), what Isaiah sees in this historical account is a layer of prophetic allegory that anticipates the certain, though tardy, fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant in the new and that also foresees the new covenant’s superseding of the Mosaic covenant through the death and resurrection of the servant king.<sup>64</sup>

Earlier, while unpacking his message of eschatological *global* salvation (Isa 51:4–5; cf. 45:14–25), Isaiah urged any who pursued righteousness and sought Yahweh to return to their roots, looking “to the Rock [צור] from which you were hewn” and “to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you through birth pain [חיל], for as one I called him so that I might bless him and multiply him” (Isa 51:1–2).<sup>65</sup> The “Rock” is probably an allusion to Deut 32:18, which designates Yahweh as the “Rock” [צור] who bore Israel through birth pain [חיל]—likely an enigmatic reference to the symbolic representative judgment Yahweh underwent in redeeming Israel from Egypt, specifically during their sixth act of rebellion (Exod 17:1–7).<sup>66</sup> The initial call, then, is for the audience to consider the implications of divine mercy.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Charles H. Cosgrove, “The Law Has Given Sarah No Children (Gal. 4:21–30),” *NovT* 29 (1987) 231. For an argument that the allegory is original to Genesis itself and not simply part of prophetic interpretation, see A. B. Caneday, “Covenant Lineage Allegorically Prefigured: ‘Which Things Are Written Allegorically’ (Galatians 4:21–31),” *SBJT* 14 (2010) 50–77; cf. Jobes, “Jerusalem, Our Mother” 317–18.

<sup>65</sup> From the beginning of his ministry, Isaiah anticipated what both Jesus and Paul found to be true—Israel was hard of hearing and would not heed his voice and turn to God (Isa 6:9–13; cf. Matt 13:14–15; Acts 28:26–27). Paul later alluded to Isa 51:1 (and Deut 16:20) when he declared that Israel, without faith, failed in their pursuit of a law that would lead to righteousness, whereas many Gentiles, without pursuit, had by their faith attained righteousness (Rom 9:30–32; cf. Isa 53:11).

<sup>66</sup> Jesse R. Scheumann, “A Biblical Theology of Birth Pain and the Hope of the Messiah” (Th.M. thesis, Bethlehem College and Seminary, 2014) 54 with 26–29; cf. Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the OT* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1988) 120–28. We will see that the veiled reference to Deut 32:18 in Isa 51:2 (first exodus) works with the reference in Isa 42:14 (new exodus) to set the stage for the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant promises in the new covenant age.

With this, Isaiah grounds his discussion of the eschatological hope for salvation in the original patriarchal promises that Abraham's headship over a blessed multitude would be assisted by his "princess," matriarch Sarah (Gen 17:4–6, 16). Furthermore, the mention of Sarah in Isa 51:2 enables the prophet to use her life in chapter 54 to explain the greatest covenantal progression of the ages. For like Sarah, whose barrenness continued until there appeared to be no hope of promise fulfillment (Gen 18:13–14; cf. Rom 4:18–21; Heb 11:11–12), so too the Abrahamic covenant had extended through centuries without fulfillment (Gen 12:3; 17:4–5). Nevertheless, in calling his audience to "look to Abraham ... and Sarah," Isaiah reminded them of the Genesis promises and pushed them to anticipate salvation rising out of the exilic judgment. Just as Sarah in her old age did give birth to Isaac and ultimately the Israelite nation, so too the Abrahamic covenant would reach its goal: the children of the desolate one would become even more numerous than those of the rival old covenant, represented by Hagar (Isa 54:1; cf. 49:21; Mic 5:3[2]).

In that future day, the covenant community's dwelling place ("tent") would need to be expanded, because of the family's abounding growth—"your offspring will inherit the nations" (Isa 54:3; cf. 49:20). In light of the Abrahamic context, this phrase suggests not only the expansion of the promised land to include the world (see Gen 1:28; 22:17b; 24:60; 26:3–4; Matt 5:5; Rom 4:13; cf. Eph 6:2–3; Heb 11:13–16) but also the fulfillment of the blessing reaching all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3; 22:18; cf. Isa 49:22–23).<sup>67</sup> Abraham will have become the father of a multitude of nations. And as in Jeremiah, because the redeemed nations operate as an "inheritance," they appear to be fully identified with and incorporated into the "offspring" of Abraham, their head (cf. Jer 3:17–18 with 4:2; 12:16; 30:8–11).

Importantly, Isa 54:1 notes that the generating of "offspring" in the new covenant occurs *without* labor and *without* birth pain for the covenant people: "Sing, O barren one—*she did not bear!* Break forth a song and cry aloud—*she did not experience labor pain,* but more are the children of the desolate one than the children of the married one!" (cf. Isa 49:21; Mic 5:3[2]). We can draw two very significant implications from this, one ecclesiological and the other soteriological.

First, in contrast to previous covenants, the "seed" of the new covenant are *not* physically born into covenant membership. Even Sarah ultimately experienced labor and pain at the birth of Isaac (Isa 51:2), but the "barren one's" lack of labor and child bearing in Isa 54:1 suggests that *spiritual adoption, not physical birth, would characterize the identity of the new children.*<sup>68</sup> The physical genealogical principle so evident in the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants does *not* continue once the Abrahamic covenant reaches its fulfillment in the new, for membership is now solely conditioned on *spiritual* rebirth, generated through the sacrificial death of the Servant

<sup>67</sup> Gentry comments on this verse: "Israel dispossesses the nations not as a destructive military conquest but as the blessing brings them into the family. Simply bringing the exiles back to the land to grow and prosper as a nation does not explain sufficiently the need for a massive enlargement of the family tent" (Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 442).

<sup>68</sup> Scheumann, "A Biblical Theology of Birth Pain and the Hope of the Messiah" 57.

King (Isa 53:10). While nothing in the text suggests that ethnic distinction will be eradicated in the new covenant, the wording does mean that membership will not be assumed simply because of ethnicity. Furthermore, because Abraham's "offspring" have now been re-identified as only the servant king's spiritual "offspring" who have thus been accounted righteous (Isa 53:10–11), Isaiah would not affirm the view of covenant theologians that an infant's birth into a family with at least one believing parent grants the child full membership in the new covenant.

Second, because throughout Scripture, labor pain is directly associated with judgment (Gen 3:16) and only rarely accompanied by hope,<sup>69</sup> the absence of birth pain in Isa 54:1 most likely means that the judgment through which new covenant salvation is birthed was borne by another—namely, the servant king of the previous chapter (Isa 52:13–53:12), whose sacrificial death would satisfy God's wrath against the people and display the curse-bearing mercy of God himself.

That the royal servant's substitutionary atonement described in Isa 52:13–53:12 is indeed the "birth pain" punishment that brings forth the new covenant family in chapter 54 is suggested by at least four parallels.<sup>70</sup> (1) The "many" in Isa 52:14–15 and 53:11–12 are the "many" in the "miracle family" of Isa 54:1. (2) The servant's "offspring" in Isa 53:11 are Sarah's "offspring" in Isa 54:3 who have been expanded by inheriting nations. (3) In Isa 53:11 the "righteous" servant king makes many "righteous," and in Isa 54:14 the redeemed city is established in "righteousness" (cf. Jer 23:6; 33:16). (4) The "servant" singular in Isa 52:13 and 53:11 gives rise to "servants" plural in Isa 54:17 and beyond (cf. Isa 65:8–9, 13–15; 66:14)—servants that explicitly include a remnant from the tribes of Israel (Isa 63:17) and the nations (Isa 56:6).

Furthermore, it is important to see that two times already in Isaiah, Judah has declared herself unable to "give birth"—that is, to generate her own deliverance (Isa 26:16–18; 37:3). Instead, the people continued Godless and desolate under the Lord's judgment (Isa 49:19; 64:10). Because no one was "being a blessing," divine favor was not reaching all the families of the earth (Gen 12:2–3). Thus the Abrahamic covenant remained unfulfilled, while the Mosaic covenant flourished in carrying out its judgment curses on the unfaithful people (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). Yet Yahweh, in alignment with his character and in fulfillment with his past promise (Exod 34:6; Deut 4:30–31), announces that he would act in mercy on his people's behalf. Though they were unable to rescue themselves from divine wrath, Yahweh promises to concretely and completely bear Israel's judgment of "labor pain" in their place and complete a new, antitypical exodus: "I have been quiet; I have restrained myself. Like a woman in labor, I will groan, gasp, and pant altogether .... And I will lead blind ones in a way they do not know; in paths they do not know I will guide them. I will change darkness before them into light and rough places into a plain" (Isa 42:14, 16).<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> See Scheumann's summary of the evidence with implications in *ibid.* 112–19.

<sup>70</sup> Adapted from Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 441.

<sup>71</sup> G. P. Hugenberger has noted how imagery reminiscent of the first exodus but now associated with God's new covenant work surrounds each of the servant songs: Song 1 in 42:1–9 (41:17–20; 42:13–

Isaiah 51:1 charges the audience to consider the first exodus labor pain that Yahweh symbolically endured on behalf of Israel (Deut 32:18 with Exod 17:7). In contrast, in Isa 42:14 the prophet emphasizes that the new covenant and second exodus would be marked by an actual penal substitution for sin, accomplished by Yahweh, ultimately through his royal servant (Isa 52:13–53:12).<sup>72</sup> Yahweh's actions in Isa 42:10–17 closely parallel those of the Servant King in the first servant song (Isa 42:1–9), thus identifying how closely the two work together. Both bear influence among the coastlands (Isa 42:4, 10, 12), redeem the blind (Isa 42:7, 16), serve as guides (Isa 4:4, 16), overcome darkness with light (Isa 4:6–7, 16), and put to shame carved idols (Isa 42:8, 17). The servant would be nothing less than “the arm of Yahweh” (Isa 53:1; cf. 51:9), the Spirit-endowed agent of God (Isa 42:1; cf. 11:2; 61:1; Luke 4:18), who would be given “as a covenant for people, a light for nations” (Isa 42:6; cf. Luke 2:32). Yahweh would be pleased to crush him in order to secure far-reaching atonement (Isa 53:6, 10, 12), but this Servant King would also die the substitutionary death willingly, all for the joy set before him (Isa 42:4; John 10:17–18; Heb 12:2).<sup>73</sup> This royal figure would embody the presence of God (Isa 7:6; Matt 1:23) and bear the character of God (Isa 9:6; cf. 28:29; 10:21; 63:16; 66:12), and through him God would establish his reign on the earth (Isa 9:7; 52:7; 53:10). As the representative royal “offspring” of Abraham and David (Gen 22:17b–18; 2 Sam 7:12; Jer 33:26), the royal servant's faithful covenant obedience would secure new life for all who submit to his kingship (Isa 55:3–5),<sup>74</sup> and these redeemed would then be counted “his offspring” (Isa 53:10)—a children no longer desolate but now flourishing and expanded, having inherited the nations (Isa 54:1, 3; cf. Gen 28:14). What hope is found in Isaiah's “good news” (Isa 40:9; 52:7; 61:6)!

e. *The “seed” as servants of Yahweh in the new creation.* Isaiah next asserts that the messianic servant's “offspring” will be all “those in Jacob who turn from transgression” (Isa 59:20–21).<sup>75</sup> They are those Yahweh has “blessed” (Isa 61:9; 65:23), which implies participation in the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. God declares, “And I will bring forth from Jacob offspring, and from Judah possessors of

16), Song 2 in 49:1–7 (48:20–22; 39:8–12), Song 3 in 50:4–11 (50:1–2; 51:9–11), and Song 4 in 52:13–53:12 (52:2–5, 10–11) (“The Servant of the Lord in the ‘Servant Songs’ of Isaiah” 105–40, esp. 126–28). With this, Bernard W. Anderson identifies ten passages in Isa 40–55 that use second exodus imagery: Isa 40:3–5; 41:17–20; 42:14–16; 43:1–3, 14–21; 48:20–21; 49:8–12; 51:9–10; 52:11–12; 55:12–13 (“Exodus Typology in Second Isaiah,” in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenberg* [ed. Bernard W. Anderson and Walter J. Harrelson; New York: Harper, 1962] 177–95).

<sup>72</sup> “What was symbolic substitution at the rock (Exod 17:1–7; Deut 32:18) becomes actual substitution for sin in this Fourth servant song” (Scheumann, “A Biblical Theology of Birth Pain and the Hope of the Messiah” 55).

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Isa 50:6–7; 53:3, 5, 7–8, 10, 12; Heb 10:4–7. Motyer reads the Niphal verbs in Isa 53:3, 5, 7–8, 12 in a “tolerative” sense (GKC §51.c)—e.g. “he let himself be oppressed, and he let himself be afflicted” (53:7) (“Stricken for the Transgressions of My People” 256).

<sup>74</sup> Peter Gentry convincingly argues for reading the genitival relationship subjectively rather than objectively in the phrase *יְהוָה הַנְּאֻמָּנִים יָדוּ הַחַסְדִּים*; the result is that the new David (i.e. Christ) is the one who performs the faithful acts of loyal love rather than God working on behalf of David (Gentry and Welum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 406–21).

<sup>75</sup> On the messianic reading of Isa 59:21, see Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993) 492–93.

my mountains; and my chosen will possess it, and my servants will dwell there” (Isa 65:9). While the use of “seed” here may seem restricted to ethnic Israel, we have already learned that this redeemed “offspring” are spiritually adopted and have inherited the nations (Isa 53:10–11; 54:3), thus making the latter part of the former. Furthermore, the singular “servant” of Yahweh leading up to Isaiah 53 has given birth to plural “servants” in the chapters that follow,<sup>76</sup> and Isaiah has already stressed in 56:6 that among these “servants” are sons of foreigners who have joined themselves to Yahweh and who now bear priestly functions (cf. Isa 60:5–11; 66:20–21).<sup>77</sup> It seems likely, therefore, that “the offspring blessed of Yahweh” (Isa 65:23; cf. 61:9) must include the remnant of the nations who now have a new identity in the people of God. “Blessed be Egypt *my people*, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance” (Isa 19:25).

After the announcement in Isa 56:6 that sons of foreigners would unite with Yahweh, Isa 56:8 reads, “The declaration of Sovereign Yahweh who gathers the banished of Israel: ‘Still more I will gather unto him, to his gathered ones.’” The language here anticipates Isaiah’s promise of international ingathering that ends his book and in which is his last use of “seed” terminology:

Yahweh declares, “I ... am coming to gather all the nations and the tongues, and they shall come and see my glory. ... <sup>19</sup> And from them I will send survivors to the nations. ... And they will declare my glory among the nations. <sup>20</sup> And *they* shall bring all *your* brothers from all the nations as an offering to Yahweh ... unto the mountain of my holiness, Jerusalem,” has Yahweh said, “just as the sons of Israel bring the offering in the clean vessel of the house of Yahweh. <sup>21</sup> And also some of them I will take for priests, for Levities,” has Yahweh said. <sup>22</sup> “For just as the new heavens and the new earth that I am making are standing before me—the declaration of Yahweh, thus your offspring and your name will stand. <sup>23</sup> And it shall be that, from new moon to new moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh are to worship before me,” has Yahweh said (Isa 66:18–23; cf. 2:2–4).

The passage opens by talking about a gathered group of “survivors” [פְּלִיטִים], likely from the nations, that Yahweh will send to declare his glory among the nations (Isa 66:19). While this group could refer to the remnant of transformed ethnic Israelites

<sup>76</sup> The term שֹׁמֵר “servant” occurs 20 times in Isa 40–53, all in the singular, but then in Isa 54–66 it occurs another 11 times, all in the plural. The first unit establishes how the singular, sinful nation (Isa 41:8–9; 42:19[2x]; 43:10; 44:1–2; 44:21[2x]; 44:26; 45:4; 48:20) is represented by the righteous Servant King (Isa 42:1; 49:3, 5–7; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11), and once the substitutionary atonement is highlighted, the one gives rise to the “many” servants (Isa 54:17; 56:6; 63:17; 65:8–9, 13[3x], 14–15; 66:14).

<sup>77</sup> After declaring blessing on those in Israel who “keep justice and do righteousness” (Isa 56:1), Isaiah addressed “the son of the foreigner [בֶּן־הַנֶּזֶר] who has joined himself to Yahweh” and yet may think “Yahweh will surely separate me from his people” (Isa 56:3). Because the terminology is that of a “son of a foreigner” and not the more common “resident alien” [גֵּר], the passage appears to refer to those *outside* Israel who are, nevertheless, followers of Yahweh and who are in some way incorporated into his people yet not directly into the Mosaic covenant or stage 1 of the Abrahamic covenant. To these God’s promise is clear. “And as for the sons of the foreigner who join themselves unto Yahweh, to minister to him, to love the name of Yahweh—to be to him for servants ... I will bring them to my holy mountain, and I will make them rejoice in my house of prayer” (Isa 56:6–7).

who made it through exile, Isaiah elsewhere always refers to them with the feminine form of the noun (= פְּלִיטָה, Isa 4:2; 10:20; 37:31–32), whereas the one occurrence of the masculine form points to the redeemed from the nations (Isa 45:20; see above). Furthermore, the nearest referent for the third masculine plural in Isa 66:19 is those gathered from the nations (Isa 66:18), which suggests that they are the very ones who engage in the vast mission movement to other Gentiles (Isa 66:19). With this, Isa 66:20 seems to address the remnant of Israel with the second plural and even contrasts them with those redeemed from the nations.<sup>78</sup>

Those from the nations who align with Yahweh are called “brothers” of the remnant from ethnic Israel (Isa 66:20). Together they make up one family, one household, united under the reign of the servant king (cf. Isa 19:18, 23–25; Ezek 47:22; Zech 2:11; Ps 87; Eph 2:11–19). Indeed, the transformed identity of those adopted from outside is so complete that they can serve as priests before the Lord (Isa 66:21; cf. 56:6–7; 60:4–9; Zeph 3:10; 1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 5:10; see also Zech 14:16; Mal 3:3).<sup>79</sup> We then read that “your offspring and your name” will remain (Isa 66:22)—both features that echo the Abrahamic and Davidic covenant promises (e.g. Gen 12:2, 7; 2 Sam 7:9, 12–13). To whom do these terms refer?

Some scholars assert that the specific statement refers only to “the continuance of the Jewish cultic community.”<sup>80</sup> While the second plural “*your* offspring” may point in this direction, it seems more likely that the prophet is now calling those listening to him to see their corporate household as having grown to include redeemed Gentiles.<sup>81</sup> Not only is the context addressing the universal mission of God, the remark about the “seed and name” occurs in a clause that provides the basis for why God will make some from the nations priests (signaled by יִזְרֶה in Isa 66:22). Far from being second-class members, the international participation will help preserve God’s people and will further ignite global (i.e. “all flesh”) worship of God (Isa 66:23).

f. *Summary.* Isaiah envisioned the new covenant age to be fulfilled by the Servant King, who would have Jewish and Gentile “offspring” identified with him solely by spiritual adoption. As Israel’s representative, he would become the agent of universal blessing, the instrument by which Abraham’s royal fatherhood would be realized on a global scale.

## VI. FINAL PERSPECTIVES AT THE END OF AN ERA

Before concluding this paper, it is important to note that the OT post-exilic prophetic and narrative books clearly show that the new covenant transformation anticipated in Genesis 17 and predicted by prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah had not yet come. At the end of the Prophets, Zechariah stresses that the king had yet

<sup>78</sup> Contrast Beale, *NT Biblical Theology* 662.

<sup>79</sup> For an overview of the interpretation of Isa 66:21 in recent scholarship with an affirmation that the text indeed points to Gentiles serving as priests before God, see *ibid.* 665–69.

<sup>80</sup> So Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66* 428.

<sup>81</sup> So Delitzsch, *Prophecies of Isaiah* 2:515; Young, *Book of Isaiah* 3:535.

to rise from Judah (Zech 9:9–13; cf. 6:12–13) and that the Jews still awaited complete restoration (Zech 8:1–13; 10:6–12), which would include forgiveness of sin (Zech 12:10–13), full and lasting freedom from enemy enslavement (Zech 12:7–9; 14:11), and the international revival anticipated first in Genesis (Zech 8:23; cf. 2:10–12; 9:10; 14:16–19; Hag 2:7). Accordingly, those in this period continue to restrict the “seed” designation to Israel only, bound by ethnicity and race. This is clear as we move ahead into the narrative portion of the Writings, for the book of Esther speaks of Mordecai as being among “the seed of the Jews” (Esth 6:13), who are distinguished from “all who allied themselves with them” (Esth 9:27; cf. 8:17).<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Ezra-Nehemiah focuses on the initial return to the land promised to Abraham’s “offspring” (Neh 9:8; cf. 2 Chr 20:7) and calls all returnees to prove their genealogical connection with Israel (Ezra 2:59; Neh 7:61). They also must not mix with pagans (Ezra 10:3, 11; Neh 9:2) so as to maintain the purity of the “holy seed” (Ezra 9:2; cf. Isa 6:13). Sustained cleanness was vital to preserve the remnant (Ezra 9:14) from whom would rise the royal “offspring” of David and Abraham, the hope of the world (Matt 1:1; John 7:42; Acts 13:23; Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8).

First and Second Chronicles, at the end of the Jewish canon, uses a number of means to stress both the perpetuation of all twelve tribes, even through exile, and the hope of the royal deliverer. (1) It opens its history with genealogies from ten of the twelve tribes (except Zebulun and Dan) with focus especially on Judah and David (1 Chr 2:3–4:23). (2) It continually stresses the preservation of a faithful, unified remnant from all the tribes, even after exile (e.g. 1 Chr 9:3; 2 Chr 11:16; 15:9; 30:11; 34:9). (3) It highlights the hope of the Davidic “offspring” promise (1 Chr 17:11) and the importance of loyalty, proper worship, and reconciliation before God (2 Chr 30:6–9). (4) It draws attention to the place of the nations in God’s care and oversight (1 Chr 16:24, 31; 2 Chr 6:32–33; 20:6). The OT closes, therefore, demanding a sequel, for God’s purposes were not done. Indeed, the charge of Cyrus, “Let him go up,” at the end of Chronicles (2 Chr 36:23) recalls Isaiah’s two-stage restoration (see section V.2) and reminds the reader that Yahweh would still fulfill the latter stage. Although the “seed” of Abraham was still restricted, the hope was alive that on the other side of the Messiah’s sacrifice the “offspring” would be reconstituted through spiritual adoption to include believing Jews and Gentiles from around the world.

## VII. SYNTHESIS AND FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

1. *Abraham’s fatherhood realized through Christ.* As noted earlier, Paul’s application of the “seed” designation to both Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Rom 4:16–18; Gal 3:28–29) marks a redemptive-historical shift from an age of promise to an age of fulfillment (see section I). Both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants incorporate “seed” language in three primary ways: (1) all those who by physical birth were part of Abraham’s family; (2) a subset of Abraham’s biological descendants who would

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<sup>82</sup> Whether the members in this latter group were true converts is unclear (see Jon D. Levenson, *Esther* [OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997] 117, 129).

take on national status as Israel within the promised land; and (3) a unique individual biological son who would play a significant typological role in redemptive history (types leading to Christ, the antitype; see section III). While the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants did not regard first-generation proselytes as “seed,” their children were considered to be such, almost completely overlapping covenant membership and “offspring” status.

While the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants initially restricted “seed” language to physical descent, they also pointed ahead to a day when covenantal, spiritual adoption would replace ethnicity as the foundational mark of the patriarch’s “fatherhood.” The promise that Abraham would become an adoptive “father” of many nations anticipated this shift (Gen 17:4–6; cf. 22:17b–18; see section IV), and then prophets like Isaiah (esp. Isa 53:10; 54:3; 66:22) and Jeremiah (Jer 31:36–37; 33:22, 26 with 3:16–18; 12:14–17; 30:8–11) predicted it through their eschatological new covenant promises (see section V). Together these prophets envisioned an international people gathering in an eschatological Zion under a single Davidic king, whose own penal substitutionary death would exalt him over all. At the cross, Christ experiences the divine labor pain judgment (Isa 42:14; 52:13–53:12) that births salvation for the many (Isa 49:20–21; 52:15; 53:11–12; 54:1), securing for him the inheritance of the nations (Isa 49:22–23; 54:3; cf. Ps 2:8). Since Christ’s atoning work, the *true* “offspring” of Abraham are those who have become the “seed” of the messianic servant king (Isa 53:10; cf. 59:21; Gal 3:29) through spiritual rebirth (Isa 54:1–3; cf. 49:20–21). They have experienced the great exchange that their representative head supplies: he bears their sins and counts his righteousness as their own (Isa 53:11; Rom 5:18–19; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9; 1 Pet 2:24).

2. *The narrowing of the “seed” and the hope of the promised “offspring.”* Whether due to divine selection or personal forfeiture through covenant disloyalty, the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenant texts often identify subsets within the overall descendants, creating a continuum of various types of “offspring” (see section III). For instance, Asaph writes that the “Israel” to which God is good is only “those who are pure in heart” (Ps 73:1). Such narrowing resulted in a “mixed” community, made up of “offspring” associated with Abraham only by biology or ethnicity and those *true* “offspring” also linked to him by faith in his God. Both types of members received the covenant sign of circumcision were ultimately called upon to keep the Mosaic law, but only the latter group typologically pointed to those in the new covenant: “Those from faith are blessed with the believing Abraham” (Gal 3:9).

Within the new covenant, Paul speaks of his fellow ethnic Israelites, saying, “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (Rom 9:6). Similarly, Paul earlier affirms, “No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, . . . but a Jew is one inwardly” (Rom 2:29).<sup>83</sup> Elsewhere we learn that God regards both Jews and Gen-

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<sup>83</sup> That Romans 2 is indeed speaking of actual (and not just theoretical) Christian Gentiles who keep the law by the power of the Spirit, see S. J. Gathercole, “A Law unto Themselves: The Gentiles in Romans 2.14–15 Revisited,” *JNT* 85 (2002) 27–49; A. B. Caneday, “Judgment, Behavior, and Justification according to Paul’s Gospel in Romans 2,” *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 1 (2011) 153–92; cf.



tiles as part of the *true* “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16; cf. 3:28–29) if they are joined by faith to Christ Jesus, the *true* Israel (Isa 49:3, 5) and Abraham’s *true* “seed” (Gal 3:16).<sup>84</sup>

From the beginning, the revealed goal of the national aspects of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1–2; 17:7–9) was that the progeny and property associated with the patriarch would expand into to a global kingdom with Abraham serving as the father of a multitude of nations through his representative king (Gen 12:2–3; 17:4–6; 22:17b–18; 26:3–4). Faith in God to fulfill the “offspring” promise is what fueled Abraham’s life of obedience (Gen 15:4–6; Heb 11:17–19),<sup>85</sup> and it testifies to the patriarch’s inability to bless the world (Gen 12:2–2); only the true “offspring” could fulfill it.<sup>86</sup> That is, from the beginning, the believing remnant viewed the promised royal deliverer as representative of the many, and only through his representative obedience and substitutionary sacrifice would blessing ultimately reach worldwide. This one, Messiah Jesus, is the *true* “offspring” of Abraham (Gal 3:16) in that he, in fulfillment of the Genesis promises (Gen 17:4–5; 22:17b–18), bears the role of father, enemy destroyer, and blessing mediator on Abraham’s behalf. But he is also the patriarch’s superior, for the hopes of both Abraham and the world rested upon him (John 8:56, 58; cf. Heb 6:20 with 7:8). Those who surrender to Jesus’ representative authority will participate in the single family of God and be counted as Abraham’s “seed” (Gal 3:29).

3. *The centrality of Christ in OT interpretation.* In Rom 4:16–18 and elsewhere, when Paul applies the “seed” promise of Gen 15:6 (“So shall your offspring be”) to spiritually reborn Jews and Gentiles in Christ, he identifies the ultimate fulfillment of Genesis’ original predications. Following closely Moses’ argument, Paul recognizes that Abraham’s fatherhood of a multitude of nations is the intended ultimate realization of his “offspring” being as numerous as the stars. Employing a redemptive-historical and canonical hermeneutic that finds its basis in the OT itself, Paul reads all Scripture in light of the fulfillment secured in Christ.<sup>87</sup>

Thomas Schreiner, “Did Paul Believe in Justification by Works? Another Look at Romans 2,” *BBR* 3 (1993) 131–58; idem, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 144–45.

<sup>84</sup> For “the Israel of God” in Gal 6:16 referring to the whole church (Jews and Gentiles in Christ), see Christopher W. Cowan, “Context is Everything: ‘The Israel of God’ in Galatians 6:16,” *SBJT* 14.3 (2010) 78–85; G. K. Beale, “Peace and Mercy upon the Israel of God: The OT Background of Gal. 6,16b,” *Bib* 80 (1999) 204–23; cf. idem, *A NT Biblical Theology* 722–23.

<sup>85</sup> See Kaiser, “Is It the Case That Christ Is the Same Object of Faith in the OT?,” 291–98.

<sup>86</sup> Yahweh charged Abra(ha)m, “And you shall be a blessing *so that* . . . in you may be blessed all the families of the land” (Gen 12:2–3). Ultimately, the “in you” [ךָ] (12:2) becomes “in your offspring” [בְּנֵיךָ] (22:18)—that is, “in Christ” [ἐν (τῷ) Χριστῷ]. For the grammatical uses and theological import of this phrase in Paul, see Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek NT: An Essential Reference for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) 122–28; and Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) 67–199.

<sup>87</sup> For more on the NT authors’ redemptive-historical, canonical hermeneutic, see Gentry and Wel- lum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 82–108; cf. G. K. Beale, “Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the OT in the New* (ed. G. K. Beale; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 393–95, 401; orig. in *Them* 14 (1989) 89–96.

Following this pattern, those “on whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor 10:11) must see Jesus as the center of history, the one to whom all promises point, and the one from whom all fulfillment comes (Matt 5:17–18; Luke 24:44; 2 Cor 1:20). He is the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45; cf. Rom 5:18–19), the hoped-for “offspring”-deliverer who discloses what it means to be truly human by imaging God as a royal priest-son (Gen 1:26–28; 5:1–3) and by serving as the ideal provider and protector (Gen 2:15). He also fulfills the mission of Israel (Exod 19:4–6; Deut 4:5–8), representing the nation as the true royal “seed” of Abraham (Gen 22:17b–18) and son of God (Exod 4:22–23; 2 Sam 7:12, 14; Ps 2:7), through whom blessing (i.e. reconciliation with God) reaches the nations (Gen 12:3; Isa 42:1–6; 49:5–6; 51:4–5; Ps 72:17), ultimately through his perfect obedience unto substitutionary death (Isa 52:13–53:12; 55:3–5). The NT uniformly asserts that Christ’s teaching through the apostles provides the essence of Christian instruction (Matt 17:5; 28:19–20; John 16:12–14; 2 Thess 2:15).<sup>88</sup> As such, Christian doctrine and Christian preaching of the whole counsel of God must work through the lens that the apostles provide, which is colored by the fulfillment realized in Christ (Acts 2:42; Heb 1:1–2). As Stephen Wellum asserts, the NT places the revelation that comes through Jesus in a “qualitatively different category” to previous revelation, highlighting how everything that preceded him was “incomplete and by its very nature was intended by God to point beyond itself to God’s full self-disclosure in his Son” (Gal 3:24–26; Heb 1:1–2).<sup>89</sup> Christ’s new covenant work fulfills the hope of OT saints; therefore, the NT provides confirmation that our OT interpretations are correct.<sup>90</sup> In Christ alone does proper understanding of the OT come (2 Cor 3:14; cf. Isa 30:8; Jer 30:24; Dan 12:4).

### VIII. IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

In conclusion, let us consider how the biblical portrayal of the “seed” of Abraham supports a progressive covenantal framework. To do so, I will distinguish my interpretation from that of dispensational and covenant theologies. I write this section with deepest affections for my brothers and sisters who see these other frameworks evidenced in Scripture, and I pray that my words will nurture greater pursuit of the truth rather than discord.

1. *Progressive covenantalism and dispensational theology.* Highlighting discontinuity between the testaments, dispensational theology has traditionally viewed the new covenant church not as a continuation or replacement of Israel but as a unique people of God in redemptive history. In this framework, ethnic Jews in Christ still maintain a distinct privilege to the Promised Land that they will enjoy in a future millennium separate from believing Gentiles.

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. Matt 7:24–27; John 17:8, 18, 20.

<sup>89</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 90. Cf. Matt 11:13–14; Acts 13:22–26; 19:4.

<sup>90</sup> E.g. hope: Matt 13:17; John 8:56; Acts 13:32–33; Rom 1:1–6; Heb 11:13, 39–40; 1 Pet 1:10–12; fulfillment: Matt 5:17–18; 11:13–14; John 5:39, 45–47; 2 Cor 2:20.

This study affirms the newness of the new covenant community but *not* in a way that distinguishes the privileges of any members within it. In Christ, Jews and Gentiles alike are “co-inheritors, fellow body members, and co-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph 3:6; cf. 2:12). The inheritance is “out of faith, in order that, according to grace, the promise may be certain to all the offspring—not only to those out of law but to those out of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, just as it is written, ‘A father of many nations I have made you’” (Rom 4:16–17). Furthermore, Christ fulfills *in the church* God’s long-range purposes given to Abraham. Because all the world’s hopes for reconciliation with God rested on what God would do through Abraham (Gen 12:3), national Israel’s disloyalty and punishment heightened the world’s condemnation, greatly distancing all from hope (Rom 3:19–20). Nevertheless, when King Jesus, Abraham’s ultimate “seed” and Israel’s representative (Isa 49:3, 5–6; Gal 3:16), performs all required obedience, he secures life and blessing for redeemed Jews and Gentiles alike (Gen 22:17b–18; Jer 4:2; Ps 72:17; Gal 3:8, 14), who together make up one regenerate people of God, the “seed” of Abraham (Gal 3:29). Rather than being an unexpected formation, the new covenant church in Christ is the natural, anticipated end in the progress of the biblical covenants.

Many progressive dispensationalists today affirm Scripture’s teaching that “Christ is the true and ultimate Israel, temple, seed of Abraham, and so on.”<sup>91</sup> Most of these, however, would agree with Michael Riccardi that the application of “seed” language to Gentiles in Gal 3:28–29 (“There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring”) requires only that Gentiles enjoy the “blessing” promise; the patriarchal nation/land promises continue only for ethnic Jews who are in Christ: “In Galatians 3 Paul presents justification by faith in Messiah as the fulfillment of the promise of universal blessing to the nations through Abraham’s true Seed. It does not cancel or reinterpret the promise of land for that ‘great nation.’”<sup>92</sup> Further, Robert Saucy states, “The promises concerning the physical seed constituting the nation of Israel remain alongside the universal promise even as they did in the original statement in the Old Testament.”<sup>93</sup>

I believe this line of reasoning falters on a number of fronts. First, this view fails to appreciate the two-stage *progression* evident within the Abrahamic covenant itself (see section 4.2). Stage one was realized in the temporary Mosaic covenant, wherein Israel became a nation enjoying the land. Stage two was inaugurated when this nation, through its representative head, fulfilled the charge to “be a blessing” (Gen 12:2) and thus served as the instrument of blessing to the world (Gen 12:3; cf. 22:18; Jer 4:2; Ps 72:17; Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:8, 14). In fulfillment of the OT hopes,

<sup>91</sup> Riccardi, “Seed of Abraham” 59.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* 60–63, quote from 63.

<sup>93</sup> Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) 50. He also writes, “The apostle’s ministry to the Gentiles was in his mind the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that ‘all the nations shall be blessed in you’ (Gal 3:8, citing Ge 12:3). That same promise included statements about Israel (cf. Ge 12:2), but Paul did not refer to these. The salvation of the Gentiles was not the fulfillment of the promises to the nation of Israel, according to the letter to the Galatians” (p. 200).

stage two—realized in the eschatological, everlasting new covenant in Christ—sees the “seed” and land promises fulfilled in a way that includes the nations, yet without geopolitical barriers (Eph 2:13–17). This is accomplished as the true “seed” of Abraham becomes narrowed first to Christ, the ultimate “seed,” and then to those identified with him by faith (Gal 3:16, 29). Christ, the royal “offspring” deliverer, claims once enemy strongholds (Gen 22:17b; 24:60; cf. plural “lands” in 26:3–4) through his ever-expanding new royal family, who now globally bears witness to him (Acts 1:8) and offensively confronts the gates of hell (Matt 16:18) with the testimony of Christ’s victory over evil and with the certainty of the new heavens and earth. Within this family, Jews and Gentiles are “one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28), “one new man” (Eph 2:15), together enjoying “adoption as sons” (Eph 1:5) with equal partnership in the “inheritance of the saints” (Col 1:12; cf. Gal 3:18; Eph 3:6).

Second, the view that Gentiles in Christ participate only in the blessing promise and not also in the ultimate fulfillment of the “seed” and land promises fails to recognize the reference to plural “promises ... made to Abraham and to his offspring” (Gal 3:16). Paul in Galatians 3 had in mind *multiple* promises in Genesis, not just the one focused on blessing.<sup>94</sup> I agree with Saucy that, “because the concept of ‘nation’ [promised in Gen 12:2] carries a territorial aspect, the land must be viewed as the necessary corollary to the promised seed that would constitute the ‘great nation.’”<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, if the blessing promise includes a reconstituting of the “seed” with a global identity in Christ, then one should be cautious to separate the land promise from this same transformation. Indeed, within the argument of Galatians 3, the eschatological fulfillment of the land promise appears to stand behind Paul’s argument.<sup>96</sup> We see this in at least two ways: (1) The inclusion of the conjunction in the phrase “*and to your seed*” [καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου] in Gal 3:16 implies that Paul is indeed quoting Scripture, most likely Gen 13:15; 17:8; and/or 24:7, for they are the only instances of the phrase addressed to Abraham in the LXX of Genesis. Of these, the most likely candidate is Gen 17:8, “for the mention of Abra(ha)m becoming ‘the father of a multitude of nations’ in the immediate literary context anticipates the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God—one of the key issues at stake in Galatians 3.”<sup>97</sup> Regardless, all three texts in Genesis address the *land* promise, which means Paul in Galatians 3 is stressing that the blessing, “seed,” *and* land promises find their culmination in Christ, that each can be understood rightly only in light of him, and that the eschatological fulfillment of the land promise is part of the “inheritance” enjoyed by the reconstituted “seed” of Abraham (Gal 3:29).<sup>98</sup> (2) Paul’s language of “inheritance” in Gal 3:18 is likely rooted in the

<sup>94</sup> DeRouchie and Meyer, “Christ or Family as the ‘Seed’ of Promise?” 38.

<sup>95</sup> Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* 44.

<sup>96</sup> Contra F. F. Bruce, who says, “The reference to the land ... plays no part in the argument of Galatians” (*The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982] 171).

<sup>97</sup> DeRouchie and Meyer, “Christ or Family as the ‘Seed’ of Promise?” 38.

<sup>98</sup> The coming of Christ marks the dawn of the age of faith (Gal 3:23–26) and new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), which will be consummated at the end of the age (Rev 21:1–3; cf. Matt 5:5; Eph 6:2–3). As such, just as “seed” language is restricted to biological descent in the old covenant economy and yet

OT land promise (e.g. Num 26:53–56; Josh 11:23),<sup>99</sup> which marked the context wherein God’s global kingdom purposes first highlighted to Adam and Eve (Gen 1:27–28) would be realized. That is, the inheritance of Canaan always anticipated the expansion of the kingdom to include the world.<sup>100</sup> And because the male, royal deliverer’s global work of blessing was to reverse the serpent’s kingdom-thwarting purposes (Gen 3:15) and to result in possessing enemy gates (Gen 22:17b–18; 24:60; cf. 26:3–4), Paul likely saw Messiah Jesus as inaugurating the fulfillment of the original Edenic vision to see God’s earthly sanctuary expanding to fill the earth through his royal-priestly imagers. In Christ, God’s blessings of “seed” and land are becoming universalized, just as the OT itself anticipated would happen in the age of the fulfillment.

2. *Progressive covenantalism and covenant theology.* As for covenant theology, this system has traditionally viewed the church as a continuation or renewal of Israel, though some view it more as a replacement.<sup>101</sup> In both views, however, the makeup of the new covenant community remains substantially the same as those of past eras, for all the biblical covenants are simply various expressions of one covenant

focused through Christ and transformed in the new covenant to include both Jews and Gentiles by faith, so too the land promise is physical in the old covenant but then, following the initial return post-exile, finds fulfillment in Christ the antitypical temple. Furthermore, the land promise is fulfilled in the context of rest (Matt 11:28–28; John 1:14; 2:21), expands through the Spirit of Christ through the new creational temple-church (Acts 1:8; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 5:17), and then culminates in the arrival of the new Jerusalem that will fill the consummated new creation (Rev 21:2–3; cf. Isa 4:5–6; Jer 3:17; Heb 12:22). In fulfillment of the original vision of the garden-paradise ever expanding until the whole earth is filled with the display of God’s glory through image-bearers (Gen 1:28 with 2:15; Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14), so too Abraham envisioned a global kingdom (Rom 4:13; Heb 11:8–16), with the whole world enjoying God’s blessing only *after* he and his “offspring” were a blessing (Gen 12:2–3; see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* [NSBT 17; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004] 81–167). Christ Jesus is the ultimate “seed” of Abraham who represents the nation, and through him the world is blessed (Isa 49:3, 5–6; Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:8, 14, 16, 29). We must see him, therefore, as bringing the fulfillment of the original expansion of the garden/temple/promised land to the ends of the earth. For more on this theme, see Oren Martin’s essay on “land” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies and Gentry and Wellum, Kingdom through Covenant* 703–16; cf. Paul R. Williamson, “Promise and Fulfillment: The Territorial Inheritance,” in *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives* (ed. Philip Johnston and Peter W. L. Walker; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000) 15–34; T. Desmond Alexander, “Beyond Borders: The Wider Dimensions of Land,” in *Land of Promise* 35–50; Peter W. L. Walker, “The Land in the Apostles’ Writings,” in *Land of Promise* 81–99; idem, “The Land and Jesus Himself,” in *Land of Promise* 100–20; O. Palmer Robertson, “A New-Covenant Perspective on the Land,” in *Land of Promise* 121–41; Beale, *NT Biblical Theology* 750–72; Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God’s Redemptive Plan* (NSBT 34; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015).

<sup>99</sup> So, too, Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 230; cf. Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 155. Cf. Num 18:20; 32:18–19; 33:54; 34:2; Deut 4:21, 38; 12:9; 15:4; 19:14; 20:16; 24:4; 25:19; 26:1; Josh 13:6–8; 24:28.

<sup>100</sup> E.g. Gen 22:17b; 24:60; 26:3–4; Ps 22:27–28; 47:7–9; 72:8–11; Zeph 3:9–10; Rom 4:13; Heb 11:10, 13–16; 13:14; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1–22:5.

<sup>101</sup> For the continuation model, see, e.g., Beale, *NT Biblical Theology* 656; Michael S. Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006) 130–31; idem, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) 730. For renewal, see Jeffrey D. Niell, “The Newness of the New Covenant,” in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (ed. Gregg Strawbridge; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003) 127–55.

of grace. Because membership in the covenants associated with Abraham and Moses was always guided by physical birth into the family of the mediator or a reorientation in spiritual loyalty (e.g. Ruth 1:16), covenant theologians have seen no reason why both features would not remain operative in the new covenant. Thus, they baptize babies born into homes with at least one Christian parent, convinced that covenant membership and election, ecclesiology and soteriology, may be overlapping in this age but are never aligned pre-consummation. While more regenerate members are present this side of the cross, the new covenant community continues to be “mixed” with remnant and rebel, saved and unsaved.

In my view, covenant theology’s construal does not fully account for Scripture’s teaching of the newness of the new covenant and the distinctiveness of Jesus and his work in redemptive history. First, by treating the Abrahamic covenant as a monolithic reality substantially equated with the new covenant, many covenant theologians miss that Genesis 17 distinguishes *two* progressive eras for the everlasting Abrahamic covenant—the first national or geopolitical (Gen 17:7–8) with a genealogical principle as its guide and circumcision as its sign (Gen 17:9–13); and the second international with the patriarch’s fatherhood being established by spiritual adoption and no longer bound by biology, ethnicity, or the distinguishing mark of circumcision (Gen 17:4–6; see section IV; cf. Gen 12:1–3). Elsewhere, Genesis clarifies that the initial stage would find fulfillment only in the second when an obedient king, *the* “seed” of the woman and of Abraham from the line of Judah, would rise, overcoming all enemy hostility and blessing all the nations of the earth (Gen 3:15; 22:17b–18 with 26:3–4 and 49:8–10). Christ’s arrival inaugurates the age of fulfillment, thus shifting the covenant community’s makeup away from the genealogical principle to one of corporate identity, established through spiritual adoption by faith. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, in order that he might redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption” (Gal 4:4–5). “In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:5).<sup>102</sup>

G. K. Beale rightly articulates the OT hopes in this way: “When the Messiah came, the theocracy of Israel would be so completely reconstituted that it would continue only as the new organism of the Messiah (Jesus), the true Israel. In him Jews and Gentiles would be fused together on a footing of complete equality

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<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Wellum speaks of the era-ending nature of Jesus’ circumcision in Luke 2:1: “Jesus’ circumcision is not a minor event; it marks the fulfillment of circumcision in its purpose of preserving a line of descent from Abraham to Christ and marking out the one in whom all of the promises of God have reached their fulfillment. In Christ, Abraham’s true seed is now here, and as such, circumcision is no longer necessary, and it was soon to be abrogated. In this sense, Jesus’ circumcision is the last significant covenantal circumcision recorded in Scripture. All other circumcisions, such as Timothy’s (Acts 16:3), were done only for principled pragmatic concerns in order to win Jews to the gospel” (*Kingdom through Covenant* 701). For more on circumcision and its relationship to new covenant identity, see John Meade’s essay in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* and Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants” 97–161; cf. DeRouchie, “Circumcision in the Hebrew Bible and the Targums” 182–89, 196–200.

through corporate identification.”<sup>103</sup> We must see covenantal progression in the move from promise to fulfillment. In Christ, spiritual adoption, not physical descent, becomes the mark of the new covenant community. While ethnic distinctions are in no way eradicated (e.g. Rom 1:16; 2:9; 9:25–27; cf. Acts 13:46), new covenant membership is grounded solely in “corporate identification” with the Messiah and is no longer assumed simply because of biological connection. In this and many other senses, Christ’s new covenant work marks an escalation beyond all previous eras.<sup>104</sup>

Second, covenant theologians must give greater consideration to the significance of Jesus’ being the *last* Adam (1 Cor 15:45; cf. Rom 5:18–19), the head of a *new* creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), *the* “offspring” of Abraham and David who mediates a *new* covenant (Heb 9:15; 12:24) that creates the church as one *new* man (Eph 2:15). All members in the new covenant are identified with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph 2:5–6; Col 2:12–13; 3:3); they are children of “the Jerusalem above” (Gal 4:26, 31; cf. Heb 12:22–24), meaning that, regardless of one’s original heritage, all have new birth certificates declaring, “This one was born there”—in Zion (Psalm 87). Indeed, as Isaiah asserts, every member of this community is spiritually reborn and thus regenerate (Isa 54:1, 3), having become “offspring” of the servant king by his bearing their iniquities and counting them righteous (Isa 53:10–11). Similarly, Jeremiah stresses that, in distinction from the mixed nature of the old covenant, *all* in the new covenant know Yahweh for *all* are forgiven (Jer 31:34).

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<sup>103</sup> Beale, *NT Biblical Theology* 654. Beale, himself a paedo-Baptist, seems inconsistent in the working out of his own model with respect to baptism. On the one hand, in alignment with the quote above, he affirms in a comment on Col 2:11–13 that “OT physical circumcision as a type *has been fulfilled* in eschatological spiritual circumcision and is no longer relevant for entrance into the new-covenant community. Instead, spiritual ‘circumcision made without hands’ and ‘baptism’ are ongoing realities designating entrance into the covenant community. . . . Physical circumcision can be seen to have its *typological fulfillment* also in the physical rite of baptism” (*NT Biblical Theology* 808–9, italics mine). In these quotations (both in the footnote and the one cited in the body), Beale appears to be affirming a high view of fulfillment that marks substantial discontinuities between old and new. Indeed, to speak of a type’s “fulfillment” is to speak of escalation, of reaching a goal, and of antitype, which identifies physical baptism as something distinct from and superseding physical circumcision. In contrast, when later arguing that baptism should be applied to infants, Beale is forced to change his wording: “[Water] baptism is the redemptive-historical and typological *equivalent* to circumcision” (816). In moving from fulfillment language to equivalence language, he minimizes the significance and centrality of the work of Christ and the distinctiveness of the new covenant community that he had earlier so beautifully articulated.

<sup>104</sup> Beale unhelpfully asserts, “Eschatologically converted gentiles would become identified with Israel *as had gentiles in the past*, such as Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah” (*NT Biblical Theology* 653, italics mine). He immediately qualifies this statement, however, by noting that Gentiles in the new covenant “did not have to move to geographical Israel, be circumcised and worship at the temple, obey the food laws and observe the holy days, and follow other laws distinguishing national Israel from the nations” (*ibid.*). This latter addition is vital, for it highlights the substantive shift between old and new. What happened with international converts in the pre-Christ era typologically anticipated what was to follow *but is not equal to it*. In previous eras, non-native-born followers of Yahweh had to *become Israelites* with the full responsibility of living under the law, but in the age of fulfillment, redeemed Jews and Gentiles serve God together in Christ without the need for all to become Jews in a law-abiding way. The change is highlighted by Paul’s stress that the principle of adoption of all in Christ apart from the law was part of the “mystery” that was ever present in the OT but only made understandable through Jesus’ arrival (Eph 3:4–6, 9).

The fact that the new covenant “has been enacted” in Christ (Heb 8:6, using the perfect passive νομοθετούμαι and thus stressing the completed action with continuing results) means that *already* the new covenant community is made up of only regenerate, even if some aspects of salvation are *not yet* complete. Jesus’ atoning sacrifice both effects and is effectual, and within the new covenant, soteriology gives birth to ecclesiology in a way that the two are completely overlapping *already*.<sup>105</sup>

Because Messiah Jesus had no physical children and yet enjoys “offspring” (Isa 53:10) and because new covenant membership comes without birth pain judgment for all but the covenant head (Isa 54:1; cf. 42:14), the genealogical principle is no longer operative. Abraham’s “fatherhood” of a multitude of nations becomes fully enacted through the spiritual adoption effected by his “offspring,” Christ (Gal 3:14, 16). Just as Yahweh stressed to Abraham that the nations of the earth would be blessed “in your offspring” [אֲנִי בְרַכְתִּיךָ/ἐν τῷ σπέρματί σου] (Gen 22:18; cf. Jer 4:2; Ps 72:17; Gal 3:14, 16), so now “God has blessed us *in Christ* [ἐν Χριστῷ] with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,” even as we await the full inheritance (Eph 1:3, 14; cf. 1 Pet 1:3–5).<sup>106</sup> Christ is the “seed” of Abraham and of David (Gen 17:4–5; 2 Sam 7:12, 16; Jer 33:26; Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:16) and the one through

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<sup>105</sup> As Wellum rightly states, “Unlike Israel of old, by definition, the locus of the covenant community and the locus of the redeemed are one” (*ibid.*, 689). In contrast, in an attempt to maintain a “mixed” nature to the new covenant while affirming the clear teaching of Jer 31:34, covenant theologian Richard L. Pratt Jr. is forced to substantially deny the “already” nature of Christ’s work, claiming that the full establishment of a regenerate community is yet future: “Many evangelicals object to infant baptism because the new covenant distributes salvation to all of its participants. As with the previous objections, this point of view is correct insofar as it relates to the complete fulfillment of the new covenant in the consummation” (“Infant Baptism in the New Covenant,” in *The Case for Covenant Infant Baptism* [ed. Gregg Strawbridge; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003] 172). But such a view cannot stand for several reasons. (1) Every promise is *already* Yes in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). (2) As James R. White correctly notes of Heb 8:6: “There is nothing in the text that would lead us to believe that the full establishment of this covenant is yet future, for such would destroy the present apologetic concern of the author; likewise, he will complete his citation of Jer. 31 by asserting the obsolete nature of the first covenant, which leaves one to have to theorize, without textual basis, about some kind of intermediate covenantal state if one does not accept the full establishment of the new covenant as seen in the term νομοθέτηται” (“Newness of the New Covenant [Part II]” 157; cf. *idem*, “The Newness of the New Covenant [Part II],” *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 2 [2005] 83–104). (3) Other paedo-Baptists like Beale correctly recognize that when the writer of Hebrews declares, “By a single offering he [Christ] *has perfected* [perfect active indicative of τελείω] for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb 10:14), and then supports it by citing Jer 31:33–34 (Heb 10:15–18), he is asserting the *inaugurated* nature of forgiveness (i.e. positionally, through our identification with Christ our representative) and the *already* completed certainty of final, complete cleansing from sin (*NT Biblical Theology* 735; cf. Heb 12:2, 23). (4) Samuel E. Waldron observes that, in alignment with its inaugurated nature, the new covenant’s ordinances have *already* been established (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25), its officers have *already* been installed (2 Cor 3:6; Eph 2:20; 4:11; Heb 8:1–6), and the knowledge of God predicted in Isa 54:13 and Jer 31:34 is *already* being enjoyed whenever a believer is redeemed (John 6:45; Heb 10:26; “A Brief Response to Richard L. Pratt’s ‘Infant Baptist in the New Covenant,’” *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 2 [2005] 106–7). (5) Pratt’s delayed-fulfillment view of the new covenant removes the clear pastoral hope for perseverance in *this age* found in passages like Jer 32:40: “And I will cut for them an eternal covenant that I will not turn away from after them from doing good to them, and my fear I will place in their heart to not turn from unto me.”

<sup>106</sup> On union with Christ, see n. 86. On reading “seed” here as a single, male descendant of Abraham, see the resources listed at the beginning of n. 8.



whom both Abraham's fatherly headship over a multitude and David's eternal throne find fulfillment (Luke 1:32–33; 2:68–75; John 8:53–59; Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8). Today—whether Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free, males or females—all become “offspring” of Christ and then of Abraham (Isa 53:10; Gal 3:28–29) only through union with Jesus by faith.<sup>107</sup> The NT knows no new covenant community apart from this relationship; and, therefore, the church should apply the new covenant sign of baptism only to those who are reborn through faith in Christ. It is those *in Christ* who are “sons of God,” those *who have put on Christ* who are baptized, and those *who are Christ's* who are counted “Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:26–27, 29; cf. Rom 6:1–4; 1 Pet 3:21).<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Troy W. Martin argues that the three antitheses mentioned in Gal 3:28 are context-specific to the argument in Galatians, each pair pointing to spheres in which the old covenant made distinctions by circumcision but where the new covenant does not (“The Covenant of Circumcision (Gen 17:9–14) and the Situational Antithesis in Galatians 3:28,” *JBL* 122 [2003] 111–25, esp. 117–19). If correct, Paul is stressing high discontinuity between the old and new covenants in a way that discourages a mere equating of the covenant signs of physical circumcision and water baptism, the latter being linked solely with faith in Christ. As for the three antitheses, Israel's full removal of the foreskin in circumcision set them apart from all other non-Yahweh followers who either were fully uncircumcised or who circumcised by retaining the foreskin (Jason S. DeRouchie, “Circumcision in the Hebrew Bible and Targums: Theology, Rhetoric, and the Handling of Metaphor,” *BRR* 14 (2004) 182–89, 192, 200). Nevertheless, now that the Abrahamic blessing of God has come through Christ, participation in the kingdom family is no longer signaled by ethnic distinctions. Similarly, as Exodus 12 makes clear, circumcision set resident slaves apart from free men, for slaves were circumcised with all male household members (Gen 17:12) but free foreigners were not, having refused to incorporate into Israel's covenant. In contrast, the covenant sign of baptism was not restricted to social status or ethnic identification but applied to all who believed in Messiah Jesus, irrespective of circumcision or the Mosaic law. (Note: While the terms “slave” [δούλος] and “free man” [ἐλεύθερος] are never directly associated in any OT circumcision texts, they appear to apply to the circumcision context and support the proposal that Paul was indeed applying the terms to the specific problem in Galatia.) Finally, while only males received circumcision under the Abrahamic and Mosaic economies (Gen 17:12, 14), the new covenant church baptizes both males and females as equal members in the one family of God.

<sup>108</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, “Baptism,” *DPL* 62; cf. Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC 41; Dallas: Word, 1990) 154–56; Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013) 249–52.