

THE TWO TESTAMENTS AS COVENANT DOCUMENTS

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Abstract: *The terminology of Old Testament/New Testament expresses a distinctly Christian confession about the nature of Scripture. Though not strictly biblical, the use of Old Testament/New Testament to label and describe the two major parts of the Christian Bible is a valid extension of modes of expression found in the Bible itself, notably in the writings of Jeremiah and Paul. The use of “testament” (= covenant) promotes a covenantal reading of both testaments as part of a joint history of God’s dealings with his people. The adjective “old” does not need to be viewed as implying that the Old Testament is passé and has been replaced by the New Testament. The labelling of the other part as “new” does not promote a downgrading of previous divine revelation. In fact, the traditional titles indicate that each testament needs the other for a coordinated reading of Scripture as testimony to the saving purposes of God that culminate in the person and work of Jesus Christ. An important caveat, however, is that this does not mean that covenant categories can be used to express all that needs to be said in outlining the dynamics of God’s ways with humanity in the Old Testament and New Testament.*

Key words: *covenant, testament, canon, Hebrew Bible*

Names are never without significance, and I seek to explore the possible import of the names commonly attached to the two major sections of the Bible, namely OT and NT. My thesis is that use of the term “OT” as a name for first part of the Bible is value-laden and an overtly Christian way of designating the Scriptures inherited from Israel. The adjective “old” is used in correlation with “new,” for there would be no *Old* Testament without a *New* Testament to correspond to it (and vice versa). Such language embodies Christian convictions about the Christian’s relationship to the Scriptures of Israel (and now also of the church) and promotes a covenantal reading of both testaments that together record the history of God’s dealings with his people. For that reason, though open to misunderstanding and abuse (see below), this way of speaking is not to be lightly discarded or replaced without due consideration of the hermeneutical convictions it embodies and expresses.

By way of contrast, from a Jewish perspective, the Scriptures we share with them are not the OT, for Jewish readers have no NT. Rather, they are *Tanakh* (תנ"ך), an acronym for the *Torah* (= Law), *Nebi'im* (= Prophets), and *Ketubim* (= Writings) with helping vowels, these being the three canonical sections of the Hebrew Bible. Or they are called *Miqra'* (מִקְרָא), namely that which is publically read in the synagogue liturgy, a noun derived from the Hebrew root *qara'* (קרא) “to recite”

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(the Arabic *Qur'an* gets its name on the same basis). Or they are the “Scriptures” (ספרים) or “Bible” (הספר), and, of course, when the Jews use such designations, they understand them in accord with their own religious tradition and the terms specify the Tanak only.¹

I. EARLY CHRISTIAN USE OF OLD TESTAMENT/NEW TESTAMENT

The NT does not as such refer to the first part of the Bible under the title OT. When the NT authors allude to or quote from it, they speak of “the law and the prophets” or variants of this phraseology (Matt 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; Acts 24:14; etc.),² or they speak of “the law” (in wider application than just the Pentateuch; Matt 23:23; John 10:34; Rom 3:19, given the context of 3:10–18; 1 Cor 14:21), “the prophets” (referring to all Scripture; Acts 3:18; 13:40–41), “the word of God” (Acts 13:44), “the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2), “Moses and all the prophets” (Luke 24:27), “the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” (Luke 24:44), or “the Scriptures” (John 5:39; τὰς γραφάς).³ It is plain that in the NT no universally agreed title is applied to the OT, though the phrase “the law and the prophets” predominates. This does not mean, however, that it would be wrong to choose a title and to use it almost exclusively, which is just what has happened in subsequent Christian history. If, as I am arguing, the OT (and its correlate, the NT) is a highly theological term, acceptance and use of it, in part, comes down to whether we believe in the practice of theology as a science (and the almost inevitable coining of new theological terms that results) or hold that terminology should be tied to wording in the Bible itself. The church has not adopted the second approach with regard to the names assigned to individual biblical books (e.g. Leviticus) or to canonical groupings (e.g. Pauline Corpus), and there seems no reason to adopt a different procedure when it comes to naming the two major sections in the Christian Scriptures.

Testamentum, from which we get the English word “testament,” is the rendering in the Latin Vulgate of the Greek word διαθήκη (“covenant”), which in turn translates the Hebrew term *berith* (ברית).⁴ When this term is applied to the OT, it is

¹ For these and other Jewish names for their Scriptures, see Ludwig Blau, *Zur Einleitung in die Heilige Schrift* (Budapest: Adolf Alkalay, 1894), 1–20; Michèle Dukan, *La Bible hébraïque: Les codices copiés en Orient et dans la zone séfarade avant 1280* (Bibliologia 22; Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006), 62–65. Jon D. Levenson chooses the term “Jewish Bible”: see idem, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985); also idem, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), chap. 1; Roger Brooks and John J. Collins, ed., *Hebrew Bible or Old Testament? Studying the Bible in Judaism and Christianity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1990).

² For this and what follows, see Stephen B. Chapman, *The Law and the Prophets: A Study in Old Testament Canon Formation* (FAT 27; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 276–79.

³ Christopher R. Seitz, “Old Testament or Hebrew Bible? Some Theological Considerations,” in idem, *Word without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 62.

⁴ The Vulgate text uses *pactum* (e.g. Jer 31:33), *foedus* (e.g. Exod 24:7, 8) and *testamentum* (e.g. 2 Cor 3:14; Heb 8:8) as translations for “covenant.”

plain that the covenantal character of God's dealings with humanity as plotted in Scripture is in view. The application of the name OT to the 39 books (as we count them in the English Bible) is not strictly biblical in that the reference in both Jeremiah 31 and 2 Corinthians 3 is to the Sinaitic covenant. The promise of "a new covenant" in Jer 31:31–33 is one modelled on the Sinaitic covenant (which Israel has broken). Deuteronomy is explicit that the law needed to be lodged in the heart (6:4–6; 10:16; 11:18; 30:6), so the prospect of God placing the law on the heart is a return to the original intent of the Sinai covenant (Jer 31:33: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts"). Jeremiah's new covenant is a *renewed* or restored covenant,⁵ and this is already anticipated in the renewal of the covenant after the sin of the golden calf in Exodus 34.⁶ In 2 Corinthians 3, "the reading of the old covenant (παλαιὰ διαθήκη)" (3:14) is rephrased as "whenever Moses is read" (3:15). Here "Moses" is shorthand for "the writings of Moses" (cf. Luke 24:27), so the parallel indicates that it refers to the record of the Sinai covenant tradition and at most the Torah (= the five books of Moses). It is only a short step to apply this term to the OT as a whole (in whose teachings the Sinai covenant is central), but that step is nowhere taken in the NT itself. There is also no evidence that patristic writers drew their terminology of OT and NT in application to the two parts of the Christian canon from this Pauline passage.⁷

According to Eusebius, Melito of Sardis (ca. AD 170) claimed to have accurately learned in the East (= Palestine) the number and order of "the books of the old covenant" (τὰ τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης βιβλία), which he went on to list,⁸ but Melito did not specifically speak of a document under this title. Likewise, Irenaeus (ca. AD 175) repeatedly made use of the expressions "new covenant" (καινὴ διαθήκη) and "old covenant" (παλαιὰ διαθήκη) in his discussions of salvation history,⁹ but he did not use them in application to the two canonical units but continued to use established expressions such as "Prophets and Apostles" (cf. the Muratorian Fragment, lines 77–78).¹⁰ The prevalence of covenant theology as a way of interpreting the OT in the second century was preparation for (but may not have been

⁵ Harry D. Potter, "The New Covenant in Jeremiah XXXI 31–34," *VT* 33 (1983): 347–57.

⁶ Claims Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 72, 86–87.

⁷ W. C. Van Unnik, "Ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη: A Problem in the Early History of the Canon," *StPatr* 1 (1961): 212–27, repr. in idem, *Sparsa Collecta: The Collected Essays of W. C. van Unnik: Part Two: 1 Peter, Canon, Corpus Hellenisticum Generalia* (NovTSup 30; Leiden: Brill, 1980), 157–71, esp. 165.

⁸ *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.13–14.

⁹ E.g. *Haer.* 3.17.2; 4.32.2; 4.33.14.

¹⁰ As noted by van Unnik, *Sparsa Collecta*, 160, 164; cf. Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (trans. John Austin Baker; London: A&C Black, 1972), 257 nn. 257, 263; Denis M. Farkasfalvy, "Prophets and Apostles: The Conjunction of the Two Terms before Irenaeus," in *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and the Early Church Fathers: A Volume in Honor of Stuart Dickson Currie* (ed. W. Eugene March; San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1980), 109–34; Theodor von Zahn, *Geschichte des Neutestamentlichen Kanons* (2 vols.; Erlangen: A. Deichert, 1888/1892), I/1:85–111, esp. 101.

the efficient cause of) the eventual dominance of the terminology of OT/NT in reference to the two parts of Christian Scripture.¹¹

Wolfram Kinzig traces titular use of *διαθήκη* in application to the OT and NT back to Marcion, making use of Tertullian's refutation of Marcion to claim that Tertullian picked up this terminology from Marcion and hence his reluctance to use it (*Marv.* 4.6.1), but the fact remains that its first attestation is in about AD 200 in a treatise of Tertullian (*Prax.* xv),¹² so that the actual evidence for the terminology goes back no further than the late second century.¹³ Certainly, it is language that is open to abuse (in various forms of supersessionist teachings), but that does not need to mean that it was coined by the arch-heretic Marcion. Clement of Alexandria, early in the third century, continued to use "Law" and "Gospel" for the two testaments but also applies the word *διαθήκη* directly to the old and new scriptures (*Strom.* 2.29.2–3; 4.134.2–4; 7.100.5),¹⁴ for example: "it is proclaimed and spoken by both the old and the new covenant" (*Strom.* 5.85.1: *διὰ τε τῆς παλαιᾶς διὰ τε τῆς νέας διαθήκης κηρύσσονται καὶ λέγεται*).¹⁵

A little later, Origen wrote with some hesitation of the "divine scriptures of the so-called Old Testament and of the so-called New" (*Princ.* 4.1.1: *θειῶν γραφῶν, τῆς λεγομένης παλαιᾶς διαθήκης καὶ καλουμένης καινῆς*) and of "the harmony of the teachings common to both the so-called Old Testament and the so-called new" (*Comm. Jo.* 5.8: *συμφωνίας δογμάτων κοινῶν τῇ καλουμένη παλαιᾷ πρὸς τὴν ὀνομαζομένην καινὴν διαθήκην*).¹⁶ The retention and mingling of the two senses of *διαθήκη* "covenant" and "last will and testament" (even within the NT itself, e.g. Gal 3:13, 17; Heb 9:16–17) means that it was not strange to call a body of writings a *διαθήκη*, so that is not likely to be the reason for Origen's lack of enthusiasm for the terminology.

Augustine in the West used the expressions OT/NT in deference to popular convention, and his mild objection to the terms in his *Retractions* is connected to what he saw as their deviation from biblical practice: "In calling (these books) 'Old Testament' I have followed the usage with which the church speaks. The Apostle,

¹¹ See, e.g., Everett Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea in the Second Century," in *Texts and Testaments*, 145–62.

¹² In what follows I acknowledge my dependence on Wolfram Kinzig, "Καινὴ διαθήκη: The Title of the New Testament in the Second and Third Centuries," *JTS* 45 (1994): 519–44; see also the survey provided by Ulrike Mittmann and Rouven Genz, "The Term and Concept of New Testament," in *What is Bible?* (ed. Karin Finsterbusch and Armin Lange; CBET 67; Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 305–37; *Adversus Praxeas Liber: Tertullian's Treatise against Praxeas* (ed. Ernest Evans; London: SPCK, 1948), 106, 151: *Si hunc articulum quaestionibus scripturae veteris non expediam, de novo testamento sumam conformationem nostrae interpretationis* ("If I do not clear this point by inquiries made of the old scriptures, I shall take from the new testament confirmation of our interpretation").

¹³ David Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 43–44.

¹⁴ References provided by J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (5th rev. ed.; London: A&C Black, 1977), 56; see also Campenhausen, *Formation*, 266.

¹⁵ *Clément D'Alexandrie, Les Stromates: Stromate V Tome I* (ed. Alain le Boulluec; trans. Pierre Voulet; SC 278; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1981), 164.

¹⁶ Campenhausen, *Formation*, 267.

however, seems to call ‘Old Testament’ only what was given on Mount Sinai” (*Retract.* 2.4.3),¹⁷ and Augustine is apparently alluding to 2 Cor 3:14 or Gal 4:24.

II. THE HEBREW BIBLE?

Some would prefer the name “Hebrew Bible” over the traditional one, and the usual motivation is a desire to be sensitive to Jewish scruples. Whatever its merits in terms of charity,¹⁸ it tells us little or nothing about its content or meaning for believers and only indicates the language in which most of it is written. The suggested title is neither inherently Jewish nor Christian, for it fails to record or express what either faith community believes about these sacred writings,¹⁹ and the Scriptures themselves (whether read by Jews or Christians) do not encourage any such disinterested stance. It is, however, in line with the post-Enlightenment ethos that wishes any scholarship on the Bible to be a purely historical study from a religiously neutral posture. The biblical and confessional connections are too important to simply jettison the name “Old Testament” and replace it with the fashionable but not strictly accurate term “Hebrew Bible” (there are several Aramaic chapters in the books of Ezra and Daniel). The adjective “Hebrew” is really a linguistic marker distinguishing the OT in Hebrew from the Old Greek Bible (usually called Septuagint) rather than differentiating it from the (Greek) NT,²⁰ for the distinction of language is not the fundamental factor in the relation (or non-relation) of the testaments. The title “Israel’s Bible” avoids the purely linguistic term “Hebrew” while still acting as a reminder that the OT was Israel’s Bible before it was (part of) the Christian Bible,²¹ though it fails to make the claim that it is now an essential component of the Bible read by Christians.

The names assigned to persons and things (animate and inanimate) are never neutral, since they have connotations as well as denotations. The epithet “old” does not need to imply that the value of the teaching of the OT has passed and that it has been replaced by the “new,” for the Christian holds both testaments as norma-

¹⁷ *ex consuetudine qua iam loquitur ecclesia uetus testamentum appellauit. Apostolus autem non uidetur appellare testamentum uetus nisi quod datum est in monte Sina. Sancti Aurelii Augustini: Retractionum Libri II* (ed. Almut Mutzenbecher; CCSL 57; Turnholt: Brepols, 1984), 93.

¹⁸ See, e.g., John F. A. Sawyer, “Combating Prejudices about the Bible and Judaism,” *Theol* 94 (1991): 269–78.

¹⁹ Bernhard W. Anderson, with the assistance of Steven Bishop, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 5–7.

²⁰ See Ernest S. Frerichs, “The Torah Canon of Judaism and the Interpretation of Hebrew Scripture,” *HBT* 9 (1987): 14.

²¹ Paul M. van Buren, “On Reading Someone Else’s Mail: The Church and Israel’s Scripture,” in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Erhard Blum, Christian Macholz, and Ekkehard W. Stegemann; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 595–606, who insists on the character of the OT as “Israel’s Scriptures,” which, for him, means we must stop calling them the OT (p. 604), for, according to van Buren, this nomenclature has the effect of taking them off Israel, and the NT is better named the “Apostolic Writings.” Yet another possible alternative, “Jewish Bible,” is not appropriate as a title, for it reflects the postbiblical parting of the ways of Christianity and Judaism, see Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. David E. Orton; Tools for Biblical Studies 7; Leiden: Deo, 2005), 748.

tive. The NT was not written to replace the OT, and the terms “old” and “new” can signify continuity as well as supplementation. One need not use the adjective “old” in the pejorative sense of antiquated and obsolete; instead it can be used in the affirming sense of venerable and treasured (cf. Matt 13:52; Luke 5:39). Moreover, the application of the adjective “new” to the apostolic writings does not aim to elevate their importance to the detriment of the authority of the OT. This way of talking does not impugn the OT, seeing that the distinction is made in the OT itself between the old covenant and the prospect of a new covenant.

More recently, some have moved to using the terms First and Second Testament,²² and it could be argued that this alternate nomenclature for the testaments has biblical warrant for Christians, seeing that the author of Hebrews when discussing the arrangements under the Mosaic covenant can speak of “the first covenant” (8:7, 13; 9:1, 18). A possible advantage of the term “first” is that it does not evoke the negative connotations that may attach to the term “old” (outmoded? superseded?) and, as well, it implies that the *first* testament has priority in time and is foundational for a proper understanding of the “Second Testament.” Since naming it the “first” implies that it has a sequel without which it would not be complete, namely a second was needed to supplement it, this term would not be satisfactory to Jews,²³ but it could be an acceptable term for Christians.

III. A HERMENEUTICAL ISSUE

As rightly pointed out by Christopher Seitz, assigning a title to a literary work—whether it be an individual Bible book (e.g. Deuteronomy), a canonical section (e.g. Former Prophets) or the OT as a whole—is an “imposition” and an act of interpretation.²⁴ Robert Davidson dislikes the label OT, for he sees it as encouraging a “Christian Readers Digest [*sic*] approach” that is only interested in the OT as a quarry for Christological proof texts.²⁵ That fear is understandable, for the sad fact is that large sections of the Christian church (past and present) have adopted just such a truncated approach to the OT. This method not only does a disservice to the OT, it fails to emulate how the writers of the NT actually use the OT, with the result that both testaments are mishandled. A Christian can only approach the OT as a believer in Jesus Christ and read the OT in the light of God’s fullest revelation of himself in Christ (Heb 1:1–2). The OT is a canonical corpus pointing forward to Jesus Christ, for we have this on the authority of Jesus himself. From

²² E.g. James A. Sanders, “First Testament and Second,” *BTB* 17 (1987): 47–49; Erich Zenger, *Das Erste Testament: Die jüdische Bibel und die Christen* (4th ed.; Topos Taschenbücher 760; Kevelaer, Germany: Topos plus, 2011), 152–54. The proposal is evaluated by Heinz-Josef Fabry, “Das ‘Alte Testament,’” in *What is Bible?*, 285–87.

²³ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 34; Rendtorff, *Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 748.

²⁴ Seitz, “Old Testament or Hebrew Bible?,” 66.

²⁵ Robert Davidson, “The Old Testament in the Church?,” in *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honour of George Wishart Anderson* (ed. A. Graeme Auld; JSOTSup 152; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 124.

the beginning the followers of Jesus were nurtured by the “Bible of Jesus,”²⁶ and part of what *imitatio Christi* entails is to read the OT with the aim of understanding the person and work of Christ.²⁷ That does not mean, however, that this is *all* the OT does. It is sometimes assumed that a kind of “nothing-but” hermeneutic is required of a Christian reading of Scripture, but a consideration of the texts commonly relied upon by proponents place a question mark over this approach.²⁸

The claim by Jesus in John 5:39 (“it is they [= the OT Scriptures] that bear witness about me”) is hardly intended as a global hermeneutical principle, but refers to the OT as one among a number of “witnesses” to him, which include his own words (5:31), his Father (5:32, 37), John (5:33), Jesus’s works (5:36) and Moses (5:46). There is nothing in the context that would indicate that verse 39 provides an *all-inclusive* test by which the validity of OT interpretations are to be judged. It does not assert that *all* the OT does is point forward to Christ. A second text, Luke 24:27, need mean no more than that in different parts of the OT (“Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets . . .”) there are things concerning Jesus, and Luke 24:44 likewise (“everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms”) is not a *comprehensive* statement of what the OT is (now) to believers. Paul’s statement in 2 Cor 1:20 (“all the promises of God find their Yes in him [= Christ]”) does not mean that the OT is *nothing* but promises fulfilled by Christ. Another key Pauline text, 2 Tim 3:15, says that the Scriptures “are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus,” but this does not purport to state the *only* function performed by the OT. Finally, 1 Pet 1:10–11 (“predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories”) is not saying that this is *all* that the prophets did, or that all a Christian should look for in the OT is intimations of the person and work of Christ. The theology of the OT cannot be limited to just one theme, even one as important as messianic expectation, though, of course, this theme will take pride of place in any Christian evaluation and use of the OT.

IV. THE COVENANTAL OLD TESTAMENT

The name assigned to a literary work can only say so much. Inevitably, any name chosen for a work is highly selective, for it can only foreground certain aspects of the work and must ignore or effectively deny others. With regard to what Gérard Genette classified as the *second* possible function of a title (the descriptive function), the relation between a title and the overall content of a literary work is

²⁶ For Jesus’s attitude toward his Bible, see E. Earl Ellis, *The Old Testament in the Early Church: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Recent Research* (WUNT 54; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991), 126–30.

²⁷ Roland E. Murphy, “Old Testament/*Tanakh*—Canon and Interpretation,” in *Hebrew Bible or Old Testament?*, 19.

²⁸ For insightful comments on this issue, see Lindsay Wilson, *Job* (THOTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 318–20.

extremely variable.²⁹ Whether intended or not by those who affixed a title, this function is inescapable in practice, for the title assigned is routinely seen as a key to the interpretation of a literary work.³⁰ The word “testament” (= covenant) in titular application to the OT may be no more than a label for identification to most readers (Genette’s first function), but for the informed reader it refers to the Sinai covenant that is at the heart of OT revelation, and it is a valid *extension* to apply it to the corpus of sacred books that especially focuses on that covenant.

Use of the title does not require the acceptance of the proposition that covenant is the dominating theme in the OT or the centre (*Mitte*) of OT theology. It would be reductionistic to reduce the rich theology of the OT to just one theme. Moreover, it may be detrimental to try to turn everything the OT says into “covenant theology” (see below). Other themes might have been highlighted that are equally prominent (or nearly so), one obvious example being the theme of God’s kingdom.³¹ There is the danger of finding covenant thinking where it is not actually present; for example, not everyone will detect a divine covenant in the first two chapters of Genesis.³² Likewise, there is the risk of turning words into *covenant terms* when they are nothing of the sort; for example, “father/son” terminology is found in ANE treaties (cf. 2 Sam 7:14; Mal 1:6),³³ but that does not mean that every use of the words in the OT and NT has a covenantal nuance. A further example is “steadfast love” (*hesed*), where the common English translation (e.g. RSV) has already decided the issue in favor of it being a covenant term, though it is better rendered “kindness,” denoting as it does *non-obligatory* generous action (e.g. when Ruth goes above and beyond the requirements of duty to family [Ruth 3:10]),³⁴ whereas covenants create or regulate obligations between covenant partners. With these

²⁹ Gérard Genette, “Structure and Functions of the Title in Literature,” *Critical Inquiry* 14 (1988): 708–9; idem, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (trans. Jane E. Lewin; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 76–94.

³⁰ Gilbert Adair calls this “the basic expositional function of a title” (*Surfing the Zeitgeist* [London: Faber and Faber, 1997], 89). According to Alastair Fowler, “The reader comes to the beginning of the work already partly attuned by the title” (*Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1982], 98); cf. Peter Hellwig, “Titulus oder Über den Zusammenhang von Titeln und Texten,” *Zeitschrift für Germanistische Linguistik* 12 (1984): 1–20.

³¹ A classic example of reading the OT from this vantage point is John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953). The metaphor of God as king is pervasive within the OT, see Marc Zvi Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (JSOTSup 76; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989). Martin Buber defined the Israelite religion as the belief in the kingship of God (*Kingship of God* [New York: Harper and Row, 1967]).

³² Without prejudging the issue, see John H. Stek, “‘Covenant’ Overload in Reformed Theology,” *CTJ* 29 (1994): 12–41. John Murray declined to call God’s prohibition and threat of death in Gen 2:15–17 a covenant, preferring to refer to this arrangement as a divine administration, see “The Adamic Administration,” in idem, *Collected Writings of John Murray* (4 vols.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:47–59.

³³ F. Charles Fensham, “Father and Son as Terminology for Treaty and Covenant,” in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright* (ed. Hans Goedicke; Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1971), 121–35.

³⁴ As demonstrated by Francis I. Andersen, “Yahweh, the Kind and Sensitive God,” in *God Who Is Rich in Mercy: Essays Presented to Dr. D. B. Knox* (ed. Peter T. O’Brien and David G. Peterson; Homebush West, NSW, Australia: Lancer, 1986), 41–88.

provisos, the names OT and NT can be accepted as appropriate for they indicate that covenant is a key unifying theme for the whole of Scripture.³⁵

In the ears of some, the name OT may make it sound as if there is only one covenant in the OT (that was enacted at Sinai), whereas there is a *series* of covenants within its bounds, notably the Noahic (Gen 6:18; 9:1–17); Abrahamic (Genesis 15, 17); Mosaic (Exod 24:1–11), Davidic (2 Sam 7:1–17; 23:5), and the prospect of the new covenant (Jer 31:31–34). These covenants are not to be viewed as unconnected or founded on different (incompatible?) principles. The biblical presentation is that later covenants build on and are vehicles for the fulfilling of preceding covenants.³⁶ For example, the exodus deliverance occurred because “God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Exod 2:24; cf. 6:2–8). God’s promise to give David “a great name, like name of the great ones of the earth” (2 Sam 7:9) recalls the Abrahamic promise (Gen 12:2).

As well, in terms of eschatological expectation, the prophets look forward to the renewal of *all* the covenants (Isaiah 54–55; Ezekiel 37). The placement of the fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 53) suggests that it describes the way in which God’s agent, the servant, will realize the second exodus (52:11–12). What follows is a survey of the future glory of Zion,³⁷ in terms of the fulfilment of the main biblical covenants: Abrahamic (54:1–3), Mosaic (54:4–8), Noahic (54:9–10), new covenant (54:11–13; esp. v. 13: “All your sons shall be taught by the Lord”; cf. Jer 31:34), and Davidic (55:3–5).³⁸ Isaiah 54 and 55 are united by the theme of covenant fulfillment. The clear implication is that due to the servant’s costly ministry of suffering and dying, the “sons” of Zion are offered the benefits and blessings promised in *all* the divine covenants. In Ezek 37:23–28, the picture of hope features “a covenant of peace” (v. 26; cf. 34:25–31), and, in fact, all Israel’s covenants will be fulfilled at that time: the eternal land promises of the Abrahamic covenant will be realized (“and multiply them”; v. 26); Israel will walk in the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant (v. 24b); she will be cleansed under the new covenant (v. 23), and she will experience the reign of the ruler under the Davidic covenant (v. 24a). A special focus on the Sinai covenant in any reading of the OT is, however, justified, for it is referred to far more often than other covenants, and the new covenant is a revamped

³⁵ See Scott Hahn, “Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994–2004),” *CurBR* 3 (2005): 263–92. For surveys of the OT that focus on covenant, see, e.g., Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; trans. J. A. Baker; London: SCM, 1960, 1967); Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005); Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 1: *The Common Grace Covenants* (Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014).

³⁶ For the unity of the covenants, see O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1980), 27–52.

³⁷ Fredrik Hägglund stresses the close compositional link between chaps. 53 and 54, see *Isaiah 53 in the Light of Homecoming after Exile* (FAT 2/31; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 128–131.

³⁸ See W. A. M. Beuken, “Isaiah LIV: The Multiple Identity of the Person Addressed,” in *Language and Meaning: Studies in Hebrew Language and Biblical Exegesis* (ed. James Barr; OTS 19; Leiden: Brill, 1974), 29–70; William J. Dumbrell, “The Role of the Servant in Isaiah 40–55,” *RTR* 48 (1989): 111.

Sinai covenant, making the relation between these two particular covenants a key issue in both testaments.³⁹

V. A COVENANTAL NEW TESTAMENT?

The appropriateness of the application of the term “covenant” to the OT hardly requires argument, but it is not so obviously applicable to the NT, for only Hebrews contains any extensive use of covenantal thinking (Hebrews 8–10),⁴⁰ or that, at least, is what is commonly asserted. However, the theme of covenant is pervasive in the Second Temple period,⁴¹ and on that basis it is to be expected that it would be strongly featured in the NT, both as a shared value and as a corrective to wrong notions about covenant. For example, the Damascus Document provides the Qumran community with a rule for “those who have entered the new covenant” (באי הברית החדשה) (CD 6:19; 8:21; 19:33; 20:12).⁴² Viewing themselves as the true Israel, the Qumran sectaries had a community-centered concept of covenant.⁴³ In a number of early Jewish writings (2 Baruch; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*; Prayer of Manasseh; Testament of Levi), God extends his covenant mercy to Israel on the basis of the meritorious deeds of their patriarchal ancestors.⁴⁴

The significance of covenant for the NT cannot be gauged simply by the frequency with which the term appears on its pages, namely 33 times, mostly in Paul (9 times) and Hebrews (17 times). We should not conclude from these meager tallies that covenant is less important in the NT than in the OT, after all, as noted by David L. Baker, the concept of the relationship of God and his people undergirds the NT as much as it does the OT and the covenant theology of the OT would have been taken as a given by the NT authors.⁴⁵ What is more, even in the OT, the term “covenant” is not mentioned as regularly as one might expect. For example, Amos 3:1–2 encapsulate the tenor and covenant logic of the prophecy of Amos,⁴⁶ but the word itself (ברית) is not used. There is what might be called an *avoidance* of

³⁹ See, e.g., Ellen Juhl Christiansen, *The Covenant in Judaism and Paul: A Study of Ritual Boundaries as Identity Markers* (AGJU 27; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 54–61.

⁴⁰ A point labored by Donald Robinson, *Faith's Framework: The Structure of New Testament Theology* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1985), 46–48.

⁴¹ Stanley E. Porter and Jacqueline C. R. de Roo, eds., *The Concept of Covenant in the Second Temple Period* (JSJSup 71; Leiden: Brill, 2003).

⁴² As noted by Josephine Massyngaerde Ford, “The New Covenant, Jesus and Canonization,” in *Hebrew Bible or Old Testament?*, 31–32.

⁴³ Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective* (rev. 3rd ed.; London: SCM, 1994), 144–74; Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Community of the Renewed Covenant: Between Judaism and Christianity,” in *Community of the Renewed Covenant: Notre Dame Symposium on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Eugene Ulrich and James C. VanderKam; Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 10; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 3–24.

⁴⁴ Jacqueline C. R. de Roo, “God’s Covenant with the Forefathers,” in *Concept of Covenant*, 191–202.

⁴⁵ David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: The Theological Relationship between the Old and New Testaments* (3rd ed.; Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2010), 238.

⁴⁶ Frank H. Seilhamer, “The Role of Covenant in the Mission and Message of Amos,” in *A Light unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers* (ed. Howard N. Bream, Ralph D. Heim, and Carey A. Moore; Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 435–51.

the term “covenant” by the eighth-century prophets, perhaps because it was misunderstood by many Israelites as only suggesting privilege and not a matching moral responsibility.⁴⁷ Notwithstanding their non-use of the term, the dependence of prophetic message of judgment upon the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28 shows the covenantal presuppositions of the preaching of the OT prophets.⁴⁸

To properly measure its significance, we must move beyond statistics. One way to do this is to notice the canonical role of the letter to the Hebrews in helping to coordinate Pauline and non-Pauline letter collections, for in the process of doing this, Hebrews gives both corpora a covenant frame. In terms of book order in the Greek manuscript tradition, there is a close association between Hebrews and the Pauline Corpus, whether Hebrews is placed after Romans, after 2 Corinthians, after Galatians, after 2 Thessalonians or at the close of the Pauline Corpus as a whole.⁴⁹ The book of Hebrews deals *in extenso* with the continuity-discontinuity between the old and new covenants,⁵⁰ and Hebrews 8–10 provide an argument based on the new-covenant prophecy of Jer 31:31–34.⁵¹ This is a theme explicitly touched on by Paul only in Romans 11, 1 Corinthians 11, 2 Corinthians 3, and Galatians 4, but it can be said to underlie his teaching as a significant subtext.⁵² However, only in Hebrews is the relation of the two covenants given a sustained treatment, such that, if Hebrews is read in conjunction with Paul’s letters, Hebrews resonates with the covenant theme in Paul’s writings and substantially develops that theme, showing the superiority of the new covenant inaugurated by Christ’s death. The Vulgate (and hence English Bibles) conforms to the majority of late Byzantine manuscripts and places Hebrews at the end of Paul’s letters,⁵³ and by so doing also puts Hebrews in front of the Catholic Epistles.⁵⁴ This placement encourages the reading of these seven letters according to the covenantal construal of the Christian faith pre-

⁴⁷ See Leslie C. Allen, “Amos, Prophet of Solidarity,” *VE* 6 (1969): 42–53, esp. n. 37; Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:51–52. The language of covenant curse is evident in the prophecy of Joel, despite the non-use of the term “covenant”; see James Nogalski, “Presumptions of ‘Covenant’ in Joel,” in *Covenant in the Persian Period: From Genesis to Chronicles* (ed. Richard J. Bauckham and Gary N. Knoppers; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 211–28.

⁴⁸ Steven L. McKenzie, *Covenant* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), 53–57.

⁴⁹ For the details of ancient manuscripts and canonical lists, see Gregory Goswell, “Finding a Home for the Letter to the Hebrews,” *JETS* 59 (2016): 747–60.

⁵⁰ Brevard S. Childs, *The Church’s Guide for Reading Paul: The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 251–55.

⁵¹ David G. Peterson, “The Prophecy of the New Covenant in the Argument of Hebrews,” *RTR* 38 (1979): 74–81; idem, *Transformed by God: New Covenant Life and Ministry* (Nottingham, UK: InterVarsity, 2012), 77–103.

⁵² As shown by recent Pauline scholarship, e.g. Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. John Richard de Witt; London: SPCK, 1977), 333–41; Sarah Whittle, *Covenant Renewal and the Consecration of the Gentiles in Romans* (SNTSMS 161; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Petrus J. Gräbe, *New Covenant, New Community: The Significance of Biblical and Patristic Covenant Theology for Current Thinking* (Paternoster Biblical Monographs; Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2006), 108–24.

⁵³ See William H. P. Hatch, “The Position of Hebrews in the Canon of the New Testament,” *HTR* 29 (1936): 133–51, esp. 149–50.

⁵⁴ With regard to genre, there is a certain appropriateness in placing Hebrews immediately before the Catholic Epistles, for Hebrews is more sermon than letter, as also are James, 1 John, and 1 Peter; see William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* (WBC 47A; Dallas: Word, 1991), lxix–lxxi.

sented by the author of Hebrews. It assists the (mostly) Jewish believers addressed in the Catholic Epistles to view Paul as a “covenant theologian” who does not slight their OT heritage by his mode of teaching Christian faith and practice.

We are not to count texts so much as to *weigh* them, in this case by noting the use of covenantal categories in what can only be described as one of the most important statements by Jesus, given its subject and its setting: the interpretation of his death as inaugurating the new covenant as spoken at the Last Supper. Jesus described the shared cup of wine as “the blood of the (new) covenant” (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20), this being an allusion to the role of blood in the ratification of OT covenants (esp. Exod 24:8: “the blood of the covenant”). Jesus anticipated that his imminent death would inaugurate the new covenant, bringing forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28; cf. Jer 31:34). In 1 Cor 11:25, Paul recalls the dominical tradition of the Lord’s Supper (“This cup is the new covenant in my blood”), such that the apostle claims that Jesus himself interpreted his death as the inauguration of “the new covenant.”⁵⁵

Another factor to be taken into account is the pervasive influence of the covenant theology of Deuteronomy in *both* testaments. Its influence is most obvious in books such as Kings, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Malachi, but is not limited to these OT portions. As made clear in David’s death-bed charge (1 Kgs 2:2–4), Solomon and the kings that follow him will be evaluated against a Deuteronomic code of obedience to God’s statutes and ordinances (cf. Deut 4:40; 8:11; 26:17).⁵⁶ Hosea indicts the Israelites for covenant failure in these terms: “you have forgotten the law of your God” (Hos 4:6). Jeremiah models himself on the Deuteronomic portrait of Moses (e.g. Jer 1:6; cf. Exod 4:10),⁵⁷ and his prose sermons draw heavily on the vocabulary of Deuteronomy. In the prophecy of Malachi, YHWH defends his faithfulness as a covenant partner (Mal 1:2: “I have loved you”). In this passage, “love” is a Deuteronomic term: God set his love on (= chose) Israel (cf. Deut 7:7; 10:15). Love and hate are the polarities of treaty relations (Mal 1:2–3: “I have loved Jacob [= Israel] but I have hated Esau [= Edom]”), for one *loves* those to whom one is bound by covenant oath and *bates* those to whom one has no such sworn obligation.⁵⁸ With regard to the NT, Deuteronomy is frequently quoted and alluded to.⁵⁹ Examples of its wide influence include the following: Jesus uses texts from Deuteronomy (6:13, 16; 8:3) when tested by the devil (Matt 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13), serving to typify himself as the obedient “Son of God” in contrast to Israel’s failure

⁵⁵ Michael J. Gorman stresses the connection between the new covenant and Christ’s death, see *The Death of the Messiah and the Birth of the New Covenant: A (Not So) New Model of the Atonement* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 53.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Lissa M. Wray Beal, *1 & 2 Kings* (AOTC 9; Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2014), 32–33, 46–48.

⁵⁷ Cf. William L. Holladay, “The Background of Jeremiah’s Self-Understanding: Moses, Samuel, and Psalm 22,” *JBL* 83 (1964): 153–64.

⁵⁸ Steven L. McKenzie and Howard N. Wallace, “Covenant Themes in Malachi,” *CBQ* 45 (1983): 549–63.

⁵⁹ Maarten J. J. Menken and Steve Moyise, *Deuteronomy in the New Testament* (LNTS 358; London: T&T Clark, 2007).

in the wilderness; Jesus uses Deut 6:5 as a summary of the law in the “greatest commandment” (Matt 22:35–40); there is his emphasis on exclusive devotion to God (Matt 6:24) and his ethic of giving to the poor (Matt 19:21; cf. Deut 14:28–29); and Paul uses texts from Deuteronomy in Gal 3:10 and 13 to teach about the covenant curse that falls on law-breakers (Deut 27:26) and redemption by Christ who became a curse for us (Deut 21:23).

A special instance of the influence of Deuteronomy on the NT is the “integrity statement” in Rev 22:18–19 (“if any one adds to them . . . , and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, . . .”), which reflects the regular feature of an inscriptional curse in ANE treaties (Deut 4:2; cf. Deut 12:32; 11Q19 54:5–7).⁶⁰ While its immediate application is to warn against tampering with the text of the book in which it is found, it is appropriate that it is also now positioned at the end of the NT writings (cf. Sinaiticus [8 01], Alexandrinus [A 02] and Ephraemi Rescriptus [C 04]),⁶¹ suggesting that those responsible for shaping the canon in this way viewed the NT *in toto* as a covenantal document.

The effect of the application of the term NT to the apostolic writings is to draw that body of writings toward the covenantal ways of thinking represented in the OT. It asserts the OT moorings of NT theology, with the OT providing a glossary of covenant terms and concepts that are then used in the NT to describe and explain the new thing represented by the person and work of Jesus Christ.

VI. THE THEORY OF MEREDITH KLINE

The concept of the canonicity of the OT is almost always relegated by critical writers to a late date in biblical history, beginning at the Josianic reforms, or even in the post-exilic period, but there is no reason why the concept could not have accompanied the formation of the OT writings from their inception. The formal roots of biblical canon are found by Meredith Kline in the treaty documents by which ANE international relationships were administered (e.g. the Hittite treaties of the second millennium BC), wherein the suzerain’s authoritative words to the vassal were drawn up in writing.⁶² Kline believed that the classic treaty pattern supplied the documentary structure of both the Decalogue and of Deuteronomy as a whole,⁶³ such that the origin of the OT canon coincided with the founding of “the

⁶⁰ David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22* (WBC 52C; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1208–15.

⁶¹ As noted by Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Nottingham, UK: Apollon, 2013), 63; idem, “Early Christian Attitudes Towards the Reproduction of Texts,” in *The Early Text of the New Testament* (ed. Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 63–80, esp. 73–74; cf. Konrad Huber and Martin Hasitschka, “Die Offenbarung des Johannes in Kanon der Bibel,” in *The Biblical Canons* (ed. J.-M. Auwers and H. J. de Jonge; BETL 163; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 612; Külli Tõniste, *The Ending of the Canon: A Canonical and Intertextual Reading of Revelation 21–22* (LNTS 526; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 189–92.

⁶² Meredith Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (2nd ed.; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 27–38.

⁶³ Meredith Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 13–44.

kingdom of Israel” (Kline’s mode of expression) by covenant at Sinai. In other words, the concepts of canon and covenant are inextricably connected.

Kline goes on to claim that the anthology of various types of literature subsequently produced (law, history, prophecy, wisdom, and praise) “all function as extensions (free and creative to be sure) of some main section or feature” of the treaties foundational to Israel’s covenant status.⁶⁴ According to Kline, the post-Pentateuchal books perform critical covenantal functions: the historical books trace the history of the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel, the prophets prosecute the terms of the covenant,⁶⁵ and the wisdom books teach covenant living. Furthermore, the NT writings can be understood to perform the same kind of covenantal functions as their OT literary counterparts.⁶⁶ In support of this theory it should be noted that the common order of the NT books follows the pattern laid down by the OT (whether the template used was Hebrew or Greek arrangement of the OT makes little difference to meaning).⁶⁷ The pertinent point is that the ordering of the NT according to the pre-existing pattern of the OT canon encourages its readers to detect a covenantal rationale behind its construction.

However, to say that the OT and NT are both covenant documents does not mean that covenant categories can be made to express all that needs to be said in outlining the dynamics of God’s ways with humanity,⁶⁸ a vital aspect of which is how God deals with fallen human beings as summed up in the doctrine of justification. It is just here that N. T. Wright, for example, took a false step early in the development of his thinking,⁶⁹ and what he went on to say about the Pauline theology has its roots in and was affected by what I would argue is his *overuse* of covenant.⁷⁰ Covenant categories are used by Wright to explain the entire plan of salvation, for he writes: “For God, to act righteously means to act in accordance with the covenant. For his people, to appeal for vindication in the heavenly lawcourt is to appeal to the covenant. Justification is therefore God’s declaration that certain people are within the covenant. And the significance of this is that God’s covenant people are a forgiven people: the covenant was designed in the first place as the

⁶⁴ Kline, *Structure of Biblical Authority*, 45–68, esp. 47.

⁶⁵ See also Charles Elliott Vernoff, “The Contemporary Study of Religion and the Academic Teaching of Judaism,” in *Methodology in the Academic Teaching of Judaism* (ed. Zev Garber; Studies in Judaism; Lanham, NY: University Press of America, 1986), 30–32.

⁶⁶ For recent use of the theory of Kline, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture’s Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 109–22.

⁶⁷ Kline, *Structure of Biblical Authority*, 172–203 (Kline focuses on what he views as parallels between the Gospels and the book of Exodus); Walter Vogels, “La Structure symétrique de la Bible chrétienne,” in *The Biblical Canons*, 295–304 (with a diagram on 299); Gregory Goswell, “Two Testaments in Parallel: The Influence of the Old Testament on the Structuring of the New Testament Canon,” *JETS* 56 (2013): 459–74.

⁶⁸ Kline himself does not fall into this trap.

⁶⁹ See N. T. Wright, “Justification: The Biblical Basis and Its Relevance for Contemporary Evangelicalism,” in *The Great Acquit: Justification by Faith and Current Christian Thought* (ed. Gavin Reid; London: Collins, 1980), 13–37.

⁷⁰ E.g. N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991).

means of undoing the sin of humanity.⁷¹ Notice that, for Wright, covenant *totally* defines what God does and what humans must do. Wright critiques and gives advice to both Protestants and Catholics whose errors and their consequences, though not the same for both groups, are summed up by him in this way: “All these things happen because we have taken the doctrine of justification out of the context of the covenant.”⁷²

This is not the place for a detailed examination of what Wright says,⁷³ but the point I am making is that the category of covenant is not intended to be a comprehensive theological framework for understanding all aspects of relations between God and humanity. The specific role of a covenant is to give permanency to a relationship with the aim of securing lasting benefits, hence covenants in the ANE and in the Bible often feature an oath,⁷⁴ or they use the father-son relation as a metaphor (e.g. Exod 4:22; 2 Sam 7:14),⁷⁵ or they employ “forever” language to stress the perpetuity of the bond forged (e.g. Ezek 37:24–28). Covenants are needed in a world where people often fail to keep their promises or to live up to their obligations. The biblical covenants reassure God’s people that God will fulfil his promises and they remind them of what they are obligated to do as people in relationship with God. They cannot, however, be used to explain the “kindness” (*hesed*) of God in doing what he is not obligated to do for fallen humanity, so that the acquittal of sinners that is at the heart of the gospel cannot as such be a *covenantal* action,⁷⁶ nor can justification simply be equated with the declaration that someone is “within the covenant” as Wright wishes to do. Much more needs to be said to prove my point, but this is sufficient to indicate the danger of stretching covenant categories beyond their legitimate sphere and purpose.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Christians should think twice before giving up the terminology of OT and NT, seeing that something vital may be lost if this is done, for these titles have distinctly Christian hermeneutical implications. Though not strictly biblical, their use to label and epitomize the two major parts of the Christian Bible is a valid extension of modes of expression used by Jeremiah and Paul. The use of “testament”

⁷¹ Wright, “Justification,” 15.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷³ See, e.g., D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism* (2 vols.; WUNT 140, 181; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001, 2004).

⁷⁴ E.g. George E. Mendenhall defines a covenant as “an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain action stipulated in advance” (“Covenant,” *ABD* 1.1179).

⁷⁵ According to F. M. Cross, the effect of a covenant is to forge fictive kinship relations between those who are not blood relatives; see “Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel,” in *idem*, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 7.

⁷⁶ Cf. the creedal description of YHWH in Exod 34:6–7 (with *hesed* used twice). It is God’s kindness that leads him to forgive and to renew the broken covenant with Israel after the sin of the golden calf (cf. Neh 9:17); see Mark J. Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology: Three Creedal Expressions* (Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 27–51.

promotes a covenantal reading of both testaments as part of the one history of God's dealings with his people. The adjective "old" does not need to be viewed as implying that the OT is passé and has been replaced by the NT. In fact, the traditional titles indicate that each testament needs the other for a coordinated reading of Scripture as testimony to God's saving purposes that culminate in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Despite the importance of covenant as a biblical category, it cannot express and explain all aspects of the dynamics of God's ways with humanity in the story of salvation presented in the OT and NT.